

The e-Book Revolution

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The OLPC XO-2 Laptop Prototype.

One of the new technologies that I've been following quite closely is the evolution of the digital book. Yes, e-Books are here to stay, for better or for worse; I actually know people reading books on Amazon's Kindle. Really!

Myself? I have tried various iPhone e-Book applications, but haven't yet started using them. The screen is frustratingly small, and with the type at a comfortable size, after reading a short paragraph it's time to go to the next page. That's not conducive to pleasurable reading. Kindle and the Sony e-readers both seem klutzy and not a real book experience. Ultimately, reading a book on a computer still seems foreign to me. I like the tactile nature of a traditional book and I like the contrast of not always being on a notebook computer. I also miss the art of the book and its great variety of typography and design.

However, there are some interesting new hardware developments that may change some of these complaints shortly. First, there is Apple's forthcoming device, which is still under wraps but due to be released as early as this summer. Dubbed the "media tablet," it will no doubt be a stunningly beautiful piece of hardware. It looks to be a kind of grown-up iPod Touch or iPhone that will include a gorgeous high-resolution, touchscreen display, wireless and app store capability, e-reader, and it will, of course, be sexy.

Here's what this device might look like.



But the e-Book I keep hoping for is not the flat-surface tablet that's been around for years. Instead it's a folding screen device where you could see two pages at once and hold it just like a book.

A project exploring this notion can be seen below. Though these prototypes are all a bit too awkward, they do show great potential.

Now for the elegant device that seems to have the most potential announced last year by the One Laptop Per Child (OLPC) initiative. OLPC is the brainchild of Nicholas Negroponte, founder and Chairman Emeritus of Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Media Lab. OLPC's breathtaking goal is to provide computers at such a low price that they could be put into the hands of almost every child in the world. That would provide a truly profound revolution in global education.

OLPC's beautiful prototype seems to be the almost perfect book substitute. The version 2 of this device can be seen below.

Unfortunately, there is great skepticism as to whether Negroponte can be successful with his mission and whether or not his company can survive long enough to release this product. Even if they don't, Negroponte has opened the eyes of many people as to the potential of his proposed device and his ambitious program. Perhaps others (hint Apple) might run with the idea, albeit at a higher price.

Now, if they could only could make this thing waterproof.



Read more about OLPC: [OLPC](#)

Read more about their new device: [laptopmag.com](#) [wired.com](#)