

# TeleRead: Bring the E-Books Home

Advocating Well-Stocked National Digital Libraries in the United States and Elsewhere

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TeleRead calls for well-stocked national digital libraries in the United States and elsewhere. TeleRead's moderator is David Rothman ([dr@teleread.org](mailto:dr@teleread.org)). For occasional highlights from this blog, join the [TeleRead Mailing List](#).



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### TeleRead FAQ

TeleRead, dating back to the early 1990s, is an evolving proposal. Click [here](#) for the basics.

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## Friday, June 11, 2004: Blackmask wises up on copyright notices, also offers CD files to Project Gutenberg for free downloading

Kudos to David Moynihan of [Blackmask Online](#) for changing his practice of putting copyright notices on public domain books (those he puts on the Net in the future).



Instead he'll use something in the vein of "Formattted by Blackmask." Entirely reasonable. Nice solution.

Meanwhile David's leaving the CD-selling business and offering the image files to [Project Gutenberg](#). No small gift. The files are not just in ASCII but also in a bunch of proprietary formats ranging from [Adobe](#) to my favorite, [Mobipocket](#).

I'm [reproducing his letter to a Gutenberg email list](#).

David Gets it--the potential of some exciting synergies between the private and nonprofit sectors. Time for the big publishers to catch on? Ditto for his avoidance of onerous DRM. In fact, he doesn't use DRM, period.

posted by [David Rothman](#) at 9:01 AM | [permanent link](#)

## Blogs into p-books--and an instant self-publishing service, with PD books as another option

More and more Web logs are being [turned into paper books](#), according to a [Guardian](#) article.

Meanwhile the New York Time tells of [InstaBook Maker services](#) that [print books from computer files](#) in as little as 17 minutes and for prices as low as \$150.

That's not all. From among 10,000 titles, you can choose a public domain book for printing. You can even get your name of the cover, if you *really* want to be Charles Dickens or whatever.

(Via [LISNews](#).)

posted by [David Rothman](#) at 7:30 AM | [permanent link](#)

## Boo! Random House cutting royalties on e-books

Random House is [slashing](#) writers' royalties on e-books. Sad news from [Crain's New York Business](#):



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The publisher, which currently pays the highest e-book royalties of all the major publishers, is slashing the payout to authors to 30% of revenues for most e-books, down from 50%, according to the Authors Guild. The rate will be cut to 15% of receipts for e-books sold at high discounts. The change is effective for contracts signed after May 31.

RH's royalty cut is deplorable, but, of course, that's what writers can expect when certain distributors and the DRM Mafia siphon off so much money--a far cry from the efficiencies that a TeleRead-style business model would bring about.

Perhaps the Guild needs to think about encouraging members and agents to do e-book-related business with outfits like [Blackmask](#), which, if I'm not mistaken, pays 75 percent royalties. Writers may also want to think about self-distribution arrangements on the e-side--with infrastructure provided by eBookAd-type companies (*note*: eBookAd is a TeleRead linking partner). And if Random House won't allow this to happen? Then maybe it's time for deserving authors to work with the library community to seek other sources of prestige, beyond those from brand-name publishers.

*Correction*: That's 70 percent, not 75 percent, at BlackMask. Still a far cry from Random House.

[More from the Guild.](#)

posted by [David Rothman](#) at 2:14 AM | [permanent link](#)

## Thursday, June 10, 2004: No tears for Sony's PDA side from Craig Froehle--and here's why

*Craig Froehle and I don't see eye to eye on a bunch of Palm-related matters, but if nothing else, we both agree that an ultra-proprietary 'tude has harmed Sony PDA sales. Here's his thoughtful reply to [The Palm software challenge--and some partial solutions for e-book downloaders](#). - David Rothman.*



Sony left the PDA space in North America because of two main reasons:

First, they got their butts squarely kicked by palmOne. Sony's sales (market percentage) was falling while palmOne's increased. There are many possible explanations for this. Sony has a horrible reputation for poor service. Also, its reliance on proprietary formats (e.g., Memory Stick) and a rapidly changing product line (which limited accessories) kept the Clie line from being as successful as it could have been.

Second, Sony is coming out with newer, shinier products that would have competed directly with their Clie line here in the US. These products include the PlayStation Portable and their forthcoming portable media players. Given that Sony doesn't have to pay for OS licenses for these products, and since they

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foresee a large amount of cannibalism w/r/t their Clie customer base, they figured that canceling handhelds was perfectly OK.

