The Digital Codex


The codex or the bound book marked a technological breakthrough in the printed world. Its significance cannot be underestimated. The codex bought with it the expansion of religious and scientific teaching across the globe. The advent of the printing press many centuries later accelerated the distribution of the written word. The format of the codex or the bound book was so natural and intuitive to use that its format has remained unchanged since its inception nearly two millennia ago.

The third millennium begins with it another profound and technological breakthrough; namely the advent of the digital e-book. The digital book has been in existence for many decades since the NLS project in the 1960S, but until recently the ability for people to author, distribute and consume the written word in an e-book has not been universally available.

The advent of the e-book has enabled traditional text to be supplemented and enhanced with rich digital media. The e-book is no longer a digital copy of the codex but rather a medium that enables readers to interact with the written word in a manner never envisaged before. The reader is no longer the passive consumer of text; rather the reader has become an active participant and contributor to the modern digital codex.

Within the education setting, the advent of the modern e-book has led to a growing debate about the use of e-books within the school setting. For instance, will schools continue to invest in books for their libraries, will schools take up the use of e-readers such as the Amazon Kindle, will the business and pricing model for e-books become more affordable for schools, how will publishers introduce rich digital media into e-books, what is the place for augmented reality within the digital codex, how will schools overcome the digital divide issues around access to e-books and how will schools engage learners with the written word and modern urban storytelling?

The advent of the new digital codex will have a profound impact on the availability and dissemination of digital literature across the education sector. Apple's textbooks for the iPad marks a significant step change in how we perceive the modern codex. Click here to view Apple's video on its digital and interactive textbook.
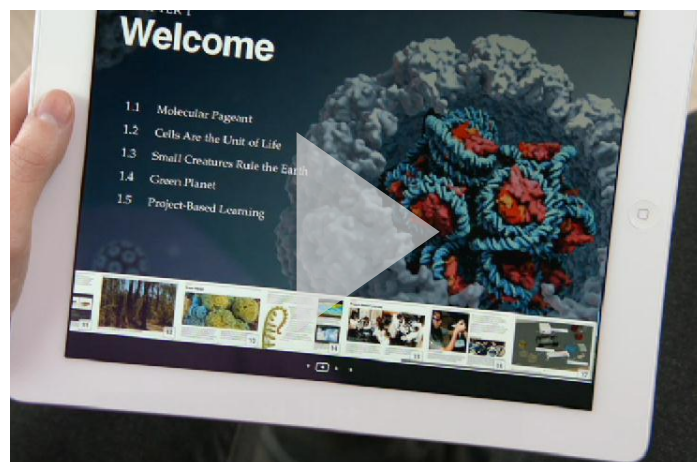
Another recent development is the application of augmented reality to the traditional text book. Here the two dimensional images of a text book become part of a larger web based catalogue of augmented reality files. Through an augmented reality app on a smartphone or a classroom visualiser the reader has the ability to view 3D and interactive content when held over a 2D image on the textbook. LarnGear is a company that has developed some interesting applications with its use of traditional marker cards and textbook images to showcase imaginative and interactive AR content. Click here to view a sample of their work.
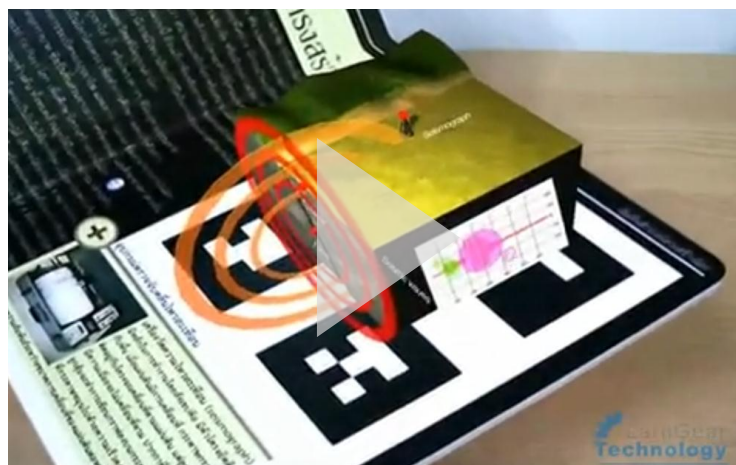
There is no doubt that the digital codex will excite and engage readers whatever their age. It has the potential to revitalise the publishing industry and the various sectors that produce traditional written literature to support learners in full time education or those in the workplace. The digital codex opens the door to various industries including film, gaming, 3D publishing and many more.

Just as the original codex transformed the world with the spread of the written word, the digital codex will transform how we produce, consume, digest, contribute to and share the written word with the aid of engaging multi-media.

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