

Bibliodiversity

Journal of Publishing in Globalisation / January 2013



South America Africa Russia Arab World *The professionals' perspective*

The Digital South:

E-publishing in developing countries

(:?!;) D O U B L E
P O N C T U A T I O N

 International
Alliance
of independent
publishers

Édito

par Étienne Galliard, co-éditeur & rédacteur en chef

Alors que les analyses sur l'édition numérique se multiplient, **Bibliodiversity** se devait de proposer un autre regard, de mettre en valeur une réalité moins connue. Conformément à la ligne éditoriale de notre publication, en cohérence avec les recherches menées par les partenaires de la revue, il était indispensable de faire entendre autant que possible des voix peu entendues, voire peu écoutées.

Ce numéro est donc, tout d'abord, entièrement structuré autour de la parole des professionnels du livre. Beaucoup des articles présentés ici prennent d'ailleurs la forme d'entretiens. Cette parole vive présente l'avantage de plonger directement au cœur des interrogations qui sont celles de la profession. Pour renforcer encore leur originalité, l'ensemble des contributions proviennent par ailleurs de pays émergents, du Brésil à l'Afrique du Sud, de la Russie au Burkina Faso. Là, en effet, l'édition aborde souvent la révolution numérique de façon différente, confrontée à des contraintes qui ne sont pas celles des pays développés. Elle fait preuve d'une réelle capacité d'adaptation, malgré les freins qui subsistent à une appropriation complète de nouveaux outils.

Les thèmes traités par ces professionnels du « Digital South » — selon l'expression d'Octavio Kulesz — relèvent de ce que l'on pourrait appeler de façon élargie « l'édition numérique ». Il s'agit aussi bien, en effet, d'évoquer une initiative originale de « Print on Demand » que d'aborder le rôle des logiciels libres dans la réalisation d'e-books. Sans entrer dans le débat sémantique en cours — doit-on parler de numérisation des contenus, des pratiques ; doit-on préférer le terme de « digitalisation », ou bien encore ne raisonner qu'en fonction de formats et de standards émergents ? —, il s'agit donc de privilégier une approche pragmatique et concrète. Comment les professionnels des pays émergents considèrent-ils la révolution numérique qui s'impose peu à peu à leurs métiers ?

Les témoignages réunis ici s'appuient essentiellement sur les travaux du [Labo de l'Alliance internationale de l'édition indépendante](#) — un espace numérique destiné à la fois aux éditeurs membres de l'association et aux personnes intéressées par l'édition numérique dans les pays en développement. Plus précisément, les entretiens et les analyses proposés sont le fruit du travail d'Octavio Kulesz, auteur d'une étude désormais bien connue, *L'édition numérique dans les pays en développement*. L'ensemble de cette démarche a été soutenu par la [Fondation Prince Claus](#) et l'[Organisation internationale de la Francophonie](#) ; ces compagnonnages sont suffisamment rares et précieux pour être chaleureusement salués.

À la lumière des éléments recueillis, peut-on alors estimer que l'édition numérique renforce la bibliodiversité — une thèse efficacement défendue par quelques analystes ? Elle offre sans doute de nouvelles opportunités aux auteurs — et change peut-être, en passant, leur statut au sein de la chaîne du livre. Elle donne à de nouveaux acteurs une importance accrue ; certains, déjà extrêmement puissants, se doivent de capter un maximum de contenus pour alimenter leurs plateformes de diffusion. Le lecteur, lui, aurait peut-être plus d'opportunités à entrer en contact avec les textes — que se soit par l'intermédiaire d'impressions à la demande, d'un ordinateur, d'une tablette ou d'un téléphone portable. Moins de barrières à la création, une diffusion facilitée, un public potentiel élargi ; de prime abord, il s'agit sans doute d'un gain pour la bibliodiversité. Dans le même temps, les textes lus grâce aux interfaces numériques s'adaptent à leurs supports. La numérisation des contenus, de la diffusion et des pratiques de lecture doit aussi être mise en relation avec la nouvelle phase de concentration qui agite l'industrie du livre. Les grands groupes doivent acquérir une dimension réellement mondiale pour maintenir leurs parts de marché, pour développer leur offre numérique. Si les « petits producteurs » conserveront sans doute des marchés de niche, les structures éditoriales généralistes de taille moyenne devront se positionner très vite face au marché numérique. Il en va, sans doute, de leur survie.

Étienne Galliard, co-éditeur et rédacteur en chef



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*Cette publication, consacrée à l'édition numérique
dans les pays en développement,
est soutenue par la Fondation Prince Claus.*



Editorial

by Étienne Galliard, Co-publisher & Editor-in-chief

With digital publishing under close scrutiny, **Bibliodiversity** naturally felt it was important to offer a different angle on the subject, highlighting a less familiar aspect of the current situation. In accordance with our editorial line, and in keeping with the research undertaken by the journal's partners, it seemed vital to give a platform to voices that are seldom heard and rarely listened to.

This issue is therefore, first and foremost, wholly structured around statements by publishing professionals. Many of the articles presented here also take the form of interviews —often informal conversations. Here, the living, spoken word offers the advantage of taking us directly to the heart of questions currently being aired within the profession. What makes this issue even more unique is that all the contributions are sourced from emerging nations, from Brazil to South Africa, from Russia to Burkina Faso —from places where publishing often approaches the digital revolution differently, faced with constraints unlike those in developed economies. And it is exhibiting a genuine capacity for adaptation, despite the barriers that still hinder their full appropriation of these new resources.

The subjects tackled by these professionals from the southern hemisphere —from the “Digital South,” to use Octavio Kulesz’s expression— address e-publishing in its widest sense, including an original print-on-demand initiative and the role of open-source software in the production of e-books. The aim was to prioritize a pragmatic, down-to-earth approach, sidestepping both current debates concentrating on definitions and terminology, and a narrow focus on emerging formats and standards: how do professionals in emerging economies view the digital revolution that is relentlessly reshaping their businesses?

The testimonies gathered here draw mainly on the work of [Alliance Lab](#), a digital space created by the [International Alliance of Independent Publishers](#), aimed both at publishers who are members of the association and people with an interest in digital publishing in developing countries. More specifically, the interviews and analyses presented result from the work of [Octavio Kulesz](#), author of a study that has achieved widespread recognition, [Digital Publishing in developing countries](#). The entire initiative was supported by the [Prince Claus Fund](#) and the [Organisation internationale de la Francophonie](#): two partners whose unique and invaluable assistance earns our heartfelt gratitude.

In the light of the contributions brought together here, can we view digital publishing as strengthening bibliodiversity —a proposition some analysts have persuasively expounded? It certainly offers new opportunities to authors— changing, perhaps, at the same time, their status within the book chain. It confers a new importance on some new players; others, already extremely powerful, are looking to capture the maximum possible volume of content to feed their distribution platforms. The reader, meanwhile, potentially has more opportunities than ever for coming into contact with texts —whether the medium in question is print-on-demand, a computer, a tablet or a mobile phone. Fewer barriers to creation, simplified distribution, a wider potential audience; at first glance there would seem to be a clear benefit for bibliodiversity. At the same time, the texts read using digital interfaces are adapting to the devices being used. The digitization of content, distribution and reading practices should also be linked with the new wave of industry concentration sweeping through the publishing sector. The major groups need to attain genuinely global status in order to maintain their market share and expand their digital offer. Although small producers will doubtless continue to thrive in niche markets, generalist mid-sized publishing operations will need to position themselves very quickly in the digital marketplace: their survival will almost certainly depend on it.

Étienne Galliard, Co-publisher & Editor-in-chief



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This issue, which focuses on e-publishing in developing countries, is supported by the Prince Claus Fund.



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Dynamism, Localization Typify the Developing “Digital South”

by Octavio Kulesz (Argentina)

The latest digital publishing developments from Brazil, Africa, the Arab World, India and China indicate change and challenges for the major global players.



Nota bene What follows is a summary from the [International Alliance of Independent Publishers's Lab](#) of recent developments in the “Digital South”—the metaphoric area that is home to the majority of developing countries dynamic region. This version of the article [was also published in Publishing Perspectives](#), the February 20, 2012.

 [Lire cet article en français / Leer el artículo en Español](#)

Brazil: Latin america's powerhouse

2012 has already been a year rich in news from Brazil, including the report 6 out of 10 Brazilians [now belong to the middle class](#), resulting in an [increase in online sales](#). E-books are increasingly interesting to buyers and new digital strategies are being developed by [publishing houses](#) and [aggregators](#) alike. The government has demonstrated an interest in developing indigenous tablets and early examples, such as the YPY by Positivo, may prove competitive to foreign models, as a result of low price and [adaptability](#). Finally, the Brazilian Book Chamber (CBL) has announced

that it will hold a [Third International Congress on Digital Books](#), together with [other training initiatives](#)—yet another sign that the Latin American giant aspires to position itself as a hub in the regional world of electronic publishing.

Sub-saharan Africa: Cell phones are the way ahead

Given the elevated penetration of mobile networks across Sub-saharan Africa, [development continues to revolve around mobile phones](#). Several new companies have arrived to take advantage of the scenario, including Eskimi,

mobile social network from Lithuania, that has [2 million users](#) in Nigeria, and the Orange from the UK which has announced a plan to [distribute Wikipedia articles through cell phones](#). In addition, mobile money—a tool that in our view turns out to be vital for the emergence of digital markets in developing countries—[is expanding rapidly in Africa](#). These factors might explain the fact why mobile broadband throughout South Africa [faster than in the United States](#). The ventures undertaken in the continent seem to achieve greater dynamism once they have given up [solutions in deus ex machina-fashion](#) and taken on their own concrete context as a starting point. From our perspective,

“The Arab World still suffers from a lack of content in its mother tongue”

this could explain the success of projects focused on mobile phones as well as on [other more informal](#) or low tech tools.

Arab World: Still lacking in content in Arabic

The Arab World still suffers from a [lack of content](#) in its mother tongue. However, some relatively new actors are starting to gain ground in the field of e-publishing and e-distribution. Several companies are producing iPhone and iPad apps, such as Dubai-based Flagship, which has launched [Rufoof](#) store. Much of the app development is concentrated in the high-income Gulf, Apple products are too expensive for the mass market in the remainder of the Arab World. Numerous other digital projects are related to the reading of the Koran and traditional texts, such



Rufoof's App Store offers options for Arabic-speaking Apple users

as the launch of the eAlim EL 1000 tablet, best known as the “[Islamic iPad](#)”. Nevertheless, there is the expectation that the recent political and cultural changes across the Arab World will inspire further technological innovation.

India: Price wars and a \$35 tablet

The remarkable size of the Indian market has given rise to [online sales giants](#); in the last few months, the competition between domestic players such as Flipkart and Infibeam has triggered a [fierce price war](#) that threatens the established network of print bookstores. Like in Sub-Saharan Africa, cell phones represent a crucial platform in India, to the point that the government has started subsidizing mobile connections in rural areas. But it is tablets that are attracting the most attention, as a result of a plan by the Indian government to [distribute reading devices to students across the country](#)—the chosen device, the Aakash (which means “sky” in Hindi), costs just \$35 USD and is manufactured by Datawind, an Anglo-Canadian company founded by the brothers [Raja and Suneet Singh Tuli](#), from the Punjab. Despite the [ups and downs](#) that the project has encountered, the trend seems clear: the Indian State is eager to mass-produce tablets aimed at the native population, which will lead to a powerful platform for the distribution of content, bearing in mind, though, that business models for publishers and authors contributing to the platform have yet to

be finalized. Should this project turn out to be successful, it will undoubtedly be exported to [other developing countries](#).

China: Companies rising to rival the Americans

In China, the transformation is long-term. The market of mobile apps, online search engines, social networks and digital content continues to grow at an extraordinary pace and is becoming a [battlefield between colossuses](#) such as Tencent, Sina, 360Buy, DangDang, Baidu, Shanda and many others that can even outperform the main players from the North. It is worth remembering that Sina's micro-blogging platform Weibo [has recently overtaken Twitter's record](#) for most messages-per-second. Gradually, companies in the public sector—[under the guidance of GAPP](#) and other agencies—, as well as those in the private sector, are preparing to move beyond China's borders. It is no secret that Baidu, for example, is planning to include [content in other languages](#), and that Alibaba [has set its sights on Yahoo](#).