To be honest, I'm not that sorry to see them go. Sony never played nicely within the Palm OS community--they were constantly developing their own proprietary drivers and technologies for the Clie line. This caused a great many of those incompatibilities you wrote about--Sony didn't follow the Palm OS development guidelines and *all* Palm OS users paid the price because this wasted the time and energy of third-party developers and decreased the consistency of the Palm OS user experience.

Given that, I won't disagree that there is more "chaos" in the Palm OS software space. That's simply because (a) it's a much bigger software space than the Pocket PC realm, and (b) PalmSource hasn't been as strict about controlling what the hardware makers do in terms of innovation as Microsoft has been. That's why you see a much wider variety of devices running Palm OS than you see running Windows Mobile. Whether or not you feel that latter difference is a good thing depends on your philosophy: I'd personally rather see a bit more chaos and incompatibility if it ensures a dynamic and innovative environment, which I believe is the case with the Palm OS community.

As long as you're content using the one or two good e-book solutions available for Windows Mobile, then you'll be fine, since they do work very well. However, if you've been reading e-books on your PDA as long as I have, I think you'll understand that the tiny amount of integration lost in the Palm OS realm is more than made up for through increased diversity and innovation. I've read over 70 complete novels on my PDAs since 1996, and I personally feel that the experience of reading an ebook on a 480x320 screen with one-tap access to both dictionary and thesaurus is more than adequate, it's superlative. That is what I get with PalmReader/eReader on a high-res Palm OS device.

Sorry to disagree, but I think you'll agree that rational debate is always healthy.

\* \* \*

Thanks to Craig for sharing his views. One reason for Sony's withdrawal, it should be noted, was the general move of consumers from traditional PDAs to those with cell phone capabilities. PalmOne has been far ahead of Sony in that respect. Still, I heartily agree that Sony didn't help with a proprietary approach for PDAs. Let's hope that if Sony introduces the Librie or an equivalent to the U.S. it will learn from its past errors.

I wonder if part of the problem could be that Sony is out of touch with U.S. consumers, who, perhaps, expect more flexibility than do Japanese counterparts. Maybe the American side of Sony needs to have a U.S.-based design team. Japanese car-makers do; time for electronics companies to do the same?

posted by [David Rothman](#) at 8:27 AM | [permanent link](#)

## Copyright zealots want to ban PC?

Huh? Make PCs *illegal*? To go by a [Slashdot post](#), that's what could happen if certain numbskulls within [WIPO](#) prevail.

posted by [David Rothman](#) at 2:40 AM | [permanent link](#)

## An e-book primer from NetWorker

*What is the best gizmo to use for reading e-books? And the best software? NetWorker, a pseudonym for a tech-hip member of the [eBook Community list](#), has just posted a beaut of a mini-primer in response to a novice's questions.*

A lot depends on what kind of "ebooks" you plan to "read." E-book devices can be special purpose devices (e.g. the [HIEBook](#), the [Gemstar](#) or the [eBookMan](#)) or general purpose devices (e.g. the [Macintosh](#), the [Windows-based PC](#), the [PocketPC](#) or the old [Palm Pilot](#)). They can range in size from the fixed-in-place (desktop PC) to the transportable (a laptop PC) to the highly portable (multi-purpose cell phone).



### Why a general purpose gizmo is better

I think almost everyone here would favor the general purpose device over the special purpose device, even when it will be dedicated to a single use. General purpose devices have consistently shown themselves to be at least as capable as special purpose devices, and due to economies of scale can always be produced cheaper. Additionally, special purpose devices are too tied to a single market segment to be robust in the market place. Public disenchantment with e-books can spell doom for the manufacturer of special purpose e-book devices, but devices which can also be used as a Personal Digital Assistant or hand-held game platform have a wider, more diversified market. You're not guaranteed that PalmOne won't go out of business, leaving you owning a paperweight, but there's a much better chance that they'll be around in 10 years than, say, Gemstar's e-book unit. In fact, Gemstar's e-book operation is *already more or less out of business*.

The other big advantage to general purpose devices is in the potential availability of software. If you buy a Franklin eBookMan, you can use any User Agent (the technical term for the software that renders electronic content) you like, so long as it's [MobiPocket Reader](#). With a general purpose device, if you don't like a particular User Agent in all likelihood there's a programmer somewhere who didn't like it either, and has built a better mousetrap.

