

Tablets, legal e-books gaining ground



HI-TECH

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Anybody who doubts the arrival of electronic books need only check out a stunning five-minute TED Talk in which the presenter blows on a tablet screen to make a windmill on the screen spin. Legal e-books might not need such bells and whistles, but they are garnering interest — perhaps enough to change lawyers' research habits.

For years, electronically available information has led lawyers to move paper-based activities to desktops, laptops, netbooks and tablets. Might e-books lead lawyers to adopt dedicated e-readers like the Kobo, Amazon's Kindle or Sony's Reader?

No — and yes. Anecdotal, tablets outnumber e-readers among lawyers. Shaunna Mireau surveyed her firm's lawyers last May and found seven of them had Apple iPads, two toted BlackBerry PlayBooks and nine owned various makes of e-readers. Tablets have been gaining share since then, according to Mireau, the Edmonton-based director of knowledge management and libraries for Field Law.

Expectations are high for such devices. "I purchased the first-generation Apple iPad instead of an e-reader since the iPad is more versatile," says Ted Tjaden, national director of knowledge management for McMillan LLP. He lists web surfing, email, calendars, games and music among the activities he wants to perform on his device.

But foregoing a physical e-reader doesn't mean you can't access its bookstore. Tjaden, for instance, buys books to read on his tablet using the Amazon Kindle app. Add apps such as Kobo and Apple's iBookstore to the mix, and the selection of books for a dedicated e-reader can't compare.

Tablets also skirt the issue of which e-book format works on which type of reader, an issue that will persist à la Blu-ray versus HD DVD unless the industry settles on one universal e-book format.

The Web browser may be the "killer app" most e-readers don't have, a tool that lawyers such as Donna Neff use to access research subscriptions. "If I want to do research related to my legal work, I go to my iPad. I can download a lengthy piece off the web to read later. I can take it on a train or plane to read locally," says the Stittsville, Ont.-based lawyer.

Indeed, for research, she bypasses her desktop PC, laptop and netbook — as well as paper, since Neff's office has dropped



E-BOOK BY TOMMASO79 / DREAMSTIME.COM, IPAD COURTESY OF APPLE, SHELVES BY ARZTSAMUI / DREAMSTIME.COM

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Tablets also support apps that let people both annotate documents and store their work online. In a pinch, tablets also let users perform that most common research task: copy material from research documents to their work documents.

Low price, long battery life and easy-on-the-eyes screens may continue to attract buyers interested only in pleasure reading, but in business environments dedicated e-readers compare about as favourably to tablets as nineties-era Palm devices compare with today's smartphones.

When I called her, Mireau was researching costs for e-books she wanted to add to Field Law's library. While individual copies were slightly discounted for e-reader versions, "in the law-firm-library world, electronic costs more," she said.

Why? For one thing, today's tablet-toting lawyers want e-book copies on their devices. That drives up licensing costs compared with those for hard copies, which lawyers leave in the library instead of carrying around.

E-book sharing could keep costs down, but it's difficult to enable. Law firm libraries may need to use tools such as OverDrive, a system used by many public libraries to handle both digital material checkouts and automate check-ins.

Devices themselves can be difficult to cost-justify. Muddying the monetary waters further, large firms may need to decide which department — IT, the library, or another — takes the budgetary hit.

"I hope people get things for Christmas and then I'll help them use their gifts," Mireau said with chuckle.

Regardless of who pays for them, technology departments will want to make e-reader devices secure, since lawyers likely will use them to view client information as well as legal research material.

You can forgive legal publishers if they secretly yearn for a return to the simplicity of the days of print. Websites to maintain, e-reader formats to choose, new licensing strategies to develop — the degree of evolution being forced on publishers by lawyers hungry for digital alternatives makes them seem a little slow on the uptake.

"The various offerings from legal publishers are still in their infancy," Tjaden says. "The main limitation is the lack of easy hyperlinking. Most substantive legal treatises in print or on a commercial online database have clickable links to case or legislative citations, but that functionality is not yet available on e-books."

Publishers seem to be taking their time not just on developing features for their e-books but on migrating titles to digital formats. "Right now, they seem to be publishing things as e-books that people would want a personal copy of," Mireau says.

"Currently, if you buy the print version then you also get access to the e-book," she adds. ■

ON THE E-SHELVES



Here's a sampling of what's available from legal publishers.

American Bar Association:

It seems a natural fit, releasing a book called *iPad in One Hour for Lawyers*, via Apple's iBookstore, but the ABA claims it will use Apple's bookselling operation to distribute other materials.



Carswell:

Thomson Reuters Preview, Carswell's forthcoming dedicated reader app, will enable customers to access a selection of its e-books.



Irwin Law:

Irwin partnered with e-book-reading application developer Nubook to create a reader for both its front and back list. Irwin claims the application will be available by the end of 2011.



LexisNexis Canada:

A selection of e-books are compatible with Apple's iPad as well as the BlackBerry PlayBook and Android devices. (LexisNexis Canada owns *The Lawyers Weekly*.)



Wilson & Lafleur Ltée:

Readers can access the Québec-based legal publisher's collection in a custom iPad app.



Law firms:

Why should legal publishers have all the fun? U.S. firm Latham & Watkins published three editions of *The Book of Jargon* as smartphone apps to assist members of the financial community (i.e. its clients) with the "talk" of banking, capital markets and project finance. The concept of e-book publishing as business development may induce other firms to follow suit.