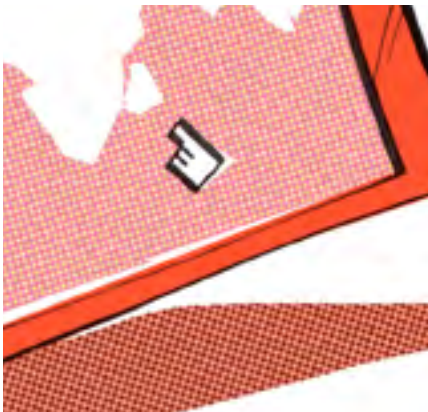
Global players are changing local strategies

Not so long ago, the strategy of players such as Amazon and Apple seemed to be inflexible in developing countries. These companies didn't appear too interested in adapting their formats, languages, content, price, charge and payment policies to the local economies. Thus, for a Latin American user, a Kindle was a

“There are also difficulties every time cultural and political differences are ignored”

Kindle, only able to be purchased in dollars from Amazon's US website.

The numerous other obstacles for acquiring and using the device —paying with an international credit card, picking up the article at customs, paying the tax, finding content in their mother tongue and so on— were left of to the user to resolve. Rather than following the motto “think globally act locally”, these platforms tended to take on the opposite



approach: “think locally —i.e. exclusively in terms of the American user— and act globally.” That is why, in our 2011 report we stressed that, *ceteris paribus*, it **wouldn't be that easy** for the companies from the North to market their products on a massive scale in the Southern countries, which were already beginning to show signs of autonomy.

Nevertheless, recently, perhaps as a consequence of the acute financial crisis —and particularly the decline of Europe as a market— we have seen a dramatic change in the strategy used by global platforms, which are now more willing to rethink their models to meet the needs of each context. For starters, Apple has launched its iPhone 4S in China, via China Unicom (an event that was not without some negative complications —see below). Likewise, a recent **tax**

exemption agreement reached by Foxconn and the Brazilian government suggest iPads are to be locally produced in Brazil —something that should further enhance the appeal of the devices in that increasingly important market.

Not sitting idly by, Amazon, has made it clear that it intends to open a new fulfillment center **in Nanning**, China, and another **in Bombay**— having opened for business in India earlier this month. Furthermore, after the failure of the first round of negotiations with Brazilian publishers in 2011, Amazon has hired a former e-book executive from Livraria Cultura, to speed up the launch of the Kindle in South America.

Finally, Yahoo has announced it will **include content in 8 languages from India**; Twitter will adapt its platform to **meet the “requirements” of the different national States**; and Google, after countless clashes with the Chinese government, is now considering the possibility of adopting a “less tough” stance to **accommodate the rules of the country**.

Ignore Cultural and Linguistic Differences at Your Peril

What is lost and what is gained with this change in strategy implemented by companies that until recently had not made many concessions to the peculiarities of each country? In our view, such a shift entails numerous risks for those key global players **who tend to underestimate the complexities on the ground**, giving a golden opportunity to local ventures.

To begin with, there is always the issue of language. Apple may have introduced the iPhone 4S in Asia, but it should have first made sure its applications worked as reliably in Chinese and Japanese as they do in English. Unfortunately, this has not been the case, as demonstrated

by the parody “Siri doesn't understand Chinese” —or in the **misfortunes of a Japanese user** who gets nowhere because of his accent.

There are also difficulties every time cultural and political differences are ignored. We already mentioned the launch of the iPhone 4S. Unfortunately, the public event surrounding the launch had to be cancelled due to overcrowding. Apple tried to make it appear as an indication of the device's popularity —since there were lots of people— when in reality it was taken to be a **sign of serious negligence on behalf of the company**. In the US or in Europe, a crowd outside a shop may appear to be an idle group of shoppers, but in China —due not only to the country's current circumstances but also to its tradition of social harmony— that restless crowd was interpreted as an attempted uprising. Indeed, that is how the event ended up —with people **hitting, shouting and throwing eggs** at the store, something that can hardly be considered a success for the brand.

The International “Network Effect” Wanes in Influence

We also find some problems developing as a result of what we might call the “loss of the network effect.”

Originally, a platform like Twitter may have been conceived as a means of direct and horizontal communication between heterogeneous users —in this way, a Tunisian student was able to follow the messages written by an Egyptian professor, for example. And in truth, if Twitter has beaten other local sites, it has been because of a snow ball or international network effect: the more users it had, the greater the number of potential users. However, any platform must become profitable at some

“The countries of the Digital South want to secure the necessary technology and know-how to supply their own market”

point, and this is when local variables —languages, prices, charges, payments, regulations, governments, etc.— start to play a role, forcing the platform to make concessions that eventually pose a threat to the initial network effect. Indeed, what advantage would there be for Egyptian users to use a platform in which they couldn't have a good connection with colleagues from Tunisia, if they knew that Twitter and the government had an agreement to ban or manipulate “inconvenient” messages? At this stage, we don't see why Twitter would be preferred over other native services. Finally, as for the different “invitations” that the multinational companies receive to produce gadgets on the ground, far from being a sign that Southern countries are passive, it could mean that

many of these nations —of a long-standing industrial tradition, like Brazil— are preparing for a context of global protectionism. The countries of the Digital South want to secure the necessary technology and know-how to supply their own market and that of their regional partners. It is worth stressing that the Brazilian government is not just allowing Foxconn and Apple to produce iPads locally: it also demands that they invest 4% of the net income in R&D projects, which accounts —directly or indirectly— for a major transfer of technology.

Interesting Times

If developing countries host increasingly relevant players and the companies from the North are forced to adapt their models according to the different contexts, the future of digital publishing in the South seems both fascinating and unpredictable. International platforms boast high tech, economic power and well-known brands. On the other hand, local ventures have the chance to strengthen digital ecosystems together with domestic actors who have first-hand knowledge of their own market and are able to join forces with a powerful public sector that desperately needs to close the digital gap.

This is the setting. Let the games begin.

Author

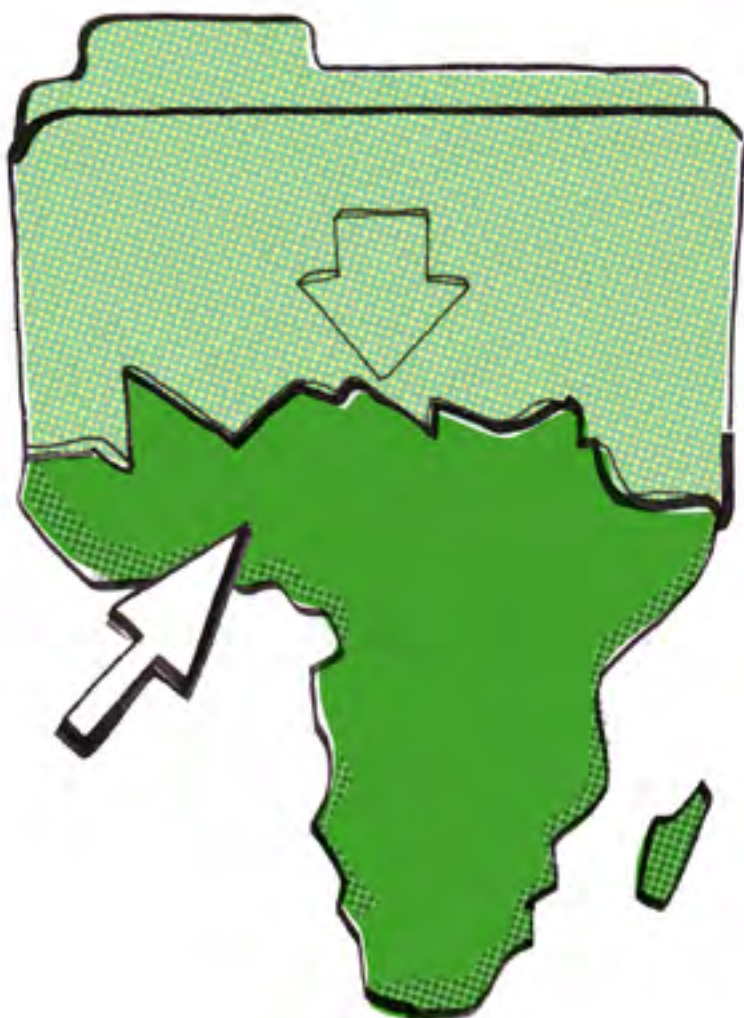


Octavio Kulesz holds a degree in philosophy from the University of Buenos Aires, where he taught Ancient Philosophy until 2006. He has worked in the publishing world since the year 2000, when he created the publishing house [Libros del Zorzal](#), together with his brother Leopoldo. In 2007, after participating in the Young International Publisher of the Year programme (British Council), he founded the publishing company [Teseo](#), geared to the publication of academic texts in print on demand and e-book format. Octavio Kulesz carried out a report, [Digital Publishing in Developing Countries](#), commissioned by the [International Alliance of Independent Publishers](#) with the support of the [Prince Claus Fund](#).

Logiciel libre et édition en Afrique subsaharienne

par Bako Malam Abdou (Niger)¹

Le prix élevé des logiciels propriétaires comme InDesign — et le piratage qui en découle — ont abouti à un manque de standards et une compétitivité amoindrie en Afrique. Dans un tel contexte, le logiciel libre représente une opportunité particulièrement attractive pour l'édition africaine.



In Africa, the high price of proprietary programmes like InDesign and the resulting piracy have led to a scenario characterized by a lack of standards and less competitiveness. Open-source software therefore represents a highly attractive opportunity for African publishing.

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¹ Cet entretien a été réalisé par Octavio Kulesz le 29 juin 2012 par e-mail.

« continuer à utiliser les logiciels propriétaires piratés est comparable à quelqu'un qui ne sait pas nager et qui avance au milieu d'une mare dont il ignore la profondeur »

Quels sont les logiciels utilisés actuellement pour le maquetage et l'édition de livres au Niger et dans la région ? Ces logiciels vous paraissent-ils appropriés ?

À une majorité écrasante, ce sont QuarkXpress, PageMaker, Publisher, InDesign, Illustrator, Photoshop, Paint, des logiciels propriétaires — et le plus souvent piratés — qui sont utilisés pour les travaux d'édition et de design. À mon avis, continuer à utiliser les logiciels propriétaires piratés est comparable à quelqu'un qui ne sait pas nager et qui avance au milieu d'une mare dont il ignore la profondeur ! Je pense que de nos jours, chacun doit être capable de connaître les lois internationales en ce qui concerne les droits qui protègent la propriété intellectuelle. Je suis conscient que le jour où les entreprises qui conçoivent ces logiciels décideront de poursuivre tous ceux qui se livrent au piratage, la conséquence ira bien au-delà de la fermeture de leurs structures.

Au cas où quelques rares structures paieraient leurs logiciels pour travailler, le problème de compatibilité sera grand avec leurs partenaires du bas de l'échelle et qui sont majoritaires car ils n'auront pas la même version. Les mises à jour perpétuelles et payantes les amèneront directement à la morosité économique ou à tricher de temps en temps en faisant comme les autres d'à côté.

Dans ce contexte, les logiciels libres auraient-ils un rôle à jouer ?

L'utilisation des logiciels libres dans les entreprises comme les maisons d'édition est impérative pour leur épanouissement et cela pour plusieurs raisons. Il s'agit tout d'abord d'une raison économique : tous les logiciels de mise en page et de graphisme sont libres, gratuits et téléchargeables à partir d'un ordinateur partout où l'on se trouve, tant que l'on peut accéder à Internet. Cela veut dire que les logiciels et leur mise à jour sont gratuits, contrairement aux logiciels

propriétaires qui, dans les deux cas, sont payants et le plus souvent à un coût inaccessible pour la plupart des entreprises éditoriales africaines comme la mienne. La raison, ensuite, est morale : en utilisant ces logiciels, on est animé d'un sentiment de confiance, nous sommes libérés de la tentation du piratage. Par ignorance de l'existence d'alternatives crédibles, libres et gratuites, nous savons que la cherté des logiciels propriétaires a contraint la plupart des entreprises au piratage important de ces outils. Enfin, la raison en est sociale : la politique de partage du savoir et la construction de biens communs constituent une vision extraordinaire de rapprochement des peuples. J'ai pu l'expérimenter concrètement lors de ma participation aux 12^e Rencontres mondiales de logiciels libres (Strasbourg, juillet 2011) où les participants rencontrés m'ont donné l'impression de former une grande famille. C'est cette raison qui a fait que chaque acteur qui prend connaissance de ces logiciels est prêt à se « reconvertir » sans hésiter, car leurs avantages l'emportent sur les quelques inconvénients qui, naturellement, ne manquent pas dans toute œuvre humaine.

Il est vrai que les habitudes sont tenaces : il n'est pas facile d'amener tout le monde au changement au même moment. Si certains acceptent spontanément le changement, pour d'autres, une forte et longue sensibilisation est nécessaire pour les y amener. En somme, retenons que les logiciels libres dans l'édition présentent des avantages certains. Leur vulgarisation, par conséquent, apportera à l'édition, à l'information et, en général, à l'éducation en Afrique un coup de pouce et un nouvel essor à la lutte contre l'analphabétisme et l'illettrisme.