### Easier to read from than desktops

On to my own personal biases. I find that except for extremely

short passages, I just cannot read at a desktop machine. A small laptop (such as one of the old 9" Toshiba Portegés) is almost acceptable if I'm at home and can settle into an easy chair, but nothing beats a handheld, such as a PocketPC or a Palm Pilot. I can jot down my grocery list before going to the store, and then read a novel while waiting in the checkout line; multi-tasking at its finest.

Unfortunately, I find that I cannot read technical/reference materials (e.g. Chuck Easttom's "C++ Programming Fundamentals") on a small screen. I find that for novels and essays, and other material designed to be read serially from beginning to end a handheld device is the best, but for technical or reference material I find the information I need and then print the section.

### **How to choose a handheld device**

The two most important considerations in choosing a handheld device (assuming, of course, that price is no object) are screen clarity and the availability of your preferred User Agent. It is obvious that for reading a monochrome screen is all that is necessary. While it may be obvious, it is also wrong. The difference between reading on a color screen and a monochrome screen is like night and day. The higher the screen resolution, the better. The early Palm's resolution of 160 pixels by 160 pixels (a "pixel" is a "picture element," and can be thought of as a "dot," although that's not quite accurate) is barely adequate for reading, and makes rendering different font's difficult. The PocketPC upped the ante with a screen resolution of 240 by 320 and a usable screen area which is half again as large. Later Palms quadrupled their earlier resolution to 320 by 320 (in the same screen area) and the Tungsten T3 (and I believe the most expensive [Sony Cliés](#)) features color screen resolutions of 320 by 480, and a screen area as large as the Pocket PCs.

You also need to consider where you will be reading. In moderately lit rooms, with the backlight on, my wife's [Casseopia](#) has a more readable screen than my [iPaq 3650](#). In bright sunlight, however, her screen washes out completely, whereas the iPaq is highly readable without the backlight. In yet another scenario, after lights out the backlight of the iPaq is so bright, even at its lowest setting, that it sometimes keeps her from falling asleep, and in those over 40, mid-night moments I can even use it as a flashlight. You should find whatever you are considering buying and look at it in all three of these locations: bright sunlight, typical indoor lighting, and in a darkened room.

The ability to use standard or rechargeable AAA batteries is a plus.

### **The operating system**

The choice between a Microsoft Mobile device (aka PocketPC, WinCE) or a [PalmOS](#) device will be dictated mostly by what kind of software User Agent you want to use, and what other tasks you want to use the device for. In my not so humble opinion, I think that the best, and most, User Agent software is available

for the Micro\$oft based devices. My favorite User Agent software is [µBook](#) (quirky but powerful) which is available only on the PocketPC platform. MobiPocket is also good and works on both platforms, as does [iSilo](#) and PalmReader. MobiPocket can display e-books in the lowest common denominator ASCII and PalmDOC formats, as well as the richer MobiPocket and HTML formats (µBook displays all these formats as well as RTF and zip files containing any of these formats). [PalmReader](#) is also an acceptable reader, although I believe it only displays PalmDOC simple files and its own proprietary PalmReader format. There is a utility called [DropBook](#) that can create PalmReader files from HTML; if you choose the PalmReader software I would encourage you to obtain DropBook as well, and learn how to use it.

Balancing all these considerations (plus the fact that I wanted to play some games and use a spreadsheet as well) I opted for a PocketPC (my now obsolete iPaq 3635); I will admit, however, that the display on the [T-3](#) makes me drool.

\* \* \*

That's the end of NetWorker's guide. I will differ with him on some minor details--for example, the Hiebook and eBookMan can be used for some PDA-type functions. But in general he is right on target.

posted by [David Rothman](#) at 12:16 AM | [permanent link](#)

## **Wednesday, June 09, 2004: Care about e-books for K-12? Check out this e-mail list**

*From the [start](#), K-12 has figured in a big way in [TeleRead](#). The [WWW-EDU](#) list is about many more K-12 topics than e-books, but it's a great way to [consider them in an educational context](#), as is [happening now](#). The list even offers an [RSS Feed](#). Here's the lowdown from the list moderator.*

Founded in December 1994, WWWEDU is one of the Internet's oldest forums for discussing the role of the Web in education. Moderated by [Andy Carvin](#) of the [EDC Center for Media & Community](#), WWWEDU offers educators, administrators, parents, policymakers, researchers and others an engaging discussion on Web-based education. Whether you're a first-time online educator or a Web pioneer, WWWEDU serves as a community to interact with colleagues and learn from each other's experiences.

