The digital revolution and the teaching/learning environment

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The landscape in which the publishing industry operates continues to experience significant change. In recent years, this has included the rationalisation within the industry involving mergers and acquisitions; as well as the move to on-line retailing. Perhaps the most significant change to occur is the development of digital technology enabling the distribution and use of books in an e-book form, challenging the need to publish a book for distribution by post or sitting on the shelf in a book shop. Of course, this form of ‘publication’ is not for everyone (not yet anyway), but is likely to become increasingly popular. Facilitating this digital revolution is the development of e-book readers which are the devices required to convert the digital book into readable text. Our broad investigation is structured around two key questions:

1. How has digital technology impacted the business model of book publishers?

2. How has digital technology – through e-text books – impacted the learning environment for higher-education students?

Theoretically, the technology acceptance model (TAM) proposes that an individual’s intention to adopt a system is based on two beliefs: the perceived usefulness of the innovation; and, its perceived ease of use. We intend focussing on each of these beliefs through the exploration of digital technology in publishing and its applications in the teaching/learning environment.

The phase of the investigation to which this application relates is to explore the uses, applications and usefulness of e-books and associated products, in a higher education environment (particularly with respect to business and economics). E-books are likely to impact the teaching/learning environment across most subject offerings within our teaching programs. To date the text book industry appears to be still developing its technologies with respect to e-books. E-books are likely to impact pedagogy, providing scope for innovativeness in subject delivery. However, prior to major innovations in this area, a broad level of awareness of the opportunities and constraints around e-books is necessary. This would include [for example] identifying critical variables such as cost, portability and transferability across platforms. This is where we believe this project makes its contribution.

Our planned deliverables in this phase of the project are:

1. To provide the results of a staff survey relating to familiarity with, and [potential] uses of, e-books in a teaching and learning environment.

2. Subsequent to the staff survey, conduct staff awareness focus group sessions which explore the uses and applications of e-books in a teaching and learning environment, with a view to encouraging staff to further explore e-book technologies.