

# The E-Book—Move Over Mr. Gutenberg!

Irvin Varkonyi

Adjunct Professor American Military University  
ivarkonyi@apus.edu

## LEARNING GOALS

1. Textbook publishers vulnerable to lost sales strive to convert their old business model.
2. Universities seek to reduce student educational expenses.
3. Mariners, among others, using Computer-Based Training to expedite compliance training.

## THE OLD BUSINESS MODEL

In 1450, Johannes Gutenberg made his first printing press. Just what would Mr. Gutenberg think if he visited a college campus (either brick and mortar or virtual online) today? No books? Well, maybe not too many books because of the surge of the e-book, the electronic book.

Although the public is familiar with the Kindle or Nook or other proprietary devices to read novels, newspapers, or magazines, college students of all ages, and increasingly high school students and below, are becoming comfortable and extremely adept at using the e-book for their required texts.

In a recent article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, published October 24, 2010, Jeffrey Young speculated on the options considered by colleges to force a switch to e-textbooks. “You’ve heard it before: Digital technologies blew up the music industry’s moneymaking model, and the textbook business is next.”

However, the change has been slow. Though college students have become more comfortable with digital technology, the change has been slower for their college courses. But there is a difference based on whether students are attending a brick and mortar institution or a virtual online institution. For the latter, where all learning is virtual, the e-book is more consistent with the main learning approach.

Textbook publishers like the e-book. Says Young, “They’re saying that e-textbooks should be required reading and that colleges should be the ones charging for them. It is the best way to control skyrocketing costs and may actually save the textbook industry from digital piracy, they claim. Major

players like the McGraw-Hill Companies, Pearson, and John Wiley & Sons are getting involved.”

## THE COURSE MATERIALS FEE

A chief problem for textbook publishers has been the creativeness of students to secure textbooks without purchasing new ones. Buying used books, borrowing books, going to the library . . . all this meant that publishers did not make money, giving publishers an incentive to release with updated editions just to keep income flowing. If a college required students to pay a course-materials fee to cover the use of e-books, this income would go to the publishers.

“Why electronic copies? Well, they’re far cheaper to produce than printed texts, making a bulk purchase more feasible. By ordering books by the hundreds or thousands, colleges can negotiate a much better rate than students were able to get on their own, even for used books. And publishers could eliminate the used-book market and reduce incentives for students to illegally download copies as well,” says Young.

Distance learning universities are moving in this direction because it is a win/win for them and their students, not to mention the publishers. Distance learning students often prefer the e-book because they are already using virtual learning systems. These students are often traveling—active duty military personnel on deployment, for example. Thus, it is more convenient.

Colleges and universities are seeking any way possible to keep costs down for students. Based on the latest research, the average price of textbooks rose nearly 200 percent over a 20-year period beginning in the late 1980s, far faster than inflation.

“When students pay more for new textbooks than tuition in a year, then something’s wrong,” says Rand S. Spiwak, executive vice president at Daytona State, who is leading the experiment there. “Our

# PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

game plan is to bring the cost of textbooks down by 75 to 80 percent.”

Young concludes, “Apple reset the sales model for music, with its iPod players and market-leading online store, and the company is likely to try to enter the e-textbook market as well. But watch out, publishers, the change agents for textbooks may just be traditional colleges.”

## COMPUTER-BASED TRAINING

The trend toward CBT (Computer-Based Training) in professional development supports the trend toward e-learning. The maritime industry has seen more recent developments in providing training for compliance via e-learning. This includes the Calhoun MEBA School in Easton, MD, which offers components of the STCW (Standards of Training, Certification, and Watchkeeping.)

There are 133 International Maritime Organization signatory countries in the world. Every country will issue a document showing the level of mariner certification and the capacity and limitations of each.

All professional mariner certifications must be STCW 95 Compliant with the exception of US mariners working exclusively on inland waters or domestic near coastal waters on vessels up to 200 gross tons waters, which are exempt from the STCW requirements. MEBA

teaches a 13-lesson course that covers emergency response and resource management knowledge and skills that are necessary to operate efficiently and safely during an emergency in the marine environment. The course also provides students with instruction in human behavior and risk assessment procedures to enable them to determine correct initial actions, training requirements, and interagency interfacing that may be required to initiate and operate in a unified situation. No paper, just the computer. *DTJ*

**“You’ve heard it before:  
Digital technologies blew  
up the music industry’s  
moneymaking model, and the  
textbook business is next.”**