Among the topics regularly discussed on the list:

- Successful Web-based educational strategies
- Educational Web site design
- Virtual schools
- Recommendations of educational websites
- Web use in schools, libraries, technology centers
- Webquests and other online lesson plans

- The debate over Internet filters
- Online publishing policies
- Professional development strategies and opportunities
- Current news and events in Web-based education
- Online partnership opportunities for schools, teachers and students

posted by [David Rothman](#) at 9:31 AM | [permanent link](#)

## Blind Chance blog honored with Audioblogger mention

[Blind Chance](#), the Web log of David Faucheux, a blind [TeleRead](#) volunteer, has been honored with a home page mention by [Audioblogger](#). Only the audioblog of director [Christopher Coppola](#), nephew of Francis, is above [Blind Chance](#) on the list of "interesting audioblogs." Almost surely, [Audioblogger](#) had hundreds of sites to choose from--perhaps even thousands.



Congratulations to David! By the way, via Blogger's email feature, he's now posting text to augment the audio. Visitors as far off as Singapore are regularly checking out David's posts.

posted by [David Rothman](#) at 5:46 AM | [permanent link](#)

## Tuesday, June 08, 2004: Blogging in schools: The good news continues

We've told how [blogs and e-books](#) go together well. Here's [one sign that more and more educators are taking blogs seriously](#). (Thanks, Alev.)

posted by [David Rothman](#) at 1:39 PM | [permanent link](#)

## British publishers shun e-books--but perhaps e-books on cell phones will perk things up

E-books are dismally small in U.S. publishing thanks in part to the DRM fanatics and format warriors. And in the U.K., it's [even worse](#) because of the general backwardness of the publishing industry there if you go by a [BBC report](#). "Books are very cheap," chirps a Brit publisher in the Luddite mode. "Why would we replace that with something that is not that cheap or could go wrong?"



For the moment, it's easy to sneer at e-books. Even a good, successful international operation like Australian-and-U.S.-based [ebooks.com](#)--whose total effectiveness leaves [OverDrive](#) in the dust--considers 1,000 copies to be in best-seller territory.

The right reading platform, of course, could help change this. I agree completely with some forward-looking sentiments that BBC attributed to ebooks.com founder Stephen Cole: "Mr Cole said the next generation of convergence devices - mobile phones combined with hand-held PCs - would speed the development of e-books."

posted by [David Rothman](#) at 1:19 PM | [permanent link](#)

## The Palm software challenge--and some partial solutions for e-book downloaders

*Note: For simplicity's sake, I'll just say "Palm" and leave out all the details resulting from recent changes of ownership. [PowerbyHand](#) nows owns [PalmGear.com](#) and [eReader.com](#), a replacment for Palm Digital Media. The old Palm Reader now has a [new name](#) reflecting its increasingly cross-platform focus. Meanwhile [PalmSource](#) is still around as an independent company. - D.R.*

The more I try Palm-based programs--like the Web browser shown at right--the clearer it is why Sony will stop selling traditional PDAs here in the United States. The quirks of PalmOS programs can annoy even seasoned computer users. Sony may or may not have puzzled out *all* the reasons for less-than-stellar sales of even knockout PDAs. But after tinkering some more with Palm-powered Sony PDAs in the context of e-books and the Net, something is as clear to me as the 320-by-480 resolution screen on my Sony Clie NX: *Software shortcomings have undermined rather brilliant efforts at hardware design.* The biggest cause of Sony's Clie-related woes, of course, is the move toward cellphone-PDA combos from PDA-only devices, but that's hardly everything.



Among the other software-related flaws, Palm-platform software is not as standardized and well integrated as the Pocket PC versions. On my Dell Axim Pocket PC, [Mobipocket](#) e-book-reading software works smoothly with Pocket Internet Explorer without the least fuss. I can go to [Blackmask](#), click on the title I want in Mobipocket format, and with just a few easy clicks, the e-book is on the Dell. The Pocket PC version of Internet Explorer has its major shortcomings, including its being a memory hog in the classical Microsoft way. But at least it is a relatively reliable solution for no-fuss e-book downloading and presumably for many other applications. Now compare this with the challenges I face with NetFront and other browsers for the PalmOS. NetFront won't even display my headline page on Yahoo page without forcing me to give up the rendering of

tables and CSS. The normal mode isn't up to the job, , which Pocket Internet Explorer can easily handle.

