

# progressing business



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# What Does the Future Hold?

*Richard Siegersma, chairman of book wholesaler Central Book Services has launched Australia's newest ebook reader, the Eco Reader, and demonstrated a range of readers that he believes will reshape the Australian book industry.*

Siegersma said that he predicted ebooks and ebook readers (portable handheld electronic devices with electronic ink screens, capable of storing whole libraries) would capture over 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 USA 300,000 in Russia and 10,000 per month to Spain – is heralding a new era of reading and learning, where books and other commercial content will be more economically viable for publishers, and convenience and cost improved for consumers.

“Australians are early adopters of these types of technology but I think in this case we have been a bit slow.

“Other markets are charging ahead. While US book sales are in decline, in July the International Digital Publishing Forum reported 136% 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 is the sole ebook reader and local support provider to the Australian market.

“I think we will catch up quickly, as more Australian publishers come on board with content and a greater range of ebook readers becomes locally available,” he added.

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.

“Most laptops don't last that long, which is part of what sets the Reader apart in a category of its own.”

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.

Elizabeth Weiss, Academic and Digital Publishing Director for Allen and Unwin, stated: “We see digital publishing as integral to our current and future strategies. We routinely publish our new books in ebook edition and we already have around 1400 titles available in ebook formats. The availability of ebook devices in the US and UK has kick started public interest in ebooks in those countries, and we're hoping the same will happen in Australia too.”

As the first local ebook reader supplier, Siegersma said that Central Book Services hoped to evolve the local industry by using their 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 Mayor's 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,” Mr Siegersma concluded.

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.

More information request *Central Book 0205* to [progbus@pbinsitute.net](mailto:progbus@pbinsitute.net)

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