Quels sont les logiciels libres que vous utilisez dans votre travail à Gashingo ?

Dans mes tâches quotidiennes, j'utilise Scribus pour toutes mes compositions, Gimp et Inkscape pour

« Notre souhait est d'étendre et de renforcer la formation sur les logiciels libres »

le traitement des images, Fontforge pour la génération des polices de caractères en langues africaines, LibreOffice pour les traitements de textes/tableur/édition d'équations (livres de maths et autres). Au Niger, ce sont les Éditions Gashingo et BucoEdit qui utilisent ces logiciels à temps plein. Les Éditions du Sahel et Albasa les utilisent parfois pour leurs travaux. Il y a d'autres éditeurs de la région qui les utilisent aussi, au Bénin, au Burkina Faso, au Mali, au Cameroun. Notre souhait est d'étendre et de renforcer la formation sur les logiciels libres dans les autres pays comme la Côte d'Ivoire, le Togo, le Sénégal, le Tchad, la Guinée, le Nigeria et les pays des Grands Lacs.



La formation s'avère donc fondamentale dans ce domaine. Vous avez participé à plusieurs ateliers de formation numérique, organisés notamment par l'Organisation internationale de la Francophonie (OIF). Quelles ont été ces initiatives ?

Dans le cadre du numérique libre, l'OIF nous a offert des opportunités multiples et multiformes. En effet, nous avons bénéficié de plusieurs formations à l'utilisation des logiciels libres pour la P.A.O. ainsi que de

l'opportunité de participer à des manifestations internationales² regroupant les usagers et concepteurs de ces logiciels.

Avec l'acquisition de toutes ces expériences, l'OIF m'a permis de renforcer mes compétences techniques et pédagogiques pour devenir formateur avec une dizaine d'autres professionnels d'Afrique de l'Ouest. J'ai ainsi assuré la seconde formation des infographes à Niamey en octobre 2011, une formation à Yaoundé au Cameroun et une autre à Cotonou au Bénin en mai 2012 sous l'œil bienveillant de M. Cédric Gémy (le formateur qui a dispensé la plupart des formations organisées par l'OIF) et de M. Amadou Waziri (responsable du volet formation à l'OIF).

Vous faisiez référence à Fontforge pour le traitement des polices de caractères africaines. Quelles sont les spécificités des langues africaines en général et nigériennes en particulier dans le domaine de l'écriture numérique ?

Nous publions dans beaucoup de langues africaines transfrontalières et dans toutes nos langues nigériennes. Chaque langue a ses spécificités à l'écrit, de telle sorte que les caractères latins ne sont pas toujours suffisants pour les écrire. En outre, il existe des langues comme le tamajaq qui ont leur propre écriture (le tifighar) et qui nécessitent la création de polices de caractères. Nous avons nous même essayé d'apporter quelques solutions à ce problème, mais il reste encore beaucoup à faire pour doter ces langues africaines de typographies libres et plus appropriées.

Avez-vous exploré la production et distribution d'e-books ? Pensez-vous que les livres numériques représentent une opportunité en Afrique subsaharienne ?

Je trouve que le mot « exploré » décrit assez bien mon expérience des e-books. Néanmoins, nous avons survolé cette question lors de notre formation à Tunis. Nous avons travaillé une demi-journée avec le logiciel libre Calibre pour publication électronique. La

² Participation, par exemple, au Libre Graphic Meeting à Vienne (Autriche, mai 2012), à un atelier de formation des formateurs sur l'utilisation des logiciels libres à Dakar au Sénégal au bénéfice des infographes et autres acteurs de l'édition en Afrique (décembre 2011) ; à l'atelier de formation sur la publication électronique avec les logiciels libres à Tunis en Tunisie (novembre 2011), etc.

« si les livres numériques parvenaient à tous les utilisateurs de téléphones mobiles, je suis convaincu que nous atteindrons nos objectifs à pas de géant »

prochaine session de perfectionnement de formateurs africains aux logiciels libres qui se tient à Ouagadougou du 23 au 28 juillet avec le soutien de l'OIF prévoit un approfondissement de la création de livres numériques à l'aide de plusieurs logiciels libres. À mon avis les livres numériques seront très bénéfiques et seront les bienvenus mais beaucoup reste à faire, car l'accès à l'électronique n'est pas garanti à tout un chacun. Aujourd'hui nous sommes à une exploration à grande vitesse de la téléphonie mobile dans nos villes et dans nos campagnes et donc, si les livres numériques parvenaient à tous les utilisateurs de téléphones mobiles, je suis convaincu que nous atteindrons nos objectifs à pas de géant.

Quelles recommandations concrètes donneriez-vous à d'autres éditeurs et maquettistes de pays en développement qui font face aux mêmes enjeux que ceux que vous avez décrits ?

Comme je le disais tantôt, notre objectif est de continuer la sensibilisation et la formation à l'endroit des autres éditeurs et maquettistes de tous ces pays que j'ai cités. Il faut que la sensibilisation gagne du terrain en atteignant les décideurs politiques, c'est-à-dire au niveau de l'État, pour que l'utilisation soit publique afin que les autres s'intéressent à fond. Il faut que des structures de l'État — comme le Journal Officiel, la Direction de l'informatique, les écoles, les ministères — mais aussi les cybercafés, utilisent les logiciels libres dans leurs tâches quotidiennes.

Auteur



Bako Malam Abdou, programmeur, éditeur et maquettiste, diplômé de l'Institut africain d'informatique de Niamey (Niger) dispose d'une importante expérience dans le domaine des livres éducatifs. Il a coordonné la publication de près de 400 titres et a créé sa propre maison d'édition, appelée Gashingo. À ses yeux, la diffusion du logiciel libre pourrait donner une forte impulsion à l'édition et à l'éducation en Afrique.

Brasil: e-books, educación y tecnología

por Octavio Kulesz (Argentina)

Gracias a su crecimiento sostenido, su próspera clase media y sus activas políticas de Estado, Brasil ocupa hoy un lugar de primer orden en la economía mundial. La industria de la edición electrónica brasileña da signos de un vigor igualmente notable: los colosos globales como Amazon, Google, Apple y Kobo —entre muchos otros— ya han anunciado planes de expansión, los actores locales despliegan una estrategia interesante y el sector público invierte de forma decidida para reducir la brecha digital. En el presente artículo analizamos estos cambios, a la luz de dos eventos destacados que tuvieron lugar en agosto de 2012: la conferencia CONTEC y la Bienal del Libro de San Pablo.

With its robust growth, burgeoning middle class and proactive government policies, Brazil is currently a prime mover in the global economy. Brazilian e-publishing is also a highly dynamic scene: global giants such as Amazon, Google, Apple and Kobo have already announced plans to expand here, while local players are developing interesting strategies. Finally, the public sector is investing heavily to bridge the digital divide. In this article we analyse these changes in the light of two key events which took place in August 2012: the CONTEC conference and the São Paulo International Book Biennale.



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“Brasil se prepara para un gran salto tanto en educación como en tecnología”

‘Non ducor, duco’

Con sus 11 millones de habitantes —20 millones, si se incluyen los suburbios— y un PBI de más de 300 mil millones de dólares, San Pablo representa el principal polo industrial y financiero de Sudamérica. Alrededor de 6 millones de automóviles transitan por su gigantesca red de autopistas, avenidas, túneles, puentes y viaductos. Escapando del tráfico, incontables pasajeros son transportados por las diferentes líneas de metro, mientras en el aire un enjambre de helicópteros aguarda el momento propicio para aparcar en la terraza de algún rascacielos.

La ciudad transmite una intensidad extraordinaria, es absolutamente multicultural y absorbe todo lo que llega de fuera —costumbres, atuendos, comidas e incluso palabras— con la misma naturalidad que una selva tropical asimila especies nuevas. Sin embargo, tal facilidad no debería llevar a confusión: lejos de adaptarse pasivamente a las tendencias de moda, San Pablo las transforma a su favor, lo que tal vez explique la máxima latina que adorna su bandera: *non ducor, duco* —“no soy conducido, sino que conduzco”.

CONTEC: educación y tecnología

Afortunadamente, la ciudad cuenta con un espacio de serenidad. El parque Ibirapuera es uno de los más importantes de San Pablo: presenta bellísimos lagos, fuentes y árboles, así como una rica oferta cultural. En el centro se yergue el auditorio Ibirapuera, concebido hace

varias décadas por el genial arquitecto Oscar Niemeyer y administrado actualmente por el Instituto Itaú Cultural.

El auditorio se destina generalmente a grandes espectáculos musicales, pero durante los días 7 y 8 de agosto sirvió de sede para el evento CONTEC, una conferencia internacional sobre educación y tecnología organizada por la Feria del Libro de Frankfurt (FBF) —en particular por sus divisiones LitCam y Frankfurt Academy—, que gozó del apoyo de actores locales como Publish-News, Abeu, el Instituto Itaú Cultural, la Cámara Brasileña del Libro (CBL) y Positivo, entre otros. Casi 700 personas, mayoritariamente jóvenes, pudieron asistir a debates de última actualidad sobre la cuestión del analfabetismo, los planes de lectura del Estado brasileño, las iniciativas de las compañías locales y las incursiones de las empresas internacionales.

Por lo que pudo verse, Brasil se prepara para un gran salto tanto en educación como en tecnología. Tal como lo dejó en claro Karine Pansa —directora de CBL— en la apertura del evento, Brasil es todavía un país desigual, pero la universalización de la educación primaria, la inversión en calidad educativa y las nuevas tecnologías resultarán factores decisivos en la consolidación de un mercado lector. Para lograr dichos objetivos, el país “tendrá que aprender de las naciones que ya dieron ese salto”.

Un Estado poderoso

André Lázaro —quien fuera secretario de Educación Continua, Alfabetización

y Diversidad durante la presidencia de Lula da Silva— enumeró los logros y desafíos de los planes nacionales de lucha contra el analfabetismo, así como la necesidad de trabajar con fuerza en este ámbito, a fin de lograr una democracia mejor. Según recordó Lázaro, todavía persisten marcadas diferencias entre el rico sudeste y el más pobre nordeste, así como entre las ciudades y el campo.

Lucia Couto —actual coordinadora general de Enseñanza Elemental del Ministerio de Educación— describió las diferentes herramientas utilizadas por el Estado para universalizar la alfabetización de los niños. Brasil está discutiendo actualmente los detalles del Plan Nacional de Educación, que podría llevar la inversión educativa a 10% del PBI en los próximos 10 años.

Los esfuerzos del sector público también provienen del área de la cultura. Galeno Amorim —presidente de la Fundación Biblioteca Nacional— expuso detalles del Plan Nacional del Libro y la Lectura. Tal como señaló el funcionario, el Ministerio de Cultura ha asignado casi 200 millones de dólares a diversas iniciativas de fortalecimiento de las bibliotecas y de estimulación de la lectura que se llevarán adelante en lo que queda de este año.

Brasil en la vanguardia tecnológica

Si el sector público da signos de moverse con decisión, las empresas privadas no se quedan atrás, aunque son conscientes de lo mucho que falta por hacer. Claudio de Moura Castro —asesor del poderoso

“Es importante recordar que en Brasil existen más de 250 millones de celulares —lo que equivale a una penetración del 130%—, de los cuales alrededor de 54 millones son 3G”

so grupo Positivo—, señaló que apenas 18% de los universitarios posee el hábito de la lectura y que un número significativo de alumnos son en verdad analfabetos funcionales; por cierto, en todo Brasil existen tantas librerías como en la ciudad de París.

El matemático José Luís Poli —del Programa de Alfabetización en Lengua Materna (PALMA), desarrollado por la empresa IES2— suscribió el diagnóstico negativo respecto de los millones de analfabetos plenos y analfabetos funcionales, pero se mostró optimista sobre las soluciones aportadas por las nuevas tecnologías. PALMA funciona como un conjunto de aplicativos para teléfonos móviles y ofrece diferentes herramientas de escritura y comprensión de textos. Es importante recordar que en Brasil existen más de 250 millones de celulares —lo que equivale a una penetración del 130%—, de los cuales alrededor de 54 millones son 3G. Por otra parte, las cuantiosas inversiones en infraestructura 4G que se avecinan permiten suponer que la telefonía móvil desempeñará un rol aun más vital en la comunicación brasileña.