Below are other highly impressionistic observations based mostly on my own experiences.

### **Flaw one: Fightin' programs**

First off, some Palm-based programs don't get along with each other as well as they should. On the [Blackmask](#) site, anyway, I could not successfully download a Mobipocket file directly to my Clie NX60. It came out as gibberish when I used the NetFront browser. No, this is not a program fight in the classic sense of "I got dubs on that stretch of memory," but this kind of incompatibility is a hair-puller just the same. Anybody out there with a solution? There is a workaround that I'll mention later, something besides just giving up and doing a HotSync from your desktop. But I'm still grouchy that I had to worry about one.

No, I have not surveyed the entire Palm scene. But based on my personal experiences and the hassles in other areas such as interfaces, I'd be surprised if clashing programs were not a problem.

### **Flaw two: Lack of a true Palm OS**

I wonder if there really is one true PalmOS for all PalmPowered devices. In fact, I *know* there isn't. The same programs that run on "pure" PalmOne machines may lock up on a Sony--as I discovered in the case of [Web Pro](#). Too bad. I watched WebPro lock just at the moment it appeared to be successfully downloading from the Blackmask site. Yes, I realize I was gambling by using the wrong program on the wrong machine (couldn't find a Sony version). But that's the point. Even on the PalmSource site, there are different programs for different PalmOne PDAs. Besides, even some *PalmOne* owners with Web Pro say the program is crashprone.

### **Flaw three: Not enough standardization in interfaces**

In the Palm world, some interfaces are all over the waterfront and tend to diverge wildly from the Explorer/Netscape ones. You never know where the submenu in Options will lead. It's as if the programmers blindfolded you before you reached the end of your little journey.

No, this lack of standardization isn't entirely bad. For a small screen and a different operating system reflected in the various buttons in the hardware, you can't just shrink equivalent desktop programs. And you want new features to surprise you in a nice way.

But as a product called PocketLink shows--yep, the one in the screen shot--you can come reasonably close. Even Pocket Internet Explorer does not do as good job of picking up some important elements of the classic IE interface. Compared to PocketLink Web Pro isn't as good in the IE look-alike contest. But it is tolerable. The real sinner here is the Palm version of

NetFront, which, alas, is the very browser bundled with many Sonys and other popular machines.

PC-like standardization would help. I'm not an expert on Macs, but I suspect that in Macdom, too, more discipline exists than in the Palm world. Yes, there are occasions when a radical break in interface patterns would be justified. But programmers should think long and hard before this happens. That would be easier to do with well-enforced standards from the OS developer.

Whatever the factors here, the fragmentation in software and markets is bad for both the hardware and software side of the PDA world. Granted, I realize that vendors want to make their tweaks to optimize performance on low-powered devices, that proprietary mania isn't the only factor here. Just the same, when you add this complexity on top of others, such as the Tower of eBabel in e-book formats, you're in trouble. Imagine the additional cost in support that all these special tweaks mean in support costs for vendors such as Sony.

So what's the ultimate solution? Ideally in the world of Palm OS6, the OS developers can better enforce standards in interface and general compatibility. I know that many programmers would consider that to be limiting. But we end users just might find it to be empowering since we would not have to waste so much time dealing with the quirks of the software. Hardware and software vendors, in turn, would find support costs reduced, and more customers would be attracted to PalmOS in the first place--and the OS company would make more sales to nongEEKs. Let's hope that is the case with OS6. If nothing else, it's great to learn that OS6 will offer decent VGA technology, which, turn, could [lead to a much better Web browsing experience](#) than now. I also hope that the new OS and the hardware making use of it will allow browsers and the rest to include more features beyond the better video.

Meanwhile, it will be helpful if the [embedded Linux camp](#) learns from the experiences of the PalmOS crowd and understands how this chaos in Palm software just may help explain why the PocketPC appears to be the winning platform these days for handheld devices. Please--*promise* that e-book-reading software, browsers and the OS in general will play well together on [Linux PDAs and tablets](#). The fewer quirks to bedevil the users of OSes and apps, the happier the people will be. This is a powerful argument for supporting an [OpenReader](#) approach. Vendors of PDAs, as well as the PDA-phone hybrids, should complete in such areas as usability, features and pure functionality, not just to be different for the sake of it. Linux would help. Who know, maybe both the past and present Palm interests can be won over. They'll never overcome Microsoft in sheer resources, but can get a head start on Redmond by going where Bill and friends would rather not venture: Linux and open source.

