

Amazon's Kindle DX: Not the answer

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Kindle DX

I am holding in my hands a device that some think could be the salvation of the beleaguered newspaper industry. It's the Amazon Kindle DX, a large-screen version of Amazon's popular e-reader that's specifically designed for papers and textbooks.

The DX is an attempt to bridge the gap between reading printed newspapers, which take up a lot of room and are out of date the minute they come out, and reading news online, which can hurt your eyes and isn't nearly as all-consuming an experience.

It also gives [publishers](#) a way to make money from digital versions of the newspaper, since unlike the majority of newspaper Web sites, it costs to

subscribe to the Kindle edition of the Orlando Sentinel (\$6 a month) or The New York Times (\$14 a month). In fact a few newspapers in other states plan to offer discounted Kindle DXs to some readers.

My review of the Kindle DX got off to a rough start. The first unit that [Amazon](#) sent me had a ghost in the machine. It would bring up the search box and start typing random characters without me pressing anything -- a major bug that Amazon said is not a widespread problem. The second DX worked fine.

The Kindle DX, which costs a whopping \$489, includes all of the features of the Kindle 2 (which now costs \$299) and two big differences: a bigger screen -- 9.7 inches diagonally compared with 6 inches and the ability to rotate the screen orientation from vertical to horizontal when you turn it.

Another key difference is that the Kindle DX can display PDF files without having to convert them first, a feature that might appeal to doctors, students and other businesspeople.

While the Kindle DX weighs almost twice as much as the Kindle 2, it's still amazingly thin, and it doesn't feel too hefty. A woman might have trouble fitting the DX in her purse, but it won't weigh down a backpack. Reading books on the DX is even easier, because with the much larger screen surface, you don't have to turn the page as often as you do on the Kindle 2.

But despite publishers' hopes, I don't think the Kindle DX will satisfy the needs of newspaper lovers because it doesn't fuse the best of print and online papers. Not yet at least.

For one thing, not many of the 32 U.S. newspapers available on the Kindle include pictures, graphics or charts, even though the Kindle is

capable of displaying them. Once you choose a newspaper section on the Kindle, all articles are listed in the same way, with a headline and the first few lines of the story, so you have no concept of which stories in that section the editors thought were the most important.

There's also no way to browse through a bunch of articles at once to see if anything catches your eye. For instance, many people like to thumb through the wedding announcements in the Sunday New York Times by scanning the pictures and names. On the Kindle, none of the announcements has a picture and each is listed as a separate story, meaning you have to click to open one, click to close it, and click to open another one.

Perhaps the biggest drawback is that newspapers are not taking advantage of the technology built into the Kindle to deliver breaking news. Despite a free Internet connection on every Kindle, the Kindle edition of each newspaper is only delivered once a day, so the news is just as dated as the print paper. This doesn't make sense.

Newspaper Web sites and mobile applications include stories from the print edition and updated material throughout the day, and they are generally free. So why should you pay for a digital edition of a newspaper that doesn't update?

I asked Amazon if there were any reason why a newspaper could not update its Kindle version throughout the day, and a spokesman would only say "we work closely with newspapers to provide the best possible reading experience for Kindle customers."

Mike Sutton, who's in charge of the Kindle version of the Sentinel, said it is possible, but it costs Amazon money each time it delivers a Kindle edition, so Amazon might not be inclined to let newspapers update their editions throughout the day.

Amazon isn't alone in trying to make an e-paper device. Several other companies are reportedly working on electronic readers for newspapers, the most promising of which seems to be a lightweight touch-screen device from Plastic Logic that's due out next year. The [Kindle](#) DX is great for reading books and [textbooks](#), but newspapers lovers will have to wait a little longer for a true hybrid of print and digital papers.

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