Brasil 2.0

Las redes sociales constituyen otro de los factores decisivos en el mundo de la comunicación de Brasil. El país cuenta con más de 55 millones de cuentas de Facebook —segundo detrás de EEUU en el ranking global de usuarios. La red social Orkut, que en Brasil es administrada por Google, perdió su liderazgo hacia fines de 2011, pero aún cuenta con una considerable masa de seguidores. Con respecto a Twitter, Brasil también escolta a EEUU en el número total de usuarios, siendo San Pablo la cuarta ciudad con mayor número de tweets del mundo, sólo detrás de Jakarta, Tokyo y Londres. Durante la conferen-

cia CONTEC, la escritora carioca Thalita Rebouças puntualizó las ventajas de utilizar Twitter y de mantener un diálogo directo con más de 200.000 lectores que la siguen.

Los medios sociales de Brasil van incluso más allá de Facebook, Orkut o Twitter. Ya han surgido redes locales organizadas por núcleos de interés, que muestran una actividad notable. En la mesa que tuve la oportunidad de moderar, Viviane Lordello dio algunas cifras de Skoob, la mayor red social de lectores de Brasil: unos 600.000 internautas intercambian recomendaciones, notas y hasta libros físicos que se envían por correo postal; estos usuarios provienen de todo el territorio brasileño, pero más del 45% vive en San Pablo. También hay que destacar el trabajo realizado por Cópia, una plataforma de contenidos digitales dependiente del grupo DCM de EEUU; Marcelo Gioia —CEO de Cópia Brasil— enumeró durante CONTEC los planes de la empresa a nivel local, en particular luego de haber sellado una alianza con Submarino, la principal compañía de comercio electrónico de Latinoamérica: de esta unión de fuerzas ha surgido Submarino Digital Club, una red social en la que los usuarios pueden compartir anotaciones así como comprar y descargar e-books.

Local y global. CONTEC 2013

La necesidad de establecer alianzas locales fue en parte discutida durante la sesión “Visión panorámica: mirando la bola de cristal”, en la que participaron Tania Fontolan —del vigoroso conglomerado brasileño Abril Edu-

cação— y Hegel Braga —director de Wiley Brasil—, bajo la coordinación de Holger Volland. Fontolan comenzó explicando la forma en que Abril Educação ve el mercado educativo local para los próximos años: crecimiento de los contenidos en la nube; proliferación de tablets y celulares; aprendizaje basado en videojuegos y contenido abierto. Braga, por su parte, ofreció detalles sobre las acciones de Wiley en Brasil: la empresa abrió una oficina propia en San Pablo hace pocos meses: desde allí espera desarrollar acuerdos con socios locales y traer tecnología desde el exterior para ajustarla al cliente brasileño. Tania Fontolan coincidió en la importancia de trabajar con alianzas locales, aunque se mostró escéptica respecto de la idea de implantar soluciones tecnológicas cerradas, pues en muchas ocasiones éstas resultan sencillamente inadaptables.

Jurgen Boos y Marifé Boix García —respectivamente director y vice-directora de FBF— subrayaron su compromiso de largo plazo con Brasil y Latinoamérica, al tiempo que anunciaron una nueva edición de CONTEC para junio de 2013, esta vez bajo la forma de feria internacional de contenidos educativos y multimedia, con días diferenciados para los profesionales y para el público. FBF ya cuenta con delegaciones en Nueva Delhi, Moscú, Beijing y Nueva York, y pronto abrirá oficinas en San Pablo. Según Jurgen Boos, las redes y el know-how de FBF pueden ser de gran ayuda para la industria editorial brasileña: “Brasil tiene un mercado interno enorme, con casi 200 millones de personas. Sin embargo, está demasiado enfocado a lo local, todavía carece

“Las redes sociales constituyen otro de los factores decisivos en el mundo de la comunicación de Brasil”

“las editoriales nacionales están trabajando activamente en la digitalización de sus catálogos”

de contactos internacionales y es allí donde creo que nosotros podemos desempeñar un papel importante. Nos gustaría también trabajar con las universidades brasileñas, porque considero que todo lo que hagamos deberá ser local. Podemos traer nuestra experiencia, pero se necesitan profesionales del mercado local.”

E-books en la Bienal: un futuro entre el EPUB y la nube

El día 9 de agosto, a unos 12 kilómetros del parque Ibirapuera —en el centro de exposiciones de Anhembi—, se inauguró la 22ª Bienal del Libro de San Pablo, bajo el lema “Los libros transforman el mundo, los libros transforman a las personas”. La exposición duró 11 días y fue visitada por más de 750.000 personas, confirmando el dinamismo de una industria editorial que factura casi 2.500 millones de dólares anuales.

En comparación con los stands de libros impresos, el espacio dedicado a los e-books era bastante limitado, lo cual resulta coherente con la baja facturación que presenta el segmento digital: en efecto, los libros electrónicos equivalen hoy a menos del 1% del total de ingresos de la industria editorial brasileña. No obstante, algunas tendencias permiten anticipar un crecimiento acelerado del nuevo mercado.

Como señalábamos antes, son numerosas las compañías extranjeras que trabajan con aliados nativos para ofrecer contenidos digitales cada vez más adaptados a los lectores locales. Gracias al lanzamiento de su red social de libros digitales —resultado del acuerdo con Copia—, el stand de Submarino fue uno de los más concurridos de la Bienal. Por otra parte, la considerable capaci-

dad de inversión de los jugadores autóctonos ha posibilitado el surgimiento de plataformas originales como Núvem de Livros, desarrollada por el Grupo Gol, en asociación con la operadora Vivo-Telefônica: durante la Bienal, los estudiantes pudieron informarse sobre las funcionalidades y costos de esta plataforma en la nube que cuenta con 800.000 usuarios y que por menos de 1 dólar semana ofrece acceso a unos 6.500 títulos.

Asimismo, las editoriales nacionales están trabajando activamente en la digitalización de sus catálogos, aunque todavía hay mucho por mejorar: según la especialista Camila Cabete, más del 60% de los archivos EPUB brasileños presentan errores de estructuración. En cualquier caso, la migración ya ha comenzado: los títulos publicados en formato digital alcanzó en 2011 el 9% del total de obras registradas. Diversas editoriales han pasado a la ofensiva comercial, en particular en el terreno del libro científico: Atlas, GEN, Editora Saraiva y Grupo A han unido fuerzas para ofrecer sus títulos a través de Minha Biblioteca, una plataforma de contenidos digitales pensada para el mercado académico.

¿Quién quiere prender (Kindle) un fuego (Fire) en la Amazonia?

El 10 de agosto fue la fecha clave para los e-books durante la Bienal. A lo largo de toda esa jornada —“el día D”—, el público pudo escuchar a diferentes protagonistas de la escena digital: Andrew Lowinger de Copia, Marie Pellen de OpenEdition, Jesse Potash de Pubslush, Julio Silveira de Imã, Eduardo Melo de Simplíssimo, Marcílio Pousada de Livraria Saraiva y Russ Grandinetti de Amazon Kindle. Luego de la primera conferencia, los organizadores se vie-



ron obligados a mudar el evento a una sala más amplia, ya que el número de asistentes había superado las expectativas.

Cuando llegó el turno de Russ Grandinetti, ni siquiera la nueva sala alcanzó para contener a los interesados, y un gran número de oyentes quedó afuera. El ejecutivo aclaró de entrada que no daría ninguna fecha para el desembarco de Amazon en Brasil y se limitó a enumerar las bondades del e-reader Kindle y la tableta Fire. Carlo Carrenho —director de PublishNews— coordinó el diálogo entre Grandinetti y el público, y hacia el final recordó una frase de Jeff Bezos: “Quiero ir a la luna... y a Brasil”, lo que derivó en una pregunta que el público celebró con carcajadas: “¿Cuándo piensan abrir esa filial lunar, entonces?”. Es que el lanzamiento de Amazon en Brasil se ha demorado demasiado —tal vez una señal de que las cosas no eran tan sencillas como parecían. A las complejidades impositivas brasileñas se suman obstáculos impensados: por ejemplo, hasta hace muy poco tiempo, el dominio amazon.com.br era propiedad de una empresa local; le llevó 7 años a Amazon EEUU alcanzar un acuerdo con su contraparte brasileña —y es que no resultaba simple para los norteamericanos alegar su de-

“el sector público, las empresas locales y las compañías globales han conformado un ecosistema rico y dinámico”

recho a la marca, puesto que el río Amazonas (“Amazon”, en inglés) se halla precisamente en Brasil. En cualquier caso, la compañía de Seattle parece dispuesta a hacer lo que sea para establecerse en Sudamérica —desde adquirir empresas nativas hasta operar bajo una denominación diferente, entre otras alternativas. Inmediatamente después de Amazon llegó el turno de la librería Saraiva. Para ese momento, eran tantas las personas en la sala que la situación se asemejaba más a un recital de rock que a una charla sobre e-books. Marcílio Pousada recordó la importancia de contar con 102 tiendas en todo el territorio brasileño y de ser uno de los principales vendedores de tabletas y de libros a nivel nacional. Vale la pena subrayar que Saraiva posee más de 2 millones de clientes activos en su división electrónica. Gracias a un equipo de 60 personas dedicadas a desarrollos digitales, ha implementado su propia aplicación de lectura y otras iniciativas pensadas específicamente en función del lector local. Este potencial contendiente de Amazon ofrece hoy unos 10.000 títulos en lengua portu-

guesa y espera sumar otros 5.000 para diciembre de 2012.

Quién guía el baile

En Brasil confluyen hoy fuerzas muy poderosas, provenientes tanto del interior como del exterior. Como ríos caudalosos que se interconectan, el sector público, las empresas locales y las compañías globales han conformado un ecosistema rico y dinámico. Este diagnóstico podría aplicarse a diferentes áreas de la economía, por ejemplo a la infraestructura de transportes, tal como pudo verse en los recientes anuncios del gobierno referidos a la construcción de ferrovías y autopistas.

En el ámbito de las publicaciones digitales, la sinergia entre los jugadores públicos y privados, locales y globales, es particularmente clara. La envergadura de los actores involucrados permite suponer un crecimiento acelerado tanto de la oferta de contenidos como de los ingresos económicos. El país tiene todo para ganar con el desembarco de las multinacionales del e-book: las empresas brasileñas reciben una fuerte trans-

ferencia de tecnología desde el exterior, al tiempo que los consumidores nacionales acceden a plataformas y dispositivos de primer nivel.

No obstante, también hay que advertir que existe el peligro de una saturación de oferta. En efecto, muchos de mis interlocutores brasileños se mostraban sorprendidos por el excesivo optimismo manifestado por las firmas internacionales, que creen encontrar en este mercado un nuevo El Dorado, el ansiado escape de la crisis económica que aqueja a sus casas matrices. Y lo cierto es que —tal como subrayaron los hacedores de políticas durante la conferencia CONTEC—, Brasil sigue enfrentando desafíos cuya solución demandará mucho tiempo y gran esfuerzo.

En cualquier caso, a pesar de todas las dificultades, el país ha cobrado una relevancia insoslayable y ya dialoga de igual a igual con los titanes de la industria electrónica global. Y es que Brasil —con su activo sector público, sus poderosas empresas y su pueblo extraordinario— está decidido a conducir el baile, no a ser conducido.

Autor



Octavio Kulesz es licenciado en Filosofía por la Universidad de Buenos Aires, donde se desempeñó como profesor de Filosofía Antigua hasta 2006. Trabaja en el mundo editorial desde el año 2000, año en que creó el sello **Libros del Zorzal**, junto con su hermano Leopoldo. En 2007, luego de participar en el programa Joven Editor Internacional del Año (British Council), fundó la editorial **Teseo**, enfocada a la publicación de textos académicos en formato impreso bajo demanda y libro electrónico. Octavio Kulesz llevó a cabo el estudio sobre “**La edición digital en los países en desarrollo**”, encargado por la **Alianza internacional de editores independientes** con el apoyo de la **Fundación Prince Claus**.

New publishing Models from the South: the Case of Paperight

by Arthur Attwell (South Africa)¹

A new service developed in South Africa is aiming to change the way books are distributed in developing countries. Paperight is a web-based system that claims to “turn any business with any printer into a print-on-demand bookstore.” Any business can register at paperight.com to get book-content to print for walk-in customers. Paperight was developed at Electric Book Works by digital-publishing expert Arthur Attwell, and is now funded by the Shuttleworth Foundation.

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What does Paperight do?

Copy shops are already de facto book-distributors. They meet massive customer demand for books worldwide—but they have to do so informally, and often illegally, by photocopying. We’re bringing them into the formal industry, by making their jobs both legal and easy. They’ll do more printing business, and publishers will earn rights revenue from it. Our website provides a growing catalogue of books that our outlets can licence and print for customers at the click of a button. Publishers earn revenue from each licence.

How do the prices compare to traditional books?