So much for the preaching on standardization and open source. Now, what about those workarounds for people wanting to download Mobipocket and perhaps other formats from BlackMask to their Palm-based PDAs? Well, as noted, WebPro could be a solution if does not crash or lock up on *yout* device.

So might PocketLink, which Roy Lewis in Texas kindly urged me to try. It locked up on my Sony and fails to display some large pages properly even though it officially isn't PalmOne-only, but might run better on Blessed Hardware, just so you don't need an elaborate set of features.

Another possible solution for my particular downloading problem with the Blackmask-NetFront-Mobipocket mix? Of course: Move on to another site. That's painful in Blackmask's case since I like the way site owner David Moynihan cuts out the usual Project Gutenberg legalese in front that makes you think you're reading a will rather than a novel. I don't agree with David on everything, such as the use of the copyright symbol with copyrighted books. However, as a reader, I love his minimalist approach to the legalese on public domain works, not to mention the chance to browse through his fascinating commercial offerings.

Two other great sites to consider in place of BlackMask--for PD books--would be Steve Sakoman's [GutenTalk](#) and Matt McClintock's [Manybooks.net](#). At Steve's suggestion I tried the .pdb format and Mobipocket read it fine (I don't think this works in the PC flavor of Mobipocket but I could be wrong). Similarly .pdb under the Doc label, not to be confused with Microsoft Word files, worked great on Manybooks.net. This is one case where the Palm world and Mobipocket do have their act together. .Pdb is a standard of sorts.

Defenders of the status quo might reply, "See, told you everything's fine. Just stick to the .pdb format." Well, not quite. Just what about those who don't want to use either the Palm OS or Palm software or rely on any particular product such as Mobipocket. That's where a true, cross-platform OpenReader approach would help. I'm pretty POed at the amount of my time that the software makers have wasted, and I'm sure that other people feel the same and are conveying similar thoughts to their friends--hardly the best way to popularize e-books and PDAs in general. Now combine this with the related mess of proprietary DRM, along with many people's natural knack for being Luddites and the not-quite-there nature of affordable display technology, and you'll know why both e-books and PDAs are out of fashion right now. Too, the e-book business and many other software vendors are hardly rushing to embrace cellular phones (despite some good moves such as [OverDrive's](#) new interest in Mobipocket which works on Smartphones). All the PR in the cosmos from the Open eBook Forum isn't going to overcome these very real problems.

*Related:* CNET's coverage of the [tiny OQO](#) which is an XP system not much bigger than a PDA. Could more powerful machines eventually break down the barrier between PDA software and other operating systems and accompanying apps. That's one more reason for the PDA world to get its act together, ideally under the flag of embedded Linux.

*NetFront details:* Despite my hassles with NetFront on Sony's Palm-based platform, I'm not going to write the software off. It can do a good job of shrinking the width Web pages to fit my NX60 screen. The catch--beyond the Palm version of NetFront

botching the rendering of large pages--is that the type *in the "shrink" mode* is so small and not quite readable to me. Could font-related tweaks on the NX60 be the solution? Perhaps bolder characters? Maybe that change would work for me. But most consumers can't or won't bother, which, for a consumer-minded Sony, is too bad. So what about NetFont on a *Pocket PC*? At least one reviewer is rather **impressed** with the Pocket PC version. I'm open minded and sooner or later may **give it a try**.

posted by [David Rothman](#) at 4:11 AM | [permanent link](#)

## DRM guidance for large publishers

DRM overkill is costing publishers many millions in lost e-book sales, and big houses have especially suffered. Just what is a sensible DRM policy if you're a giant of the book trade? For the smallfry, the question is much simpler since their books are less likely to be pirated. But suppose you're a house brimming with valuable best-sellers--just how far can you go in protecting them without scaring off readers? Jon Noring, an invited expert to the [Open eBook Forum](#), main cofounder of the [OpenReader Consortium](#) and moderator of the [eBook Community](#) list, shares some thoughts in an [essay](#). An earlier version of the material appeared on TEBC.



posted by [David Rothman](#) at 12:05 AM | [permanent link](#)

## Monday, June 07, 2004: 5th-rate Web browsers for PDAs: Another reason why e-books have bombed?

I can't believe how pathetic the Web browser scene is for the most part, at least on the PalmOS side. This isn't helpful to those hoping to use their PDAs to buy e-books or read HTML versions.



