

# Amazon lets authors mute Kindle books read-aloud feature

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A man holds the new Amazon Kindle 2 at an unveiling event at the Morgan Library & Museum February 9, 2009 in New York City. Amazon is yielding to concerns of authors by letting them selectively silence a read-aloud feature in Kindle 2 electronic book readers that hit the market in February.

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The US Authors Guild had warned that the new Kindle feature could pose a "significant challenge" to the publishing industry and hinted at possible legal action by saying they were studying the matter closely.

"Kindle 2's experimental text-to-speech feature is legal: no copy is made, no derivative work is created, and no performance is being given," Amazon said late Friday in an announcement posted online.

"Nevertheless, we strongly believe many rightsholders will be more comfortable with the text-to-speech feature if they are in the driver's seat."

Amazon said it is making modifications to allow

those holding rights to written works to decide on a title-by-title basis whether to allow Kindle 2 devices to read passages aloud using text recognition software.

"We have already begun to work on the technical changes required to give authors and publishers that choice," Amazon said in the written release.

"With this new level of control, publishers and authors will be able to decide for themselves whether it is in their commercial interests to leave text-to-speech enabled. We believe many will decide that it is."

Amazon contends that Kindle devices encourage reading, and that the more people read the more books they will buy in an outcome beneficial to authors and copyright holders.

The Authors Guild maintained that while it considers the quality of the Kindle 2's audio feature "serviceable" it feared that Amazon was "undermining" its members' exploits in a billion-dollar audiobook market.

"Bundling e-books and audio books has been discussed for a long time in the industry," it said. "It's a good idea, but it shouldn't be accomplished by fiat by an e-book distributor."

Amazon said the experimental "Read-To-Me" feature "converts words on a page to spoken word" so customers have the option to read or listen.

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