Apple and the Kindle

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The Amazon Kindle is full of all sorts of amazing, delightful touches — the sort of thing you'd expect from an Apple product. For example, when you first take your Kindle out of its (gorgeous!) box, it boots right up knowing your name and logged into your account. This is actually out-Apple-ing Apple: it's possible because Amazon not only controls the hardware and the software, but the entire distribution channel; they know exactly who is going to get each Kindle.

And think about how the original Kindle came with a *lifetime unlimited world-wide* data plan. Imagine how much that must have cost! All so that you never had to think about syncing again: your Kindle was automatically synced, no matter where it was in the world.

Bezos must have spent tons of energy getting this stuff right. And he must be sitting there, pissed, that Steve Jobs gets all these laurels while no one ever recognizes the stuff he's done. But I don't think that's because Jobs is a better marketer and showman than Bezos (that's the easy way out); it's because the small details that delight get buried under small details that annoy.

For example, if you download a sample of a book and get to the end and decide to purchase the whole thing, the sample doesn't expand to download the remainder of the book — instead the full book downloads completely separately and you have to manually copy over all your highlights and annotations to the full one. (You can't just keep them in the sample because sample's don't even sync; you have to download a sample manually to each of your devices and hand-synchronize the page numbers.)

Or (and this is incredibly aggravating) when you select a word in the Kindle, depending on how common a word it is, the option that comes up highlighted by default is either "full definition" or "start highlight". Since e-ink's refresh rate is so slow, you typically don't see what's actually come up until you've pressed the button for the second time. So I often "double click" on words to highlight them, but some percentage of the time this kicks me over into the dictionary and I have to hit back twice to get out.

And this is all before I've even got to the disastrous incompatibilities between the Kindle device, the Kindle for Mac app, the Kindle for iOS app, the Kindle Online Reader (read.amazon.com), and the kindle.amazon.com social network — all of which are full of gruesome interface annoyances of their own.

That's the thing about delightful details: they're not just another thing you can add on top. Unless you sweat the details all the way through the user experience,

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the ones that delight quickly get drowned out by the ones that constantly annoy.
I hope someone at Amazon will take that to heart.