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Not a 'Kindle' – It's an 'ECO Reader'



New basic e-book reader now available in Australia and Singapore ahead of the big boys

By Ross O. Storey 12 Oct 2009

At last, there is a quality e-book reader actually physically available in Singapore and Australia.

In the same week that Amazon announced that it was making its e-book reader 'Kindle' available to regions across the world...

Up against eCommerce giant Amazon, the 'ECO Reader' is certainly a David against Goliath, but I was proud to see an enterprise in my home country taking on the big boys in this relatively new field of devices.

The ECO Reader, from Melbourne-based book wholesaler Central Book Services, is so named because it's 'ECO logical' that is, environmentally friendly.

Having tried for sometime to get my hands on a Kindle or a Sony reader to try out here in Singapore, I was pleased when the Australian firm, through its Singapore office, promptly agreed to give me three weeks' trial of the ECO-Reader.

What's Vizplex?



store more than 1,000 books.

You might call it a 'junior Kindle' because it has no wi-fi, you must connect via USB to your computer to download books, and, unlike the Kindle, it has no keys to input text.

Having been trying out the ECO reader for a few days already, I can say it takes a little while to become accustomed to pushing a button to turn the page, but the display area is very similar in size to a paperback novel.

If you check out their web page—http://www.ecoreader.com.au—you'll see they state that "the ECO Reader utilises the latest generation of E Ink's micro-encapsulated ink imaging film, Vizplex.

The device runs on Linux and features open format file support.

You can change the font and type size on the ECO reader's 15 centimetre, four-greyscale screen which has a 600x800-pixel resolution.

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Classics pre-loaded

The ECO reader comes with 21 classic books pre-loaded, and they say you can download more from their site.

Here are just some of the great classics loaded on ECO readers.

- *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll
- *Crime and Punishment* by Fyodor Dostoevsky
- *Designing Better Futures* by Michael J. C. McAllum
- *Far from the Madding Crowd* by Thomas Hardy
- *For the Term of His Natural Life* by Marcus Clarke
- *Gone with the Wind* by Margaret Mitchell
- *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens
- *Gulliver's Travels* by Jonathan Swift

With carbon fuel running out, global warming a planet-wide issue, and pulping trees for paper becoming a very politically in-correct practice, I can't help but think that the ECO reader is a device that shows the way to the near future.

I admit I was initially a sceptic about e-book readers, wondering why they were so special when your average 3G mobile can adequately display text, but having delved deeper, I realise they are justifiably a separate device, with unique features to cope with a range of lighting environments and a special extended battery life. Users claim they can leave the ECO reader on for 'days' before having to re-charge, and I am testing this out myself. The distributors claim you can read 7,000 pages before having to re-charge.

Of course, at A\$449 (S\$567), they remain a relatively expensive new toy, in about the price range as a basic 'netbook', but I expect they will, like netbooks, stake their claim to a new niche device genre within the next 12—18 months. Let me know if I'm wrong.

My experience to date with the ECO reader has certainly impressed me and perhaps soon, the techno salespeople at Singapore's various digital malls will no longer look at me with blank faces when I ask them about e-book readers.

Ross O. Storey, currently the Managing Editor of Fairfax Business Media Asia, is responsible for the editorial content and production of MIS Asia, CIO Asia, Computerworld Singapore and Computerworld Malaysia magazines.

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Mark says...

Its unfortunate for the ECO Reader that their timing has clashed with the Kindle launch to Australia. The Kindle is cheaper and a true object of desire. With the inbuilt 3G modem allowing in device buying I can see most selecting the Kindle. I did - sorry ECO, just bad timing beyond your control :-)

12 Oct 2009 8:49pm

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