In South Africa, Paperight printouts will generally be about 20% below the retail price of books. In each country, rights fees and the economics of book publishing and printing will differ. Where we can’t beat the retail price of conventional books, we emphasise the accessibility of Paperight outlets: since anyone can be an outlet anywhere, we lower the total cost of buying a book—which might include travelling to a store, the risk of it being out of stock, waiting for a delivery, or buying Internet time or borrowing a credit card for ordering.

How much do publishers earn compared to traditional books?

That’s up to the publishers, who set their own rights fees. We see this two ways. On the one hand, this is a reprint-licence agreement, and such agreements historically have involved a 5–10% royalty. So we’d love



¹ Interview by Octavio Kulesz, conducted by email on 8 March 2012.

to see publishers setting rights fees at 5–10% of traditional book prices. On the other hand, where Paperight will definitely sell to the publisher's conventional markets, the publisher needs to earn the same as they would from a conventional edition. After the bookseller's cut, printing, shipping, warehousing and returns wastage (things Paperight cuts out), publishers retain often about 25–30% of retail price. So a rights fee of 25–30% of retail is fine, too.

What if outlets make extra copies without paying for licenses?

We know this will happen, just as it does with photocopying conventional books. The real question is how to reduce it and learn from it. So our approach is two-fold: first, make sure the outlets know that unlicensed copying is illegal. In many cases, the first problem is ignorance. Second, create a mechanism for tracking a sample of the copies produced. We watermark every page with the details of the licence transaction, and include a unique short URL. When someone visits the URL, we track that, mapping 'sightings' of specific documents and detecting potential over-copying problems. We can work with publishers to create valuable web destinations for those short URLs so that customers want to visit them. Of course, we'll suspend outlets that we know are abusing the service.

How do you control the quality of the print-outs?

We don't. The quality of a print-out is up to the outlet and the customer to figure out, depending on cost

and capability. What matters is: are we delivering the content when someone needs it?

What books do you have on Paperight?

We have started with over 1,000 publications that are mostly public-domain and open-licensed books. We've been very careful about our selections, focusing on high-quality educational, health and self-help material. On our blog, we've posted a very open report about our selection. We're currently working with several commercial publishers on adding their content during 2012, and we're approaching more publishers every day.

Surely e-books are replacing the need for print?

It's very seductive to think that. In wealthy markets, it's absolutely the case. But in remote areas, or for people who don't have devices or an Internet connection at home, e-books don't solve the accessibility problem. And while mobile phones are great for some content, you can't study mechanical engineering or architecture on a mobile phone screen. Even as the cost of computing plummets, there will always be people who need a print-out.

How do people know what books are on Paperight?

Until our mobile-phone catalogue is ready later this year, we work with outlets and educational institutions to tell customers about specific books we carry. We provide a big, printed poster advertising fifty top books to outlets that want one. For instance, we tell schools we have past national exam papers, and we tell universities about the many classic networks we carry.

How do people find Paperight outlets?

We're working on a map that we'll add to our site soon. On the street, look for the Paperight poster or logo —this is mostly in Cape Town where we're promoting most heavily now. We're also relying on tips from customers who want to get Paperight books from their local store. Tell us about the store, and we'll contact them to pitch Paperight, anywhere in the world.

“in remote areas, or for people who don't have devices or an Internet connection at home, e-books don't solve the accessibility problem”

“POD as publishers were using it was not going to solve the most pressing problems of African book distribution”

Are there other companies doing the same thing?

Not that we know of. We'd love to have a competitor, it would help educate people about the concept.

How did you come up with the whole Paperight idea?

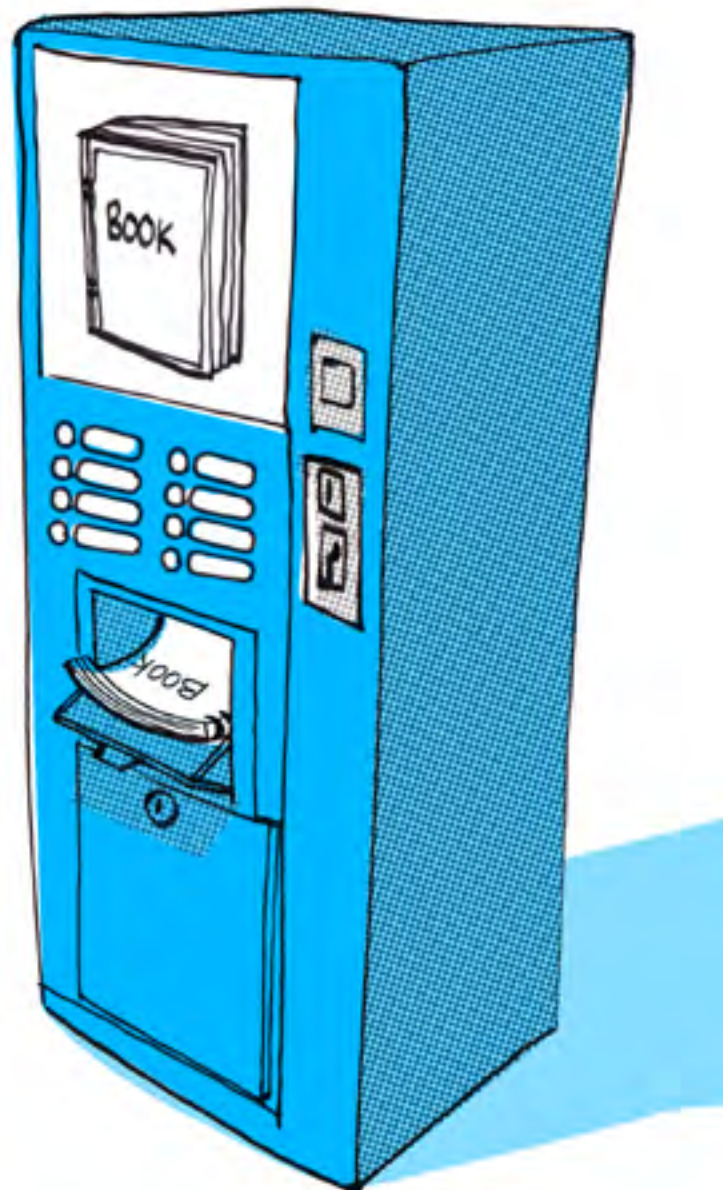
At Electric Book Works, in 2008, we did two research projects on the print-on-demand industry and its potential impact in Africa. In short, we found that POD as publishers were using it was not going to solve the most pressing problems of African book distribution. The printers were big, centralised companies in cities, and while impressive the [Espresso Book Machine](#) was too expensive to set up and run for most businesses. We needed a solution that used existing infrastructure: regular laser printers, low-bandwidth Internet, and e-book-distribution mechanisms that publishers were building anyway. As an e-book-production consultancy, we were well placed to turn this into a business model.

I am curious about some facts related to South Africa. To begin with, [some recent studies](#) claimed that mobile bandwidth speed in SA is considerably high, even compared to the US. How is that?

There are many opinions on this, but these high speeds are essentially driven by the demand for data. Like many developing countries, mobile far outstrips fixed-line telephony here. And along with the demand for voice comes demand for data. To keep their market share, mobile operators work hard to keep their speeds close to those of Telkom, the fixed-line monopoly. That said, this only applies to wealthy, urban South Africa, perhaps a quarter of the population.

In South Africa we could find a number of initiatives —such as [M4Lit](#), [FunDza](#) and [Bozza](#)— aimed at promoting e-reading. In general, are those projects being “exported” to the rest of the continent? What about Paperight in this respect?

Not that I know of, though I might be missing something, and I'm sure there are many people trying. Readership is often highly localised, and reading packages —list of bestsellers, book clubs, book-marketing campaigns— are difficult to transplant wholesale from



“it’s deeply wrong that billions of people have no access to books because the total cost of acquiring them is so high”

one region to another. More importantly, though, there is no way to pay online or by mobile phone across borders among most African countries. So pan-African business models are hard to set up. Hard doesn't mean impossible. At Paperight, we're absolutely committed to building an international marketplace that works everywhere in Africa. For instance, in some cases we're arranging money transfers via Western Union, despite the hassle and fees, just to be able to trade with outlets in other African countries.

In the last years, you have travelled across the globe and must have been in touch with dozens of big companies. In fact, as a digital expert, you

could be working in New York, London and many other places where tech infrastructure is highly developed. Why do you think you have decided to stay in Cape

Town and bet heavily on a project based on low tech?

I love working in Africa because there is unending potential and very little competition in this space. But what drives me is that it's deeply wrong that billions of people have no access to books because the total cost of acquiring them is so high. As publishers, we've created an industry that turns human knowledge into an expensive, inaccessible product, and that needs to change.



Author



Arthur Attwell is the founder of [Paperight](#), a distributed print-on-demand service he is building as a [Shuttleworth Foundation Fellow](#). Previously, he co-founded Electric Book Works, a digital-publishing and consulting company based in Cape Town.

Les téléphones portables et l'édition en Afrique subsaharienne

par Jean-Claude Naba (Burkina Faso)¹

Si les téléphones portables pourraient jouer un rôle dans la numérisation de l'édition en Afrique subsaharienne, de telles utilisations se heurtent parfois à l'absence de polices pour certaines langues locales. Le livre audio, par contre, pourrait bien trouver là un débouché tout naturel.

Mobile phones could play a role in the development of e-publishing in Sub-Saharan Africa, although a lack of the fonts necessary for some local languages can sometimes hamper applications of this nature. On the other hand, phones could prove to be a natural vehicle for audiobooks.



¹ Cet entretien a été réalisé par Octavio Kulesz le 24 octobre 2011 par e-mail.

« Je crois que l'audiolivres a même de beaux jours devant lui »

Les téléphones portables pourraient-ils servir, au Burkina Faso, comme plateforme de publication ?

Oui. À condition que l'on puisse trouver un compromis entre la taille des écrans et les caractères des ouvrages qu'on va publier. Il y a beaucoup de téléphones portables sur le marché mais leurs écrans n'ont pas tous la même dimension. Je peux très bien imaginer qu'en se servant surtout des formats les plus grands, on puisse promouvoir la publication électronique.

Vous pensez ici à des publications en français ou en langues locales ?

Les deux — je pense que les deux sont possibles. Ce qui est sûr, c'est qu'il faudra changer les habitudes des gens ou plutôt les habituer à lire sur leurs téléphones des textes un peu plus longs que ne le sont les SMS. Selon le cas, il se peut que l'effort à faire du côté des populations rurales (qui sont celles qui en général parlent en langues africaines) soit plus grand, puisque ces populations ont le moins l'habitude de la lecture. Mais paradoxalement, il se peut aussi que ce soit dans cette direction que les choses avancent le plus vite — ces populations ont un besoin de lecture qui n'est pas couvert actuellement.

L'utilisation de langues locales pour les téléphones portables représente-t-elle une complication technique ?

On ne peut pas donner une réponse générale ; pour certaines langues, il n'existe aucun problème. C'est le cas pour ma langue, par exemple : je peux écrire l'intégralité des sons en me servant des caractères déjà disponibles. Mais il y a un certain nombre de langues pour lesquelles il faudra certainement créer des caractères. En réalité, il ne s'agit pas de les « créer », parce qu'ils existent déjà. Mais il faut trouver le moyen de transférer ces caractères spéciaux sur les portables ou de les mettre à disposition d'une façon ou d'une autre ; c'est essentiellement, donc, un problème technique.

Sur un continent où la tradition orale continue à être très forte, les audiolivres peuvent-ils aussi représenter une possibilité intéressante pour les téléphones portables ?

Oui, absolument. Je crois que l'audiolivres a même de beaux jours devant lui. Les gens échangent beaucoup

de musique mais aussi beaucoup de sketches, des historiettes, qui circulent de portable en portable. Je peux donc très bien imaginer qu'au-delà d'une histoire brève, une histoire un peu plus longue, racontée, puisse être utilisée sur les portables. Je suis même persuadé que cela marcherait très bien, parce que ça répond à cette institution culturelle qu'est la tradition orale.



Comment envoie-t-on ces fichiers audio d'un téléphone à l'autre, au Burkina Faso ? Est-ce coûteux de les envoyer, de les recevoir ?

Disons que l'envoi ou le transfert d'un fichier audio requiert la proximité physique, puisqu'il s'agit effectivement du bluetooth. Donc pour l'instant, cela fonctionne ainsi. Mais j'oubliais une possibilité d'une importance énorme, surtout au plan économique : parmi les petits emplois qui se créent autour et grâce au téléphone portable, il y a celui — permettez-moi le néologisme, je ne connais pas de terme consacré — de « transféreur de sons ». Ce sont des gens, des jeunes très souvent, qui ont l'équipement et le savoir nécessaire pour transférer sur un portable musique, sonneries, textes audio, vidéo etc. Notons en passant que le terme « son » a pris une signification toute particulière. Je pourrais demander à quelqu'un, au Burkina : « Tu as des nouveaux sons ? » — ce qui inclurait aussi bien de la musique, que des sonneries, etc.

