Google to launch e-book service in Japan in 2011

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US Internet giant Google said Monday it would launch an electronic books service in Japan next year despite a chilly reception from major Japanese publishers.

The Japanese version of Google Editions may have to start with a limited number of titles, said Yoichi Sato, a strategic partner development manager at Google Japan.

Major Japanese publishers are still uneasy about handing over book data, especially of in-copyright titles, to the foreign IT giant, fearing that the content may be used for unintended purposes, Sato told a media briefing.

Japanese copyright laws also require strict and complicated permission processes involving authors and publishers, before Google can use book contents for online searches and sales, he said.

"Hopefully, the industry's recent development to prepare for the full-fledged spread of e-books in Japan will help improve understanding for our project," Sato said.

Google Editions is similar to but separate from a controversial Google Books search project that aims to make all the world's written works available online.

Google Books shows a small portion of the book at a time for free, while Google Editions offers access the entire content of the scanned books for a price.

In the United States and Europe, Google plans to start Editions and sell electronic books that people can read on any Internet-connected device including Apple's hot-selling iPad tablet computer.

Google Editions may not bring profits directly to the US search engine, but should increase the overall market value of the company and could boost its advertisement revenue, Sato added.

"Hopefully, major publishing houses will see benefit in this venture later this year or next year," Sato said.

E-books are still relatively rare in Japan, and local publishing houses have only recently started considering how best to approach the new technology.

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