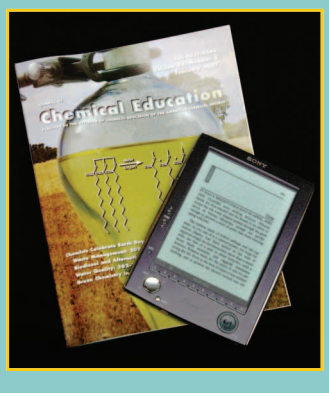
Editorial

New Technologies, New Opportunities

I recently attended the conference of ACS editors, which brings together the editors of all 34 ACS journals every January at a warm, comfortable place. Although the *JCE* (published by the Division of Chemical Education, Inc.) is not an official ACS journal, ACS Publications has for many years graciously invited its editor to participate. This year there was a major fringe benefit: a Sony Reader *(1)*.



I think ACS Publications wanted to get the editors thinking about the effects of new information technologies on their journals. In my case it worked. Books were already loaded on the reader, which is about the size and weight of a paperback book but a lot thinner. For some time I had wanted to reread *1984* by George Orwell. It was there, so I started reading. *1984* provided a nice test of the reader's "electronic paper" technology. I found that I could read comfortably at poolside, on a beach, in a hotel room, in bed, in an airport, and on an airplane. When I finished *1984*, the battery was still three-quarters charged. Sony claims that one could read *War and Peace* and still not have to recharge.

When I got home I hooked the reader up to my computer and tried loading files into it: a paper from the *JCE* and one of our book-length publications *(2)*. Loading files through a USB connection is easy, but unless the text has been formatted to fit the screen of the reader, it is too small to read. I turned the screen to landscape format and could then barely read the *JCE* book, but I could not enlarge it (as you can with the files pre-loaded on the reader) and I would not have wanted to read a lot that way. With a *JCE* paper, which is in two columns, even landscape format is not enough to make the text readable; reading down one column and going back later over the same view to read the other column is not my idea of fun.

Like most new technology, the Sony Reader shows great promise combined with frustrating gotchas. The text is clear and bright enough to read conveniently under most lighting where a book could be read. You could easily download papers from journals and read them without having to waste paper by printing them. But you could do that only if the journal had formatted the papers so that the reader can resize them to fit its screen (getting rid of double-column text, for example). Perhaps a bright programmer somewhere will figure out how to take a PDF file and modify it to allow for such resizing, but if that does not happen, then it would be up to the journal publishers to modify what they have published online to fit this new display technology. Or we could try to get an electronics firm to make a bigger reader that would accommodate an 8.5 × 11 in or A4 page. That reader would be a lot less convenient to use than the current small one, and it would weigh more than a typical issue of this *Journal*.

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In telling this story, my goal is to get you thinking about the implications for a professional journal of rapid changes in information technologies. Last month Jon Holmes noted that nearly all issues of this *Journal* have been scanned and mounted on *JCE* Online *(3)*. The scanning project has required significant resources: a dozen or more student workers and several staff members. We think it was well worth it, because now everyone with a $45/year subscription can access any issue back to 1945. We often hear from high school or college teachers whose library has discarded printed copies of the *JCE*, and our digitization project has solved such problems; every subscription will soon include the entire run from 1924 to the present as PDF files.

New technologies open up far more possibilities than we can afford to pursue, so we have to pick and choose the most useful ones for you, our audience. We would like to get from you all of the ideas, suggestions, and hard work that you are willing to provide. When we finish scanning the *JCE* back issues, for example, should we create more online textual materials? If so, what should we scan next? Possibilities are out-of-print books, such as *The Chemical Arts of Old China*, that we used to publish; books, such as the *TA Handbook*, that are widely used now; periodicals, such as the *Chemistry Leaflet*, that *JCE* published a long time ago; or new material that readers might submit, such as the two books we have recently published online *(2)*. Or should we be going in a completely different direction? If you have ideas to share or are willing to work on a project, please email *jce@chem.wisc.edu* to let us know. I look forward to hearing from you.

Literature Cited

1. For information about the Sony Reader, see *http://products.sel.sony.com/pa/prs/index.html* (accessed Jan 2007).
2. Kundell, Frederick A. *The Polymer Primer: A Modular Introduction to Polymer Science*; Govere, Ephraim M. *Guidelines on Determining and Reporting Significant Figures in Chemical Measurements*; both at *http://www.jce.divched.org/JCEBooks/index.html*.
3. Holmes, Jon L. *J. Chem. Educ.* **2007**, *84,* 367–368.