« La plupart du temps, [les éditeurs] réfléchissent encore en termes très classiques »

Les opérateurs, les compagnies de téléphones cellulaires, pourraient-ils être ouverts à ces développements ? Ne sont-ils pas des acteurs très importants pour tout projet de distribution ?

Je ne pense pas qu'au Burkina on ait approché à ce jour les opérateurs, pour un tel projet. Mais je pense qu'ils sont ouverts à de telles perspectives tant que cela peut leur être profitable. Je sais par exemple qu'on les contacte pour des questions de publicité. Le Comité électoral national indépendant les approche par exemple pour leur demander d'envoyer des SMS appelant la population à s'inscrire massivement pour les élections, etc. Je peux imaginer que si on les approche pour leur demander de faire un pas supplémentaire qui aide à faciliter par exemple le transfert de fichiers, d'améliorer une certaine qualité, un certain service dans la perspective de mieux écrire en langues africaines — cela pourrait les intéresser. L'important étant que cela leur rapporte de l'argent !

Les éditeurs seraient-ils intéressés par ce genre d'expérimentation ?

Cela dépendra certainement des éditeurs. La plupart du temps, ils réfléchissent encore en termes très classiques : si je dis « édition », je dis « livre », et quand je dis « livre », je dis « livre papier ». Donc s'imaginer qu'on puisse aller du livre papier au livre électronique

sur téléphone portable, il y a un grand pas ! Je crois qu'il n'y a pas beaucoup d'éditeurs à l'heure actuelle qui soient ouverts déjà à une telle perspective. Mais je pense qu'il n'est pas inutile de le leur proposer.

Le gouvernement contrôle-t-il beaucoup la circulation des contenus, d'une façon générale ? La censure est-elle un facteur à prendre en compte ?

C'est un domaine qui me fait peur, puisqu'il y a juste quelques jours, le ministre de l'Intérieur du Burkina Faso a confirmé que le gouvernement a demandé aux opérateurs de restreindre le service de SMS afin d'éviter que des manifestants puissent communiquer entre eux. Donc c'est un point très sensible, où il faudra vraiment faire attention. Disons que les gouvernements n'hésiteront pas à intervenir dans ce domaine. Les mouvements des droits de l'Homme doivent faire attention à cet aspect, parce qu'il s'agit ici de droits élémentaires de la personne humaine.

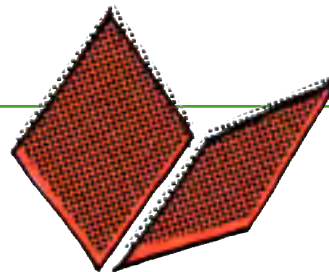
Existe-t-il des systèmes de paiement par SMS au Burkina Faso, permettant de payer des services ou d'acheter des produits, comme il en existe en Afrique du Sud ?

Non, au Burkina il me semble qu'il y a eu quelques tentatives mais elles ont échoué, parce que les gens n'ont toujours pas confiance.

Auteur



Jean-Claude Naba est né le 19 mai 1956 au Burkina Faso. Depuis 1993, il est enseignant au département des Études germaniques de l'université de Ouagadougou. En 1995, il crée la maison d'édition Sankofa & Gurli, qui s'est fixée comme objectif la promotion de la littérature en agissant sur l'écriture (soutien et suivi des auteurs), la lecture (communication avec le public), la promotion et la diffusion. Jean-Claude Naba a été Président de l'Association des éditeurs du Burkina Faso (ASSEDIF) en 2004.

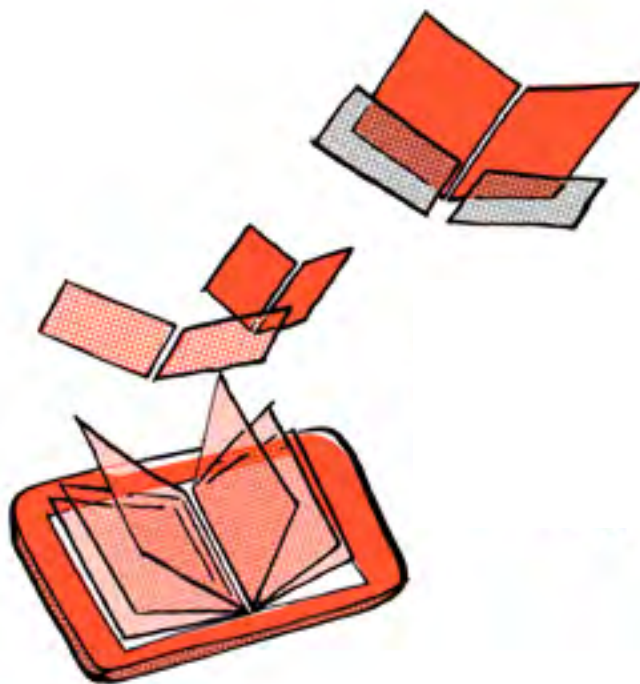


EPUB: un formato en evolución constante

por Liz Castro (Estados Unidos de América)¹

Cada eslabón de la industria del e-book experimenta un proceso de intensos cambios, desde las plataformas hasta los dispositivos y los formatos. El EPUB —establecido por el [Foro Internacional de Edición Digital](#) (IDPF, por sus siglas en inglés)— es considerado el estándar más prometedor para archivos de e-books. Este formato redimensionable cuenta con grandes ventajas respecto de otros competidores; en particular, es gratuito y de código abierto.

Each link in the e-book industry chain is undergoing sweeping changes, from platforms to devices and formats. EPUB, created by the [International Digital Publishing Forum](#) (IDPF), is regarded as the most promising standard for e-book files. This resizable format offers significant advantages over other competitors; above all, it is free and open-source.



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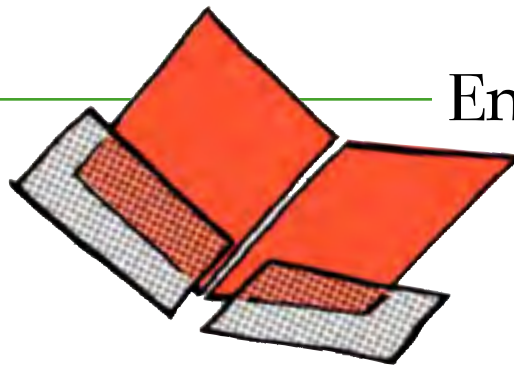
Uno de los obstáculos para la edición digital en lenguas no latinas es que el formato EPUB no siempre funciona adecuadamente. ¿Tuvo experiencia con este tipo de lenguas? ¿El EPUB3 ha mejorado las cosas?

El EPUB3 ahora tiene soporte muy bueno para lenguas asiáticas, como el japonés. Acabo de volver de Japón de [la primera conferencia de IDPF en Asia](#) —trataba sobre EPUB3—, y enseñamos varias muestras de e-books no solamente con caracteres japoneses, sino además con escritura vertical, con caracteres ruby, tate-chu-yoko, kenten y otras partes esenciales de la tipografía japonesa. Se ha mejorado hasta el punto en que [Rakuten/Kobo](#) ofrecerá todos los libros en japonés en formato EPUB3.

¿Cómo le parece que evolucionarán los estándares en el mundo del e-book, dada la presión de Amazon por imponer su propio formato —el MOBI—, los esfuerzos del IDPF y de la mayoría de las editoriales por estandarizar el EPUB, o los intentos de supervivencia del PDF?

Creo que las prestaciones nuevas de EPUB3 —y en particular su soporte para lenguas no latinas— puede ser la clave para imponer el formato y acabar definitivamente con MOBI. Amazon mismo ya está sustituyendo MOBI por KF8, un formato tan similar a EPUB3 que podría considerarse algo así como su versión propietaria (combina los mismos HTML5 y CSS3). Amazon ya acepta archivos EPUB3 en su sistema y los convierte automáticamente. Evidentemente, Amazon quiere mantener su propio formato pero será interesante ver si las editoriales están dispuestas a permitirlo. También se ha visto con la maquetación fija —que ya es parte estándar de EPUB3— que los grandes fabricantes de e-readers están apoyando el nuevo estándar. Las editoriales no tienen el tiempo ni los recursos económicos para hacer múltiples versiones de un libro para cada lector. Que un estándar se establezca permite a las editoriales crear un solo archivo para todos los lectores, y así tener tiempo para aumentar la calidad y cantidad de libros ofrecidos.

¹ Esta entrevista fue realizada por Octavio Kulesz el 12 de julio de 2012 por e-mail.



“Para la creación de libros puramente electrónicos, todavía no hay herramientas gráficas muy buenas, pero no creo que tarden mucho en llegar”

InDesign constituye un software fundamental para la maquetación de libros en papel y en digital. Sin embargo, para la pura edición de libros electrónicos, ¿no convendría partir de otras herramientas (incluso más simples), sin tener que intermediar con InDesign?

InDesign, como explica, es un programa potente pero complicado y caro. Dado que la gran mayoría de las editoriales en Estados Unidos, Europa y Japón lo utiliza para la compaginación de libros impresos, es una opción natural para la creación de libros electrónicos. Además, con cada nueva versión, realiza este trabajo cada vez mejor. Pero en los casos en que no se utiliza para los impresos y no se conoce ni se ha comprado con anterioridad, sus ventajas disminuyen considerablemente. Para la creación de libros puramente electrónicos, todavía no hay herramientas gráficas muy buenas, pero no creo que tarden mucho en llegar. Sin embargo, es cierto que se necesitan herramientas de bajo coste para crear libros electrónicos sin tener que tocar el código de EPUB que se encuentra detrás.

En estos años ha viajado por muchos países. ¿Cómo ve la evolución del e-book en el mundo?

Veo que todo el mundo reconoce la utilidad de poder leer en dispositivos electrónicos. Creo que el precio de los dispositivos es clave para su adopción. En EEUU, no bajaron el precio del Kindle hasta que salió el iPad —una competencia auténtica. En pocos meses, fue de \$400 hasta menos de \$100. Eso está a punto de pasar en Japón ahora, con la salida del lector Kobo por menos de \$100 y con la presentación del soporte para escritura vertical. En Argentina, donde estuve en abril, creo que la falta de un e-reader asequible es una de las cosas que está frenando el mercado de libros elec-

trónicos. Hay mucha gente que lee allí, pero ¿quién quiere comprar un e-reader por 300 dólares? Entonces las editoriales, que suelen ser más conservadoras —y que además se hallan en una situación delicada debido a la crisis mundial—, tienen miedo de invertir dinero en hacer las conversiones necesarias, lo cual deriva en una falta de contenido. Todo es un círculo. Pero veo que ya comienza a rodar.

¿Qué consejos les daría a los editores de países en desarrollo que buscan experimentar con digital?

Creo que hay que tener en cuenta los dispositivos móviles que la gente ya tiene en su mano o sobre sus escritorios. Se puede leer EPUB gratuitamente en un ordenador, o en muchos teléfonos móviles existentes. Con esto ya se puede comenzar. Luego, aconsejaría que hicieran relaciones directas con los clientes lectores, que sean receptivos a sus necesidades y que no los traten como piratas. Si las editoriales hacen que resulte más cómodo y más fácil comprar un libro que piratearlo —con la consiguiente pérdida de tiempo y las preocupaciones que esto último implica para el usuario—, la gente se comportará correctamente. Estoy convencida. Y actúo sobre esta convicción: vendo todos mis libros sin protección DRM y continúan vendiéndose tanto en países donde se dice que todo el mundo es pirata como en los que no. También creo que es buena idea continuar creando libros en papel y en digital a la vez. Pueden ser formatos complementarios, no tienen que ser exclusivos. Y estos días en que mucha gente todavía no está acostumbrada a leer en formato digital, el papel sigue siendo necesario para que el libro llegue al público.



Autora

Liz Castro con una trayectoria de casi 25 años en el terreno digital, ha publicado más de una decena de libros sobre EPUB, CSS, HTML y Blogger, que constituyen una referencia obligada para cualquier editor o escritor interesado en explorar la era electrónica. Su blog *Pigs, Gourds, and Wikis* y su cuenta de Twitter (@lizcastro) son seguidos por miles de lectores a nivel mundial.

Digital publishing in Russia

by Natalia Erokhina (Russia)¹

The e-publishing industry appears to have a promising future in Russia. Although little news about the Eurasian giant reaches the West, careful study reveals that the country boasts a hugely powerful technology industry, a very active State and one of the highest literacy rates in the world, all of which are factors that will contribute towards the growth of digital publishing. To analyze the current condition of Russian e-publishing, we interviewed Natalia Erokhina, from the company ABBYY.

