

Kindle – What the hell is it?

On the eve of Apple's iPad tablet PC announcement, I went to Amazon.com and bought a Kindle. Several of my friends thought I was bonkers. If I wanted to read eBooks, surely one that used colour and had lots of other features would be a better choice? The fact is, I've already placed my iPad order, because I want both. Why? Because I've started writing eBooks and I need to know how they look on both platforms.

My Kindle arrived three days ago and I love it! I love how it only does one thing. No distractions. I love how it sits in my hand like a skinny, easy-to-hold paperback. I love how easy-to-read the digital paper is. That's right folks—it doesn't use an eye-straining, backlit, power zapping, hard-to-read-in-daylight screen like a computer or iPhone. It reminds me of an etch-a-sketch screen, matt grey with strange black digital ink, but it is surprisingly easy to read. I find myself wanting to read it and flipping through pages and pages of text without noticing the object itself.

One thing that annoys me about reading paperbacks, especially the chunky Ben Elton's and Terry Pratchett's I am quite partial to, is the thickness of the book and I get hand fatigue just holding the damn things over my head while lying in bed or at the beach. Not so with a Kindle. It's light and thin. The main feature that's turned me into a raving fan was only revealed to me last night—we had a blackout—but luckily my Kindle was charged, so as I read in bed by candlelight, without thinking, I clicked on the Kindle store and downloaded a book—The Green Marketing Manifesto. Wait a minute. How? My power is off, therefore so is my wireless network. The Kindle is not signed up to a plan like my iPhone. How did it do it?

A quick look on the Internet (the next day) revealed that the second version of Kindle uses a free wireless system called Whispernet. To quote Amazon's website:

“Whispernet utilizes Amazon's optimized technology plus a high-speed data network to enable you to wirelessly search, discover, and download content on the go. Your books and periodicals are delivered via Whispernet in less than 60 seconds. And unlike Wi-Fi, you never have to hunt for a hotspot. Wireless download times can vary based on 3G or EDGE/GPRS coverage, signal strength, and file size”. Wow. If only laptops had such a feature!

Another added bonus is that you can read PDFs. As a university lecturer, I have many downloaded reports that I'm expected to read. I threw out a wheelie bin full of A4 printed pages last year. PDFs that I print to take somewhere quiet to read and then once the task is done, throw away. Terrible! Xerox research has found that up to a third of A4 copy paper gets thrown away the day it's printed, so it's not just my office that commits this heinous crime.

Now I can load PDFs onto my Kindle (it mounts a disk like any other USB hard drive) and read them at my leisure. I was forced to wait for my husband for 15 minutes the other day. Normally I would have been annoyed but out came the Kindle and I read 15 minutes worth of PDFs. Pages and pages I would no doubt have printed off to read otherwise. I never like reading on the computer screen (no one does) and my iMac holds a world of other distractions, so I always used to print them out and

take them with me to a coffee shop. Now, there's no printing. Even if you never purchase and download an eBook in your life, if you read printed PDFs, do the world a favour and chuck them on your Kindle instead of printing them.

9 quick reasons why eBook readers are awesome:

- * They're instant: You're lying in bed, you feel like reading the new Ben Elton novel. Bingo. It's in your hand. No visit to a bookshop in three days time.

- * Excess baggage: In these days of airlines charging excess baggage at every opportunity, taking 4 or 5 paperbacks to read on your overseas trip is out of the question. Carry many 100s of books and if you don't like any of them, buy a new one with no additional weight.

- * Hand strain: It's easy to hold and stays the same thickness. Simple. Those last 20 pages of a 600-page novel are no longer difficult to hold.

- * Space saving: My library is full. Chockers. I have to sell or giveaway at least 100 books before I can even think of buying any more.

- * Portable: I can load my reader up with loads of PDFs and read them when I get a spare few minutes. It fits in my handbag and weighs nothing.

- * Paper: Talk about saving the environment. No more trees need to die for trillions of paperback novels that end up in the 4 for \$5 tables in discount book barns.

- * Back catalogues: Those old books you trawl second-hand bookstores looking for but never find. Now you can download it instantly. Lots of out-of-print titles are being re-released in eBook format because it costs the publishers nothing.

- * Low power: Digital paper only uses energy when you "turn" the pages

- * Niche publishing: You'll find books published as eBooks that will never stand a chance of being published through traditional methods.

One downside of the Kindle is the lack of colour. This is why I've ordered an iPad as well. Books for reading will go to my Kindle. Books for looking at will go to my iPad for shiny colourful goodness. I think (hope) the book industry is about to undergo a similar revolution as the music industry. I haven't bought a CD in years, but I download digital files and play them on my computer and iPhone in the car all the time. I often look at the CD slot in my car and wonder what it's there for. Maybe one day we will look at a bookcase with the same thought?

Article by Dominique Falla

Tags: e-book reader, ebook, ebook reader, Kindle, kindle review

This entry was posted by Dominique Falla on Tuesday, February 2nd, 2010 at 9:55 am and is filed under Reviews & Editorials. You can follow any responses to this entry through the RSS 2.0 feed. You can leave a response, or trackback from your own site.

- * Craig says:

02.02.10 at 10:03AM

What a fantastic read! One thing I will miss about old-fashioned books are their palpability. There is also something to be said for the sight of a bookshelf crammed with a variety books. ps. I think I will get an iPad.

- * Carolyn says:

02.02.10 at 10:41AM

This is a really interesting viewpoint – I generally have objected to the ebook because I always feel like they're sending me blind, but the lack of colour in this is actually making me re-think my position. Love the idea of non wasteful travelling reads. Great!

* Kimmy says:

02.02.10 at 10:59AM

Wow, great article Dominique, but I for one will really miss holding paper, there is nothing like it, but when the time comes im going with the kindle, backlit all the way!

* Nori Tominaga says:

02.02.10 at 7:10PM

Great article! Didn't think about the CD point of view either. Wonder if Borders would go the same way as HMV? The mind boggles. I'll miss the coffee, couch and 50 kilo book