

Brief History of Digital Textbooks (notes for presentation)

use these notes to walk through a a timeline on Adobe Connect whiteboard

According to Stephen Acker, a librarian from Ohio and a researcher of the textbook evolution, the mid-1980's was when an environment ripe for welcoming digital textbooks began to take shape. At that time, bookstores formed into large chains. Simultaneously, universities began to use more adjunct professors or field experts to replace long-term professors. The textbook, then, naturally shifted into a position that represented solidarity. It took on a more powerful identity in education because it represented a core of content that offered consistency in a changing environment.

By 1990, the Internet was blazing new trails of global communication. For a decade, although there were complicated and frustrating access problems, plus a cacophony of user-unfriendly programs, people from all walks of life began to develop a comfort level with the presence of technology. William Chesser, an e-Textbook researcher and designer, called it a **slow start-up**, but after successfully hurdling Y2K, the advance of digital communication picked up speed in the early 2000's.

In 2002, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology introduced open-education-resources (OER). Massive amounts of educational information could be accessible and shared for free in some ways. Furthermore, long-distance learning programs began springing up around the globe. Textbook publishers, who were already pounding the pavement delivering computer software resources by the bundles to schools, formed alliances to become suppliers of choice to the education market.

2007 was the year of CourseSmart, a 1-stop-shopping experience for educators who wanted to access materials in digital format that already existed in the respected print formats. Five major textbook publishers joined to offer a large collection of the highest-demand textbooks -- all in digital format, for a price that came in lower than the printed versions.

In higher education, however, college students and consequently some educators clamored for more reasonable costs. The result was enough to push forward some legislation in 2008 that forced more open-handed practices in the publishing business. While prices could **not** be dictated by government, publishers had to give earlier notices of pricing and make their business transactions more visible. It was an attempt to add accountability to the marketing of information.

Simultaneously, new devices for viewing and managing content sprang onto the scene. The iPhone and Kindle hit the market in 2007. The Nook jumped in by 2009, with Apple's iPad on its heels in 2010. According to Jeffrey Young's article a month ago in the Chronicle of High Education, 2010 was also the year that many major textbook publishers invested 9-digit dollar amounts into acquiring computer design companies and building up massive digital departments, presumably to prepare for what some researchers call the Tipping Point. That is, the inevitable shift from print to digital in actual sales volume.

This year, in 2013, iBooks has opened with textbooks available in Multi-touch. Unquestionably what began as a slow start has now become what what William Chesser calls a season of Rapidly Compounding Growth.