



Adobe Digital Editions' ebook DRM

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Modern-day ebook publishers have been utilizing various forms of [digital-rights management](#) (DRM) to protect the books they sell to make sure that "copyright laws are respected and that authors and publishers are fairly compensated".^[1] However, the end user who purchases the content legally ends up being restricted in what they are able to do with the ebook once they have purchased it. One of Adobe's version of this DRM is called "Adobe Digital Editions" which is the client the user uses to read their ebooks.

Background [[edit](#) | [edit source](#)]

Adobe eBook Platform is a platform for publishers to leverage when selling ebooks. This includes the following software suite: Adobe InDesign® CC software, Adobe Content Server software, the Adobe Reader® Mobile Software Development Kit (SDK), and Adobe Digital Editions.^[2] A summary of each of the software is outlined below at a high level (mostly extracted from the Adobe white paper on the platform):

- Adobe Content Server - "Adobe Content Server allows publishers, retailers, distributors, and libraries to host and manage eBook distribution. This server software encrypts PDF and EPUB eBook files and allows publishers and retailers to manage the rights on the eBook files they distribute."^[2]
- Adobe Reader Mobile SDK - The SDK "allows e-reader device manufacturers and eBook application developers to support EPUB and PDF files protected by Content Server in their products. It enables tethered and over-the-air downloads so that consumers can order eBooks directly through their devices or "side-load" them by copying files from their desktops to their mobile devices".^[2]
- Adobe InDesign - InDesign allows the publishers to export EPUB and EPUB3 files from print layouts. This also allows publishers to export ebooks to hardware such as the "Sony Reader, the Barnes & Noble nook, and smartphones, as well as personal computers using Microsoft® Windows® or Mac OS".^[2]
- Adobe Digital Editions (ADE) - "Adobe Digital Editions is a free, lightweight desktop reading application for PC and Mac that allows eBook consumers to easily download and organize their eBooks easily. Consumers can read their eBooks online and offline, transfer copy-protected eBooks from their personal computers to other devices, organize eBooks into a custom library, and annotate page".^[2]

All these solutions come together to give publishers control over their ebook content. The main product discussed on this page is Adobe Digital Editions (ADE). ADE allows for the following benefits:^[3]

- Download and transfer of books between devices
- EPUB3 support
- Keyword search across ebooks
- Voiceover accessibility
- Multi-language support
- Bookmarking, highlighting, and note support
- Support for borrowing ebooks from libraries
- ebook printing (publishers decide whether they opt-in for allowing printing or not)
- EPUB, EPUB3 and PDF support

ADE also has system requirements, as it is an application running on your system:^[4]

Windows:

- Intel® Pentium® 4 processor or later
- Windows® 7 (32 or 64 bit running in 32-bit mode) or later
- 512MB of RAM (1GB recommended)
- 40MB of available hard-disk space

Mac OS:

- Intel Core™ Duo or faster processor
- Mac OS X v10.8 or later
- Compatible with Apple Retina Display
- 512MB of RAM (1GB recommended)
- 75MB of available hard-disk space

iOS:

- Minimum requirement 9.0 or later.
- Compatible with iPhone and iPad.

Android:

- Minimum requirement 4.4 or later.
- Compatible with the Mobile and Tablet.

Adobe Digital Edition's Consumer Effects [\[edit \]](#) [edit source \]](#)

With the release of the platform and specifically the Adobe Digital Edition application, consumers have been restricted on what they are allowed to do with ebooks that they have purchased. Although unlimited downloads are mentioned by publishers and ebook sites, those are tied to an account.^[1] This means that if access to an account is lost, then the access to those ebooks is lost as well. eBooks.com is one of the various e-bookstores that sells both non-DRM and DRM books leveraging ADE. When purchasing an ebook from them, you get a .acsm file. This format only works with the Adobe Digital Editions application. The user needs to create an Adobe account (after already creating an ebooks.com account) in order to add the book to their account. ADE (pertaining to purchases from ebooks.com) allows for authorization of up to 10 devices with a single Adobe ID, but only one computer.^[5] The end user would not be able to read a book on a home computer and then later on a laptop simultaneously due to this limitation. Barnes and Noble uses ADE as well for their ebooks, with their limitations being a bit different in comparison to ebooks.com's. They have 4 versions of DRM types they leverage for the books sold on their site:^[1]

1. Consumer DRM (eBook)

1. Unlimited downloads
2. Up to six (6) devices/computers
3. No copying and printing

2. Business DRM (eBook)

1. One (1) download
2. Up to one (1) device/computer
3. No copying and printing

3. Education DRM (eTextbook)

1. Two (2) downloads
2. Up to two (2) devices/computers
3. Limited copying and printing

4. Hard DRM

1. Six (6) downloads

2. Up to six (6) devices/computers
3. Used for Case Studies made available by professors and specific courses

In both cases, the user is limited to only a certain number of devices and has to constantly authorize and un-authorize readers in order to be in compliance. This leads to a lack of autonomy for the user who has purchased the book. In addition, with the Barnes and Noble "Consumer DRM" section, a user is not able to print the ebook they have purchased either. Going back to the ebooks.com example, ebooks.com has a bit more control on the consumer stating that due to DRM: "the amount of printing or copying and pasting you can do may be restricted, or prevented entirely. It will also determine whether the read aloud functionality is enabled for the ebook or not".^[5]

With ADE, a consumer will always need to download the application to access books that they have purchased. This is under the assumption that the user is able to have the technical know-how to do all the ADE overhead in order to finally read the book they have purchased. In addition, individuals who do not have access to the most modern technology, thus not being able to download ADE on their system, are also then prevented from reading ebooks they have purchased.

If a user were to be able to remove DRM from a ebook purchased from an e-bookstore leveraging ADE, they would then be breaching the compliance with an end-user license agreement or a customer license. On ebook.com's customer license page, they mention the following: "You promise to keep any eBook in the form in which it was supplied to you. We may include other information (including information identifying the author, the copyright owner, or the terms upon which the eBook is supplied) to any eBook supplied to you. You promise not to circumvent any measures that we have taken to protect the rights in the eBook that we have supplied, including removing this information or otherwise facilitating an infringement of copyright".^[6] Although no lawsuits have been found being documented (as of writing this article), the door for this kind of consumer abuse is still present.

In 2014, the Electronic Frontier Foundation had published an article regarding how Adobe Digital Edition was tracking its end users by logging what the end-user reads and what happens to those files.^[7] This data was also being sent in plain-text undermining the privacy of the users.

Consumer response [[edit](#) | [edit source](#)]

On Reddit, consumers are constantly inquiring about steps to remove the Adobe DRM, as it is obstructing the end-users method of being able to comfortably read the ebooks they have purchased.^[8]

Adobe Ebook DRM Removal [[edit](#) | [edit source](#)]

In the *Abbey House Media v. Apple Inc* ruling on an ebookstore notifying users of how to remove ebook DRM, a judge has ruled that telling users to remove DRM from books they have legally purchased is "not contributory copyright infringement".^{[9][10]} The summary of this case being that the removal of DRM protection on books in non-infringing cases of the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) does not necessarily lead to the piracy of digital books.^[10]

An online persona known as ApprenticeAlf, has also gone ahead to create a tool to remove DRM as well from multiple forms of ebook DRM, not only Adobe's.^[11]

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