

Digital publishing: Short history

The world was changed when Gutenberg introduced printing press in 1455. And now it's high time for digital publishing to change it again. Thanks to e-publishing you can have all your favorite magazines and newspapers in your pocket anytime, anyplace. But digital publishing in its current state didn't happen yesterday, it has more than a 40-year history.



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1970s: Project Gutenberg

We can say that digital publishing was born on 4 July 1971 when Project Gutenberg started. It was founded by Michael Hart who was the first to make a digital copy of the Declaration of Independence. This document became the first digitized publication in the world. Moreover, it was the first document to be published online. People got a free access to the Declaration and shared it with each other - also for free.

[Project Gutenberg](#) exists to date and it now offers more than 42,000 free eBooks. The project is supported by volunteers and contributors who help to digitize, proofread and publish the books. Project Gutenberg has not only made a revolution in the book market, but also opened public discussions on copyright issues online.

1980s: CD Era

The first [CD-ROM became](#) commercially available in 1982. and it changed the way people share information. Not only music and video companies saw the CD's potential, but also publishers found a way to use it.

Many magazine and newspaper publishers began experimenting with new ways of editions distribution. At that time only a few people had 24/7 access to the internet and CDs appeared to be a great way to share material. For example, National Geographic magazine made copies of archival works on CD-ROMs for retail distribution. It helped the company to use up-to-date digital technologies, save money and distribute its magazine with the digital-rights management.

The first digital magazines were written in basic HTML or in proprietary markup languages.

1990s: First eBooks

1990 was called the "International Year of Literature" and this year opened an era of eBooks. The number of the internet users was growing exponentially and the demand on electronic books was growing accordingly. Books in txt, mobi and doc formats took the market.

In the end of 90s many publishers and authors decided to sell their books online. The first digital books stores appeared in 1998. By the way, Stephen King was one of the first authors who began selling his novels ('Riding the Bullet', 'Plant') online.

2000s: ePaper

Digital publishing was developing at railway speed. In 2003, ePaper technology was introduced to the mass market. And in 2004 Sony released [Sony Librie](#) - the first eBook using electronic paper. It was followed by Kindle eReader from Amazon in 2007. Since then the publishing market has never been the same again... It was a point of no return.

While "old" eBooks were made for reading on PCs, new eReaders revolutionised the process of book reading. It was a totally new experience to have a whole bookstore in your pocket - a bookstore users could take anywhere. New eReaders had increased storage capacities, allowing people to carry dozens of documents in their pocket.

But not only Amazon and its Kindle were at the forefront of digital publishing revolution. Google and its newly developed search engine also impacted the e-publishing development. Google's representatives scanned thousands of documents and books from various universities, converted the texts into PDF files and created the unique database and search engine - [Google Books](#). Today several millions scanned documents which doesn't violate copyright can be read and downloaded for free.

2010 till now: Mobile era

The second decade of 21st century started with the introduction of first iPad by Apple and it was a real milestone in digital publishing development. Apple has changed the perception of computing. Steve Jobs joined the best from all computing devices: the tablet's mobility was taken from mobile phones, its shape from eReaders and its functionality from computers. Since 2010 Apple has released several generations of iPads and lots of manufacturers offer its tablet solutions. The whole world is becoming mobile.

[Mobile technologies are the next step](#) in digital publishing evolution. People don't use PDF or ePub files as often as they used to in early 2000s. What they need is mobile applications.

Content distribution via mobile apps has become popular thanks to the fast consumer adoption of smartphones and tablets.

Today publishers can choose between ADPS (Adobe Publishing Suite), native apps development and cross platform mobile solutions.

Native apps provide more opportunities than ADPS thanks to the rich functionality of the platform (iOS, Android, Blackberry, WinPhone), though it is quite time-consuming and pricy for publishers. As native development takes more time, and if you need to cover a wider audience, you have to develop an app for each platform.

Cross-platform solutions are cheaper as one app is developed for all platforms at once. As for the functionality, such apps have the same set of features therefore such variant can be more profitable. For example, [digital publishing tool from Nasty Creatures](#) is a newly developed mobile platform for delivering cross-platform mobile solutions for publishers.

Thanks to cross-platform, e-publishers can deliver highly productive apps faster and at a lower price.

What's next?

It's really hard to predict how digital publishing will look like in 10 or 20 years, but one thing is clear: publishing has become not only digital (it is predicted that [50% of total magazine](#) and newspaper circulation will be via digital delivery by the end of 2015) but it is also becoming mobile ([50% of tablet owners](#) prefer to read news, magazines, and books on screen, rather than on paper).

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