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27 ebook Eco Reader set to revolutionise industry



Book wholesaler, Central Book Services, has launched its ebook reader, called the Eco Reader, at The Age Melbourne Writers Festival.

Richard Siegersma, chairman of Central Book Services, said that he predicted ebooks and ebook readers (portable handheld electronic devices with electronic ink screens, capable of storing whole libraries) would capture more than 20 per cent of the \$2.5 billion Australian book industry in the next five years.

He said the accelerating size of the global ebook reader market – with sales of over 1 million in the US, 300,000 in Russia and 10,000 per month to Spain – was heralding a new era of reading and learning, where books and other commercial content would be more economically viable for publishers, and convenience and cost improved for consumers.

“Other markets are charging ahead. While US book sales are in decline, in July the International Digital Publishing Forum reported 136 per cent growth in wholesale US ebook revenue, taking it from a value of \$1.5 million in 2002 to \$37 million today,” Siegersma said.

By contrast, Central Book Services was the sole ebook reader and local support provider to the Australian market, he said.

Siegersma said that before local demand took off in earnest, more work was needed to grow the category in Australia and familiarise consumers with the concept.

“Avid readers don’t yet understand that ebook readers are not intended to function like laptop computers or iPhones. Their purpose is to provide a similar reading experience to a conventional book – only better.

“They take what people like about books, the reading experience, and the benefits of modern data storage and sharing, and roll it up into what the global sales figures demonstrate is a pleasing package.

“We’re at a stage now with the Eco Reader, where you can get around 1,000 books on a device, and have enough battery life to read about 7000 pages.”

Siegersma said that some of its Australian publishing partners, such as Allen & Unwin, were attuned to movements in the global ebook market and working with Central Book Services to provide content for the Australian market.

As the first local ebook reader supplier, Siegersma said that Central Book Services hoped to evolve the local industry by using its position as an industry forerunner.

“We see this technology opening up opportunities for new talent and for the publication of more diverse works than ever before. For this reason, we have sponsored the world’s first ebook competition as part of the Melbourne Lord Mayors Creative Writing Awards.

“It will also cut out some distribution costs and create savings that may be able to be split between the consumer, author and publisher,” Siegersma said.

The Eco Reader, so called for its potential to improve the sustainability of the book industry, has the added benefit of saving 4kg to 8kg of CO2 emissions per ebook chosen in the place of a printed book (by avoiding both printing and transport). The unit is also expected to offset its environmental footprint within a year of use.

While local ebook and ebook reader sales are currently limited to a handful of local online and retail sources, Central Book Services expects major electronics and book stores to begin stocking them for Christmas 2009.

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