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Please tell me more about your background and about ABBYY.

I studied at the Russian State University for the Humanities and graduated in artificial intelligence—a specialization that combines two areas of knowledge: software programming and linguistics. Over the past 10 years I have been employed by several Russian software and hi-tech companies. At the moment, I work as a business development manager for Latin America at ABBYY²—an international leading developer of document recognition, data capture and linguistics technologies.

ABBYY's products include end-user applications for document recognition and conversion (FineReader and PDF Transformer), data capture programs for processing forms, semi-structured and unstructured documents (FlexiCapture and FormReader), SDKs that provide a full spectrum of ABBYY's recognition technologies, the Lingvo line of electronic dictionaries and a range of other linguistic products and solutions. The company is one of the largest scientific global research centers for developing artificial intelligence technologies in linguistics and document recognition. ABBYY also owns a publishing house, ABBYY Press, and a linguistic solutions agency, ABBYY Language Services.

¹ Interview by Octavio Kulesz, conducted by e-mail on 18 October 2012.

² The company's name—ABBYY—can be translated as "keen eye". This word comes from the hypothetical (reconstructed) parent language for the Miao-Yao, Nu, Hmong-Mien, Hmong and Kim Mun groups of the Sino-Tibetan language family. The name and its meaning reflect the company's key fields of operation and research: document recognition and linguistics technologies.

“The demand for digital content is growing and, according to the estimations of experts, sales of electronic books double every year”

Which are the main players in digital publishing in Russia?

The digital publishing market in Russia is relatively young and still developing. The demand for digital content is growing and, according to the estimations of experts, sales of e-books double every year. I think there is a general understanding of the fact that the market is changing and the development of information technologies is clearly in the air, which impels large publishing houses and middle-sized companies to launch digital projects and work on digital strategies.

To me, it looks like the electronic publications market is now made up of significant publishers, who are launching new and expanding existing digital projects ([Eksmo](#), [Prosvescheniye](#), [Drofa](#), [AST Press](#)), and major digital book distributors ([LitRes](#), [Wexler](#), [Ozon](#)). From certain points of view, ABBYY may also be considered as this type of company and is involved in digital publishing industry in various aspects.

What is the general attitude among publishers towards the digital age?

The publishing industry is traditionally conservative, however, with the arrival of an era of total informatization, it also has to adapt to contemporary tendencies. I think that, overall, publishing companies in Russia understand that this is a time of significant transformation and that the way in which content is provided to readers has changed. The market leaders are already developing actively in the digital sphere, but I would say that most are still at the stage of considering different ways to enter the digital arena.

One of the key issues is that the preparation of quality electronic publications requires resources and financial investment. The development process includes many stages: technical requirements, content revision and restructuring, interface design, programming, testing, etc. Moreover, the variety of platforms (Win-

dows, Mac OS, Android, iOS etc.) means technical adaptations are needed, which in some cases double the costs. Clearly, emerging publishing tools help to ease this process, however their implementation also requires that resources are put into learning how to use them. In addition, development of the digital product alone is usually not enough, as the publication process also includes the digital distribution aspect, which is also a labor-intensive task. It includes day-to-day work such as promotion, dealing with customer reviews, technical updates, and dynamic analysis of sales results, pricing policy and the effectiveness of distribution channels.

As a result, publishers either have to face the need to change the business processes within the company and create their own software development and sales departments, or else find a reliable partner in a technological area who will cover this part of the process. In Russia, the leading publishers are now trying both ways (for example, AST Press and Drofa both work with partners in some areas while at the same time developing their own digital projects). However, for the moment, the most winning solution lies in mutual cooperation between publishing houses and software companies who offer partnerships in the creation of electronic products, such as, for example, ABBYY, as well as companies who have expertise in the digital distribution of content (such as LitRes —54%—, Wexler, Ozon, and ABBYY too).

Could you say that digital is increasing its presence among readers?

Yes, of course. People in Russia are getting more and more used to reading on portable devices. According to the [SmartMarketing](#) analysis, the overall volume of e-book readers sales in Russia has grown 3 times in comparison to 2010. Analysts refer to this market as one which has already passed through the youthful phase and has achieved stable growth.

Interesting results were obtained by the RBC ([Russian Business Consulting](#)) portal team. According to their survey, 53.1% of the portal audience (mostly made up of young and business people) use e-readers to read books. The most popular brands among e-readers are PocketBook, Sony, Wexler, Onyx. However, according to various estimations, the most popular way of reading electronic content in Russia is still on PCs and mobile devices (smartphones). On the other hand, sales of tablets are growing as well, and the experts suppose that in the future e-book readers will be replaced by their multi-functional versions.

The general opinion currently is that electronic publications should help to develop the reading culture in Russia, by making content more easily accessible and affordable not only for the citizens of Moscow and Saint-Petersburg but also for people in the distant regions of Russia, such as, for example, Siberia and the far east of the country.

Piracy comes up over and over again in debates on digital publishing. How do you see this phenomenon in Russia?

Piracy is certainly one of the most critical issues in Russia, as it is in many other countries in the world. In Russia, the e-books market is growing rapidly but only 1 in 10 electronic books is downloaded legally. The publishing houses lose millions of dollars every

“the subject of electronic educational materials is being actively discussed in the Russian education industry”

year because of the huge number of illegal downloads. At the same time, because of insufficient legal policy in relation to electronic publishing, there are a lot of illegal players in the Russian market. Among the major providers of legal content are: LitRes, [Elkniga](#), [Bookee](#) and others.

The Russian law against online piracy on one hand is relatively strict and implies individual responsibility.

However, its application in practice is more complicated and large stores and publishers sometimes have to deal with illegal publications on their own: there are cases when they agree to make illegal resources legal. In my opinion, the problem of piracy might be partially solved not solely by improving protection systems, but probably also by providing good quality content at affordable prices. It is common knowledge that the pirated books found online often include mistakes, junk symbols, etc. So at some point, for the users it may just be easier to buy a legal book from a trustworthy provider, if the price is not too high. For the purpose of comparison, in the West the price of an e-book may be around 10-15 USD, while in Russia it is around 3 USD. Another expert opinion about piracy is that, at present, the Russian publishing industry does not provide enough legal content for readers. For example, LitRes has around 50.000 titles, while one of the major Russian illegal online libraries, Lib.rus.ec, has around 200.000 titles (this and some other subjects are described in more details in the article by Vladimir Kharitonov on Russian Publishing “[Steps into the Digital Future](#)”).

What will be the impact of e-books and other digital tools in Russia? Do you see any particular opportunity? Any big challenge?

I think that the development of the e-book industry will first of all provide the different layers of the Russian population in Moscow, Saint-Petersburg and the regions with an opportunity to read more. Through the spreading of the Internet, the distant regions of the country will be given access to the same type and amount of books as the central regions, which will support and develop the reading culture in the whole country and increase the general level of education. It is hard to find a variety of interesting books in print, but in electronic form they may be accessed and downloaded easily from any place. Students are already actively using this opportunity.

In addition, the subject of electronic educational materials is being actively discussed in the Russian education industry. If these discussions take the form of a government project, then most likely such a project will receive funding, which will also be helpful for the growth of the publishing business in Russia.

“the Russian public is not really used to the idea of purchasing legal content”

Among the main challenges for the development of the e-book market in Russia is establishing clear business models for the sale of content. At the present moment, there are 3 general variants: sales of e-books as files, the subscription model and multimedia applications. However, the purchasing processes are a bit more complicated than, for example, in the USA, as the infrastructure based on the connection of e-reader devices and digital stores is still at the stage of active development.

Another issue is that, on the one hand, the Russian public is not really used to the idea of purchasing legal content as is the case, for example, in the USA, and on the other hand, online payment methods (such as credit cards, for instance) have also only become common in recent years. This leads, then, to the problem of piracy in combination with technical payment processing difficulties.



Author



Natalia Erokhina studied at the Russian State University for the Humanities and graduated in artificial intelligence. Over the past 10 years she has been employed by several Russian software and hi-tech companies. At the moment, she works as a business development manager for Latin America at [ABBYY](#) — an international leading developer of document recognition, data capture and linguistics technologies.

A Digital Spring? E-Publishing in the Arab World

by Octavio Kulesz (Argentina)

The Arab World is an extremely diverse and dynamic region. While it is true that the Arabic language acts as an integrating force for the whole area, there are profound cultural, economic, and political differences not only between the various nations but also within each country. This great variety has resulted in a heterogeneous and promising digital market, as we saw clearly at the 2012 Abu Dhabi International Book Fair. Below is a summary of observations arising from numerous interviews carried out both during and after the fair with leading players from e-commerce, apps developers, digital aggregators, traditional publishers, and Internet start-ups.



Nota bene This article was initially commissioned by the Abu Dhabi International Book Fair and published in their annual publication *Al Kitab Al Arabi* under the title *The State of the Art in Digital Publishing: Notes by an International Observer*.”

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“When it comes to the online sale of books, some stores have been expanding for over a decade”

The boom in e-commerce: advances and challenges

E-commerce in the Arab World is showing signs of accelerated growth, in particular in [the Gulf area](#) and [in certain countries of the Levant](#). Sites like [Nahel](#), [Souq](#), and [Dubizzle](#) are acquiring unprecedented levels of popularity, at the same time that consumer confidence [is rising steadily](#). This trend has increased the prominence of logistics companies like [Aramex](#), founded in 1982 by Fadi Ghandour. The company—the first in the Arab World to be quoted on the NASDAQ—has become a real transport giant and offers solutions for small companies looking to establish themselves in e-commerce.

When it comes to the online sale of books, some stores have been expanding for over a decade, as has been the case with [Neelwafurat](#), founded in Beirut in 1998. [Although, like Amazon, this store started out selling only books](#), it currently offers a vast range of products. Salah Chebaro, the company's director, acknowledges the remarkable advances made so far in e-commerce, although he identifies a certain number of challenges still existing in the Arab World: “There are many obstacles. First of all, shipping is becoming more expensive. Another issue is payments: credit card penetration is not so high, so this is a major problem; we are trying to find other solutions, like Western Union, payments in banks, etc. We also face ‘monitoring’

issues: the books are being monitored in different countries. Now it's more relaxed; this issue was found in Saudi Arabia—almost fifty percent of our orders go to Saudi Arabia—but now we are able to send ‘taboo’ books into that country.”

Apps for telephones, tablets, and smart boards: a fertile sector

While there are still problems with the online sale of printed books—particularly logistical obstacles—the new possibilities offered by technology have led many players in the field to try their hand at distributing purely digital content, in the form of applications, with some success. One example is the reading app [iKitab](#), developed by the aforementioned [Neelwafurat](#) in 2011, which already boasts 3.000 titles and targets iPhone, iPad, and Android users. Also in the Levant region, the independent publisher [Al Salwa](#)—founded in Amman in 1996—has begun exploring the opportunities of the new era. It took its first steps in that direction in 2009, when it began distributing animations on CDs to complement its printed publications. These early experiments demonstrated the extraordinary potential of electronic content, as the head of the project, [Salwa Shakhshir](#), now recognises: “We ran out of copies very quickly, and that's when we noticed that people were hungry for digital content that's entertaining but also be-

neficial for their children, and especially in Arabic.”

From that point on, [Al Salwa](#) allied itself with the company [Media Plus](#)—also from Jordan—with the aim of producing applications for Android and Apple devices. This series of books with accompanying applications, the first of which was [Anything](#) by [Taghreed Najjar](#), has been remarkably well received by users, particularly in Saudi Arabia.

It is in the Gulf region that most developers of applications for tablets and smartphones can be found, no doubt because that's where the greatest purchasing power in the Arab World is concentrated. The company [Flagship Projects](#), located in Dubai, has been working on multimedia content since 2000 and bases its current business model on the distribution of iPad and iPhone applications. Its main apps include [Rufoof](#)—“Shelves” in Arabic—which offers texts in the local language, many of which can be downloaded for free. As [Flagship's](#) director, [Shadi Hasan](#), acknowledges, fifty percent of its clients live in Saudi Arabia; the rest are located in the Gulf region and in some Western countries—particularly in the US and UK, where there are fairly large Arabic-speaking communities.

A long way from the Gulf and the Levant, the company [Sanabil Med](#), based in Tunisia, produces numerous multimedia educational materials—from content for smart boards to iPad and iPhone apps. Its director, [Sana Ghenni](#), underlines the importance of diver-

“The lack of electronic content in the local language limits the home-grown platforms’ chances of success”

sifying markets within the Arab World: “It is thanks to exports that we are able to develop new products. The Tunisian market is pretty small. We regard the Arab regions as sub-regions, so we prepare our products with specifications for the Maghreb or the Middle East.”

