

ELECTRONIC PUBLISHING

Meeting Notes: March 2008

WHAT IS ELECTRONIC PUBLISHING?

The term covers a wide variety of methods use to convey information on a computer screen, video projection system or other display devices. It is necessary to “upload” (send) the document to your audience. They must “download” (receive) the document to be able to read it. This is most commonly accomplished over the Internet. The cost of purchasing the equipment and producing a CD or DVD is now so reasonable that many authors use this method to disburse their information.

WHAT TYPE OF INFORMATION CAN BE DISPLAYED?

20 years ago the information technology available to consumers was primarily text, such as messages and basic reports. A few adventurous authors started publishing short stories. At “phone line” transmission speeds a large story might take hours before it could be read. To view the information, you needed the same program as the author. This was a huge disadvantage. Screen size was a problem. Information written on a 15” screen was too wide on a 10” monitor

Today, high-speed lines can transmit huge amounts of data in a couple of minutes. Documents might contain text, graphics, and photographs. It is becoming common for these documents to contain audio and video.

WHAT IS THE ADVANTAGE OF ELECTRONIC PUBLISHING?

We cut down fewer trees! It is possible reach a vast audience without spending a fortune printing and distributing a “hard copy” book. A “limited edition” book for the family or grand kids is now cost effective. Photographs with notations, stories with illustrations, the possibilities are endless.

WHAT EQUIPMENT IS REQUIRED?

A Computer and a high-speed Internet connection, although as mentioned a CD or DVD can be used.

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WHAT SOFTWARE IS REQUIRED?

The software you use will depend on what you want to do. For the most part it is the same software that you would use to write a letter or book. If the document will contain graphics or pictures, the software must have these capabilities. Below are a few examples, but far from a complete list. This document is being written in MS Word.

The very basic requirement is a word processing program. Every Windows based computer comes with a *Word Pad* program. It is primarily a limited feature text processor. Fine for basic needs. Some computers come with Microsoft Works Suite, which contains a word processor with more features.

Microsoft Word or Word Perfect. These are fine programs that allow text and images to be used in a document.

Microsoft Publisher and Serif Page Plus X2 <http://www.serif.com/>

These are a combination of a word processor and a graphics programs. They allow some very complicated page design such as text following a shape and other features. These are simply 2 of many programs of this type.

Graphics Programs like Adobe PhotoShop, Elements, Paint Shop and many others.

It pays to check and compare program features and prices when purchasing software. <http://software.toptenreviews.com/> My suggestion is to use what you have and start simple.

NOW WHAT?

Let's assume that you have prepared your document (manuscript?) and are ready to electronically publish it. Do I need a special format? Is this expensive? How can I be sure that my audience can read it if they have a different type of computer or screen size? All valid questions. Thankfully, they have simple solutions. This leads us to electronic "formats" which are used to solve these problems.

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ELECTRONIC FORMATS & READERS.

Email.

The problems of programs and screen size were solved early on by Email readers. Today, with few glitches, it really doesn't matter what Email program or computer is used. The Email Reader (program) handles the technical problems. This is a very basic type of electronic publishing. Limited, but you can send it to a large number of people, instantly.

HTML (Hyper Text Mark-up Language.)

The language of the World Wide Web (www). HTML allows a mixture of text and media to be combined into a visual display. It adapts to the screen size. Change the size on the screen and it adapts. The HTML Reader is called a "Browser" and every MS Windows computer has one called Internet Explorer (IE). You do not have to be connected to the Internet to read a HTML document. Just double click on the file and give it a few seconds. There are other types of browsers, with some different features, but all read HTML.

Most programs have an option to save a document in HTML. The general path is: FILE > SAVE AS > select HTML for the format (> go to.) Another method is to use software to create a document or web site. There are many programs to choose from. I use MS Front Page to change the MPPC website. Jo Ann McKissack programmed the original site, using HTML directly. A knowledge of HTML is useful for complex projects.

PDF (Portable Document Format)

Adobe Corporation created a format that could be used to create a document that would maintain all the characteristics of the original document, such as formatting, color and type style. It requires a Adobe PDF Reader, available free from <http://www.adobe.com/> . This has become the standard for electronic publishing of all types.

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Adobe produces a program that will create A PDF Document and much more! Acrobat 8 Standard and Professional is a great program for heavy-duty use. Otherwise, it's like using a cannon to hunt squirrels...

Many current programs will allow saving a document as a PDF, yet many don't. A simple solution is available. A PDF converter. This converter is a program that "prints" your file and creates a PDF. The term print, in this case, refers to the conversion process not actually printing the document on paper. The result is 2 files. One the original and the other a PDF Version. Example Tim.doc and Tim.pdf. There are many PDF converters. My favorite is Cute PDF available from: <http://www.cutepdf.com/> A free version is available and a professional version for sells for \$50.

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Hope this article has been helpful. — Tim Engel —