Over the weekend I got a PalmOS-powered Sony Clie NX60 going--picked up on eBay for \$125 with a beautiful 320-by-480 screen. My particular unit didn't come with a Web browser and I found the pickings to be horridly slim. Even the browser I finally settled on, NetFront, bundled with at least some NX60s, apparently isn't set up to do what the Pocket PC version of Internet Explorer can--and let me directly download a book in a [Mobipocket](#) format. Am I overlooking something? What's more, even the most recent NX60-compatible version of NetFront has trouble digesting large Web pages, even allowing generously for the limits of small PDA screens.

As for alternatives to NetFront, most of the other PalmOS browsers tend to use technology several years old or are for cell phones or whatever. Oh, and this isn't even to mention the possible shortcomings of comm programs for PDAs. My own

solution was to skip a modem and try out the [Softick PPP program](#), which lets me access the Net via my desktop without spending a nickel on a modem or LAN card.

Seems to me that e-book sales would be better if more PDA software vendors came out with good browsers and other software that let you *easily* download books directly without going through the terrors of synching with a PC. I'm just glad that Pocket Internet Explorer--itself pretty disappointing--is out there. Too bad Pocket PC screens come nowhere close to my Sony's. A nasty Catch 22, no? If you demand a screen better than the Pocket PC's--[ClearType](#) can do only so much--then you must suffer in the browser software department. Here I thought that Opera was going to do PalmOS. What happened? Oh, well, maybe there's [hope](#) for Opera browsers on newer PDAs, at least, in the near future. Also, I've just learned of WebPro and will be trying it--WebPro from afar looks very promising. Regardless, most Palm users, even those with the more powerful models, are suffering with fifth-rate products.

This is just one detail in explaining e-books' dismal sales record. The old Gemstars didn't require you to use a desktop or laptop computer to download books, and yet the product still flopped. But then again, there were a number of other reasons why the Gemstars failed. Allowing consumers to download books directly to a dedicated e-book device, PDA or phone or whatever is a Good Thing.

*Suggestion:* E-book sellers might want to do special Web pages optimized for fifth-rate Web browser. Not so hard as otherwise if you're using a true XML/CSS-based approach--which will allow easy repositioning of the material. E-book-sellers should visit the [Zen Garden page](#) for inspiration.

*Speaking of e-book sales:* Don't get excited over the [latest sales-related chest thumping](#) from the [Open eBook Forum](#). E-book sales are still a speck of a speck of the [total](#), I couldn't agree more with Business Week's Stephen H. Wildstrom, who, in his latest column, places e-books among the major disappointments he has felt with technology in the last decade.

posted by [David Rothman](#) at 6:49 AM | [permanent link](#)

## **E-stupidity: Drexel prez says going to library is waste of time**

Yes, we're pro-e-books, but [this](#) is ridiculous--the [president](#) of [Drexel University](#) hoping that students and faculty will shun libraries and get all their information via computer instead unless they're book lovers. As if all good books are online already! Besides, can't one love books in their *electronic* form, too? Details:

"My understanding when I was first hired was that in three years I did not want any professor or graduate student to walk into the library to find a book, because this is a waste of your time unless you love

books and are going to look at them," [University President] Constantine Papadakis responded.

He then elaborated on his philosophy of using electronic media instead of printed material. "I am telling you the philosophy that we follow, right or wrong," he added.

"I did not get much complaint from students who are using the library most of the time," Papadakis said. "If I am wrong, somebody needs to tell me."

[Associate Professor of Architecture Mark] Brack continued, "We have been telling you through the advisory committee that you are wrong, that there is great dissatisfaction with the library facilities by both the faculty and the students. I completely disagree with your characterization of the way the library is working."

Several other faculty members voiced their concern with the library. One member questioned the University's idea to build a cafe on the first floor, saying that the money would be better spent on the library's contents. Another faculty member likened the University's library to that of a community college. The University Assembly was broadcast live via the Internet through the Office of the Provost's Web site.

Thinking about sending your kid to Drexel? Maybe it's time for both of you to scratch that school off the list.

(Via [LISNews](#).)

posted by [David Rothman](#) at 5:45 AM | [permanent link](#)

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