

Title:

The Future is Now for the NY Times

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656

Summary:

An insightful and informative article exploring the latest technological innovation at the NY Times.

Keywords:

iLiad E-reader, iPod, E-Ink

Article Body:

Reading the morning paper just got a 21st century upgrade. The New York Times is now among the first newspapers to release an E-Paper format to subscribers. Soon subscribers will be synchronizing the latest copy of the NY Times and many other major papers from around the world to e-reader devices that are hitting the market this year.

The iLiad E-reader and Sony's Reader are making a bid to be the iPod of the literary world. Electronic readers may seem like nothing new, we've been reading text on PDA devices since the first iterations of the Palm Pilot and it's never taken off. James Joyce looses something on a tiny handheld while turning pages with a stylus. While a market for a new kind of electronic reading display remains to be seen, the new E-Reader devices promise to be different thanks to a unique approach in display technology.

Instead of paper and ink e-reader products use E-Ink a new display technology developed by E-Ink Corporation. The display uses electrically charged microcapsules of ink. Each microcapsule is about the diameter of a human hair and can be negatively or positively charged to present the viewable surface of the display with either black or white. Each individual microcapsule can even be divided to display both black and white parts for higher resolution when needed. The display is so unique because it doesn't rely on its own light source so it's easier for your eyes to keep it in focus for long periods of time. In fact a lot of people think the display looks just as soft to view as real ink on paper. Besides being easier to view for extended periods it's 90% more energy efficient than an LCD display a key advantage for battery powered mobile devices.

Two devices that use E-Ink displays for reading include Sony's Reader and the

iLiad by iRex Technologies. The Sony Reader is about the size of a wafer thin paperback novel and uses Sony's own memory stick or SD memory for storage. The iLiad is a larger reader, about the size of a tablet PC. The iLiad has more features like wi-fi and the ability to take on more types of memory along side its own built in storage.

Sony's intention with the E-Reader goes further than simply a handheld device using an innovative display technology. Taking a page from Apple's playbook Sony has created The Connect an online book service that will sell thousands of eBooks in E-Reader format. The iTunes of the literary world will include a desktop client that will allow you to synchronize your Reader device with the online service and receive your subscriptions to ordered books and periodicals like the NY Times.

E-Readers are only the begging for E-Ink Corporation's new display. E-Ink has already been developed in full color that can reproduce moving images. While it's not designed to be a quick refreshing display that would be used for a television, E-Ink displays are already being integrated into places where space and power are a premium. The device can be attached to almost anything including flexible substrates for displays that can literally wrap around flexible, foldable material.

A disposable variation of the E-Ink display could theoretically be added to packaging when a low cost threshold is reached. Microsoft tried this on a limited release of one of its Xbox games putting a full color animated E-Ink display on the cover. Hopefully this won't become a common practice. The breakfast cereal aisle of the grocery store is headache enough with its boldly colored cartoon characters. Tony the Tiger and the Rice Crispy guys waving at you as you try not to look is something out of an Orwellian nightmare.

Whether or not E-Readers take off and become the new PDA still remains to be seen. But E-Ink has a clever display technology on its hands and will definitely show up in unexpected places in coming years.