Aggregators with subscription models: the need to educate the market

Although interactive texts and individual applications show considerable dynamism, there are other business models that are every bit as promising—for example, the sale of complete collections of electronic texts on a subscription basis. Set up in 2010, the Dubai company [Al Manhal](#) is one of the first platforms to distribute academic digital content in Arabic. Its broad catalogue of e-books, reports, theses, and scientific journals reaches institutions through an active network of 400 agents.

As Mohamad Al-Baghdadi, the company founder, explains, there is a good market for this kind of material, both in the countries of the region as well as among the universities of the US. However, thanks to a former stint at [Ebrary](#) and over fifteen years’ experience in the digital arena, Al-Baghdadi [is well aware](#) of the challenges that await his project: “We have upwards of 400 to 500 journals coming out of the Middle East, but not one is sold. One of the reasons is that there haven’t been efficient and cost-effective ways to distribute these journals. Besides, the publishers themselves have never believed they could sell them.” The strategy implemented by Al Manhal to overcome these obstacles is oriented

towards educating the market: “I want to increase the level of transparency in the Middle East publishing industry, because I think it would benefit all of us. This will ensure that each one of us is more efficient and that the money reaches the authors, which could end up as an incentive to write more and better books; better books meaning better products, more sales... that would be beneficial for the entire chain. Although educating and persuading takes quite a long time.”

The perennial obstacle: lack of content in the local language

Practically all of the players involved in Arab digital publishing point out that there is a vicious circle threatening the new industry. The lack of electronic content in the local language limits the home-grown platforms’ chances of success, at the same time that it forces readers to make do with texts in other languages, which in turn [leads to frustration](#) and reduced interest in digital formats.

Al Baghdadi provides an eloquent description of this phenomenon: “The only publishers providing electronic content are the Western publishers. This means the Arabic book and journal publishers are losing their market. And that is not because the Western products are either of high quality or more relevant. In fact, it’s just the contrary, as here there is no other option available.”

This problem is largely due to technical issues. To be more precise, electronic publishing in Arabic has always faced huge obstacles [for reasons related to fonts](#). Sana Ghenima offers a dramatic

assessment in this regard: “For us Arab countries, technology put a brake on the use of the local language. Content in Arabic, with its calligraphy, died out when IT appeared in digital printing techniques. And a webpage in Arabic looks extremely mediocre, due to the weakness of the typefaces available.”

While it is true that [EPUB 3](#) already solves some of the basic difficulties of digital writing in Arabic, in the Maghreb and the Middle East there is still a great deal of confusion where formats are concerned. As Salah Chebaro observes: “The main issue in the Arab World is that some people are using PDF, others are using EPUB, and others have even created their own formats. So it’s really a variety of solutions that people are using, which is creating a lack of standards.”

Worse still, so far the global players—who usually play a key role when it comes to unifying any market—have shown no real interest in digital publishing in Arabic. The case of Amazon is fairly clear-cut: we need only look at the poor reach of the Kindle 3G network coverage in the area to see the complete indifference displayed by the US giant towards regions as vast as the Maghreb. The [Kindle self-publishing platform](#) simply does not accept texts in Arabic, from which we can infer that the only plan Amazon has for the region is to distribute texts in English or French—at least for the time being.

According to many actors, one way out of this predicament might be to produce reading devices locally. As Salah Chebaro asserts: “Of course, having an Arabic e-reader would be a need. Not everybody is able to buy an iPad, which here costs USD \$650 or maybe more. Here you can earn a salary of USD \$100

“As for traditional publishers, their attitude towards the digital age is usually one of apathy or apprehension”

a month. Not all the communities can buy the current devices. I have read about this solution, in India they have an e-reader for USD \$40.”

Traditional publishers: between challenge and opportunity

As for traditional publishers, their attitude towards the digital age is usually one of apathy or apprehension. The spectre of piracy, for example, is mentioned time and again and deters many publishers from experimenting with electronic formats. This reaction only makes matters worse, since it exacerbates the lack of content in the local language and increases theft of the limited materials available, thereby creating another trap: 1) fear of piracy; 2) less available content; 3) increased piracy; 4) more fear of piracy, and so on.

However, in spite of the many challenges —technical difficulties related to the Arabic language, the lack of a clear business model, fear of piracy— there are still opportunities to be had for publishers. We have already referred to the example of Al Salwa, a publishing company that has developed successful applications. It is true that, due to format, apps can often be a way of overcoming language-related obstacles, and publishers in the children's, teenage, and educational markets are well positioned in this respect.

We also find social science publishers that, contrary to all predictions, have achieved some interesting results by experimenting with digital technology. Samar Haddad, who runs the Syrian publishing house Atlas, attended a training seminar and debate session on e-books, organised by the International Alliance

of Independent Publishers in Tunis in May 2011. A simple presentation on the tools available to build an EPUB was all it took to awaken in her the feeling that behind the apparent technical complexity there lay a huge opportunity: “I started working with a Syrian company called ePedia, on developing solutions following the points we started in Tunisia. So I asked them about all this: it was the first time they heard about it. Well, they knew what an e-book was, but they didn't know how to make it. So they were very happy and very enthusiastic—they said, “Wow, this is a completely new line, we are bored of all the same things and you are giving us another idea on how to work.” They downloaded



Calibre and started with research to see which devices are compatible and which ones are not. Three days later they called me and said, “OK, your e-book is ready.” My team learnt how to make it, very quickly, and that's it: we have the first e-book in Syria.”

Left to its fate, the Arab book industry runs the risk of falling into traps like the ones we have described. Without more digital content in the local language, home-grown platforms and devices won't take off, there will be little interest in exploring new business models, and ultimately, the risk of piracy

will increase. As the experiences of Al Salwa and Atlas show, the way out of these quagmires may emerge from joint explorations between publishers —of social sciences, children's books, literature— and technology experts. The business models have yet to be invented, but the extraordinary dynamism of the region's IT sector will no doubt help to consolidate the new publishing ecosystem.

Start-ups and Internet platforms: an energy source for the future digital publishing industry?

When it comes to alliances with the technology sector, publishers will find an inexhaustible source of innovation in Internet start-ups. From the Maghreb to the Levant to the Gulf, each Arab sub-region is witnessing a ferment of activity related to digital ventures: ArabNet, Wamda, Flat6Labs, Startup Weekend Dubai, Startup Weekend Abu Dhabi, Maghreb Startup Initiative, and Wiki Start Up are just some examples of projects and websites devoted to the topic.

Many of these web-born ventures are dedicated to publishing-related subjects. One example that recently received wide coverage in the media is Yamli, the online Arabic transliteration system. In May 2012, Yahoo acquired a licence to integrate Yamli technology with its different products in order to reach Internet users in the Arab World in a personalised manner, as part of an ambitious strategy for the region.

Qordoba, a Dubai-based project created by May Habib in late 2011, offers online translation and content distribution ser-

“The alliance between the region’s publishers and Internet entrepreneurs could prove beneficial not just for both groups, but also —and above all— for authors and readers”

vices. This platform is supported by the work of hundreds of freelance translators in over thirty countries.

According to Habib, “The Arab World is under-equipped to bring quality Arabic language content and innovative software to global audiences. We want to make accessing new markets fast as well as affordable.”

Habib even acknowledges that digital ventures may bring a change in working methods in a region characterised by great economic and political transformation: “I think that especially in the Arab World this labour model will be a key driver of job creation over the coming years. Post-Arab Spring, you’ll have millions of young people forced to look beyond the government for economic security.”

The company run by Habib presented its project [Qordoba Books](#), a bilingual platform that enables users to convert, publish, and distribute digital content, at the Abu Dhabi International Book Fair. It would appear that Qordoba Books has implemented significant advances in [the way right-to-left texts are presented, as well as in conversion to EPUB and DRM application](#) —which is to say, the issues that most concern traditional publishers.

Asnad, a platform devised by the Moroccan entrepreneur Mohammed Sahli, was launched in May 2012. Its aim is to help Arab artists sell their creations online —books, photos, software, and website templates, among other possibilities. When asked about his personal motivations, Sahli —who is not from the traditional publishing world but rather that of the Web— offers an interesting explanation: “For many years now, I have been thinking about selling my books online, but the e-commerce infrastructure in the Arab region was not ready yet. Now it is getting better, and

online users from many Arab countries can easily buy online, but still there is a big gap in the services allowing people to sell online, not just buy. So I decided to launch Asnad to sell my own books as a start and at the same time build an open platform for anyone who wants to sell their creations and reach a new audience in different countries.”

A quick glance at the main Internet start-ups dedicated to digital publishing-related topics prompts a number of reflections. On the one hand, the originality of many of these ventures —almost always headed by young people— appears highly promising. However, the lack of contact between Internet projects and traditional publishing companies is increasingly apparent. As Sahli explained, a project like Asnad is justified because at present it is not easy to sell content online. The fact that authors can’t find practical ways to sell their creations through the Internet suggests that publishers are not responding to this overriding need.

It is worth noting that the weaknesses of the publishers themselves tend to coincide with the strengths of the new web platforms —conversion to EPUB, transformation of texts into enriched content, digital distribution, etc.— although the reverse is also true: publishing companies possess a significant volume of content, which is precisely what web platforms need to rapidly grow their business. The alliance between the region’s publishers and Internet entrepreneurs could prove beneficial not just for both groups, but also —and above all— for authors and readers.

Some thoughts for the future

As this article has attempted to describe, digital publishing in the Arab World is

extremely varied in nature. First, in recent years there have been significant advances in the field of e-commerce, which have enabled the consolidation of various online stores, as well as the emergence of companies that make apps and interactive materials. Some of these companies come from the traditional publishing business and have managed to position themselves thanks to alliances with software providers. However, many conventional publishing houses face difficulties functioning in the digital world, which prevents content from being incorporated into different electronic distribution platforms and ends up delaying the consolidation of the new industry.

The various vicious circles observed may be seen as merely the reflection of an ecosystem that has not yet managed to gain a firm foothold in the region, and many of the obstacles could perhaps be overcome if the different parties involved were to work together more closely as a network. Among the initiatives implemented so far in the Arab World, four are worth emphasizing:

1•Training. The various training initiatives carried out in the region demonstrate, in every case, that training publishers is vitally important. Indeed, an appropriate training course increases confidence and promotes experimentation among publishers. The most pressing topics such courses should cover include conversion to EPUB, creation of apps, examination of e-publishing and distribution contracts, and study of digital business models. Various organisations —such as KITAB— have been working successfully in the field for some years. It might be worth thinking about how to make these courses more widely available, for example through online tutorials or attendance classes in different countries in the region.

“At this time of transformation and ferment, the Arab publishing industry is faced with a unique opportunity to deal a new hand”

2•Networking. If publishers lack precisely what technological actors possess, and vice versa, then any professional networking activities will be highly beneficial for both parties. One example is the implementation of the [eZone](#) at the Abu Dhabi International Book Fair. At the 2012 fair, numerous providers—including Qordoba, for example—were able to exhibit their products and services on one of the fair's main thoroughfares. However, since publishers do not always appreciate the importance of networking with such companies, it will be essential to emphasise this point at the training days.

3•Incubation and acceleration. In addition to promoting strategic alliances

between analogue and digital actors, it might be possible to encourage the emergence of start-ups dedicated exclusively to electronic publishing. One example worth following is that of the [Labo de l'édition](#) in Paris which hosts around a dozen ventures exclusively related to electronic publications.

4•Research and development. Given that certain technical issues go beyond what even an Internet start-up is able to address, it will be important to achieve advances in the field of R&D, particularly with regard to new formats and devices adapted to the Arabic language. This can be accomplished only with the support of the public sector, local foundations—many of which are [very active](#)

[in science and technology](#)—and telecommunications companies.

Digital publishing brings into play high-impact cultural and industrial factors. At this time of transformation and ferment, the Arab publishing industry is faced with a unique opportunity to deal a new hand. The time is ripe, in spite of all the difficulties, for local actors—many of them highly dynamic—to join forces and draw up a new publishing framework, which is much broader, richer, and more interconnected than the previous one. The essential idea is for more and better texts to reach the greatest possible number of readers, and digital technology may be a privileged means of achieving that objective•

Author



Octavio Kulesz holds a degree in philosophy from the University of Buenos Aires, where he taught Ancient Philosophy until 2006. He has worked in the publishing world since the year 2000, when he created the publishing house [Libros del Zorzal](#), together with his brother Leopoldo. In 2007, after participating in the Young International Publisher of the Year programme (British Council), he founded the publishing company [Teseo](#), geared to the publication of academic texts in print on demand and e-book format. Octavio Kulesz carried out a report, [Digital Publishing in Developing Countries](#), commissioned by the [International Alliance of Independent Publishers](#) with the support of the [Prince Claus Fund](#).