

E-books gain a foothold at Frankfurt Book Fair

October 16 2009, By LAURA STEVENS , Associated Press Writer

(AP) -- While paper books still outnumber texts that can be read online or on dedicated readers like the Kindle or eBook, use of the electronic versions is growing.

Many publishing firms unveiled electronic editions of their books for the first time this year at the 61st Frankfurt Book Fair. But many publishers, while they are certain that [e-books](#) will play a bigger role in their future, say it has yet to be seen just how big the trend will become.

De Bezige Bij, or The Busy Bee, a Dutch publishing company based in Amsterdam, published its first e-books in August, said Pieter Swinkels, a senior editor at the company.

"Everybody is interested in it (but) at the moment it still feels like you're looking into a dark room," he told The Associated Press Friday.

"Books are still a good piece of technology, they can still do everything you need," said Jason Cooper, a director at Faber & Faber, one of the largest independent book publishers in the United Kingdom.

He said that, while books won't vanish, it's important to start rolling out electronic titles, which Faber & Faber did last year.

Unlike many other [publishers](#) at the fair, MIT Press has been bringing out e-books since the early 1990s, said Gita Manaktala, editorial director of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology university press. Now

they've added titles for Kindle, and nearly half of MIT Press' 4,000-strong backlist is available electronically.

"One thing that's really driving a shift toward e-books are libraries," she said. Electronic editions are in demand, she said, because they are more convenient, take up less space and can be made available to more people.

Joachim Leser, a spokesman for the Stuttgart-based publishing company Klett-Cotta Verlag, said the company is working to get e-books out to all kinds of technologies, including iPhones and Sony eReaders.

"The problem right now is that the customers don't have any orientation, and they don't know where to find it," he said. "Personally, I think that everything ... will end up going in the direction of both cell phone and iPod technology."

Peter Prange, a best-selling author of German-language historical novels, including "Die Principessa," said it's complicated for authors to watch the e-book process.

"It's wonderful for the world, but a catastrophe for the authors," since they make almost no money, he said.

Prange said that, while electronic books are convenient and portable, they don't have the familiarity of traditional books.

"Books are friends. And I want the book that I've read to be on my bookshelf. Therefore I believe that paperless [books](#) will be about as successful as bathrooms without toilet paper," he said.

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