

The eTextbook Landscape

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eTextbooks are a moving target. The landscape is changing rapidly as campuses, publishers, and platform providers experiment with a wide variety of business models. Major digital textbook platforms and providers include:

- **CourseSmart** (www.coursesmart.com): Publisher partners include powerhouses Cengage Learning, Macmillan Higher Education, McGraw–Hill Education, John Wiley & Sons, and Pearson. CourseSmart says its catalog features more than 90% of textbook titles in use today. It offers free trials of eTextbooks. Rentals typically last 6 months or 12 months.
- **Courseload** (www.courseload.com): Courseload is an aggregator and distributor of digital textbooks. It says it can integrate course content from any source (publisher, open-source, faculty-generated, etc.) because it’s “device- and content-source neutral.” Rather than selling to individual students, Courseload brokers deals between institutions and publishers, or enables institutions to negotiate directly with publishers. Bulk purchases for entire classes lower costs.
- **Inkling** (www.inkling.com): Inkling titles are designed for the iPad, iPhone, and web. Working with publishing partners, Inkling turns traditional books into interactive titles with quizzes, videos, 3D objects, and embedded links. It currently only works with Safari and Chrome browsers. Users can buy individual chapters or entire eTextbooks.
- **Flat World Knowledge** (www.flatworldknowledge.com): FWK, funded in part by Random House, offers more than 115 peer-reviewed textbooks. Students get to choose format and price. FWK sells print, ebooks (for iPad, Kindle, Nook and other e-readers), audiobooks, and downloadable PDFs. Instructors can use the books as-is or modify them. FWK also provides supplements such as test banks, instructor manuals, and lecture slides. FWK started out with a “freemium” model, allowing free online access but charging for premium content. Free access ended in January 2013. Now emphasizing “fair” pricing rather than “free,” FWK typically charging \$19.99 for eTextbooks and \$39.99 for print-on-demand copies. Students get indefinite access to read online. They get 6 months to download any digital materials and the files don’t expire.
- **Connexions** (<http://cnx.org>): Connexions is a non-profit start-up launched at Rice University and funded by foundations and donors. It offers open-source textbooks and educational course materials. Under a Creative Commons Attribution License, instructors can modify eTextbook content for any purpose. The eTextbooks can be read online or downloaded for free. Connexions sells low-cost print-on-demand copies.
- **CafeScribe** (www.cafescribe.com): CafeScribe is owned by the Follett Higher Education Group. It offers free 3-day trials for eTextbooks. Depending on the title, students can rent the eTextbook for 180 days or buy it.
- **Apple iBooks2** (www.apple.com/education/ibooks-textbooks): With iBooks Author, a free app from Apple, anyone can create an eTextbook. The iBook works only on the iPad, however. Features include interactive

diagrams, 3D objects, photos, videos, and iTunes U integration.

- **VitalSource** (www.vitalsource.com): Owned by Ingram, VitalSource currently partners with more than 200 publishers. In 2012 VitalSource acquired VPG Integrated Media (VPG), a developer of interactive learning objects, eWhiteboard content, and video/ audio/animation services.
- **Kno** (www.kno.com): Kno was founded by the co-founder of Chegg. The eTextbooks' Smart Links feature links to videos, websites, and interactive modules. The standard rental period is 6 months. Some titles can be purchased. Kno users currently can't print or export any eTextbook content.
- **Nook Study** (www.barnesandnoble.com/nookstudy): The Nook Study app enables users to read Barnes & Noble textbook purchases on a computer. These eTextbooks can't be read on Nooks and mobile devices because the screens are too small. B&N eTextbooks come in an Enhanced version (which allows for some printing and copying/pasting) and a Regular version (which doesn't). Users can try an eTextbook for free for 7 days, then rent or buy it.
- **Thuze** (www.thuze.com/academics.php): Thuze lets users upload their own ePubs or choose from over 60 peer-reviewed eTextbooks. Interactive content includes audio and video. Thuze says eTextbooks can be licensed as is or mashed up to suit users' needs.

Additional Resources on eTextbooks

- Indiana University has put together a comprehensive website called **eTexts at IU** (<http://etexts.iu.edu>). Indiana was one of the pioneers in eTextbooks.
- The final project report from the **Internet2/EDUCAUSE eText Spring 2012 Pilot** (www.internet2.edu/netplus/econtent/docs/eText-Spring-2012-Pilot-Report.pdf) has great information on that project (participating institutions were Cornell, Indiana University, University of Minnesota, University of Virginia, and University of Wisconsin). The Spring 2013 pilot has expanded to include more than more than 20 colleges and universities, CourseLoad, CourseSmart, McGraw-Hill, and Elsevier Science and Technology. Plans for the Fall 2013 pilot are under way now, in case your institution is interested in joining.
- Gerry McKiernan, a librarian at Iowa State University, has a great **Digital Textbooks blog** (<http://digital-textbooks.blogspot.com>). He frequently updates the blog, providing news roundups, presentations, reports, and more.
- **College Open Textbooks** (www.collegeopentextbooks.org) and its blog provide useful information on open-source eTextbooks.
- Temple University has a good website with info on its **Alternate Textbook Project** (<http://sites.temple.edu/alttextbook>). Temple offers small grants for faculty to develop eTextbooks or other alternative textbook content. The site also has links to open education resources, including open textbooks.