

About seven years ago I made a prediction in this

magazine that soon all printed material would also be available in a digital form. At the time CD-ROM was the big thing, and everybody in multimedia—including me—was jumping on the bandwagon to take advantage of this “new media”. Consumer educational or infotainment CD-ROMs filled shelves at bookstores around the world. Children loved to read, hear and watch the animated stories. Then suddenly, sales fell flat.

A computer modem, an Internet connection, and millions of free websites replaced this industry almost overnight. The math was fairly simple. Why pay \$40 dollars for a CD-ROM when you can pay \$40 for a high speed Internet connection to get free information, MP3 music, games and e-mail. Okay, there are drawbacks. The information might not be reliable. You are stealing the music. The games crash your computer and we now have a ton of spam and viruses in our e-mail. Could there be some karmic relationship between Napster and attached e-mail viruses?

Inexperienced investors lost millions in the dot.com implosion. Every day, someone would ask me which dot.com company to invest in (I told them not to bother—buy real estate). Let’s be honest, many multimedia companies started dot.com divisions knowing full well the investors would never ever see a profit.

Now investors are launching criminal lawsuits. The public hates technology stocks. Layoffs are everywhere.

So where am I going with this?

Well, I’m going to make another prediction and this time, I hope this time the industry can get it right...or should I say, “write”.

EBOOKS WILL BECOME THE NEXT BIG THING

Most readers have heard of eBooks but the general public hasn’t caught on yet. Seems the marketing machines at major book publishers have held back promoting this technology until all the pieces are in place.

However several weeks ago the issue of eBooks was spotlighted by a significant arrest. This eBook-related crime has been making headlines around the world. If the U.S. federal government is coming down as heavy as it is on the suspects, how valuable does that mean it must be?

Earlier this year, Adobe discovered that a Russian software company called ElcomSoft was illegally marketing a product that could be used to circumvent security protections built into Adobe’s *Acrobat eBook Reader*. *eBook Reader* is a brilliant piece of software that can display PDF files and web pages. Unlike *Acrobat Reader*, you don’t need to launch an external browser to view linked web pages in PDF files. The web browser is built in. Hmmmm. I wonder how Microsoft feels about that.

Adobe sent letters to ElcomSoft, ElcomSoft’s U.S. Internet service provider, and its U.S. credit card clearinghouse, asking the companies to stop selling their digital burglary tools. Basically, ElcomSoft acted like Napster, stuck its head in the sand and said, “Sue me.” Adobe then forwarded the matter to the U.S. Attorney’s Office.

On August 30, 2001, the Russian hacker Dmitry Sklyarov was arrested while visiting the United States and arraigned in U.S. Federal Court on five counts of violating the Digital Millennium Copyright Act. Remember, you can now file *Acrobat* tax returns in the U.S. You can also sign digital *Acrobat* PDF contracts using “digital signatures”. Many U.S. gov-

Can



BOOKS
BY BOB CONNOLLY



you



read



this?



website development. The drawbacks were ugly HTML text and incompatibilities with browsers.

At the same time, Adobe was focusing its efforts on publishing PDF files for print and the Internet. Adobe saw a world where printed material could look identical on the Internet. Anti-aliased PostScript fonts with kerning and tracking and leading was Adobe's vision. *Acrobat* was used to compress the document and to provide interactivity.

Wanting to escape the constraints of the browser, Adobe built QuickTime streaming capability right into the *Acrobat* document format. *Acrobat* documents became an interface for QuickTime wired sprites. *Flash* could be played inside QuickTime movies. PDF text documents could be downloaded instead of websites. Graphics and video were linked to Internet servers and streamed into the document when needed.

EBOOK READER OR ADOBE READER?

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