

# Opportunities in Digital Publishing

## observations by KITAB

To support its aim of connecting the technology and Arab publishing industries, Kitab has launched and maintained several initiatives and organised a variety of venues at the Abu Dhabi International Book Fair (ADIBF). One such venue is the eZone, an area at the ADIBF dedicated to digital products and technology; a marketplace where firms can showcase their knowhow and services. Aside from ADIBF, Kitab's publisher training sessions prepare Arab publishers to face future challenges in their field.

Digital issues are THE hottest topics during these sessions where speakers involved in digital initiatives in leading US publishing houses share knowledge and their vision of the future in the digital arena.

We at KITAB continue to monitor the Arab book market closely with a particular interest in how digital initiatives translate locally. We have noted that in 2011, blogs and other means of digital expression (social media such as Facebook and Twitter) have gained so much momentum in the Arab world that the way Arab content is consumed has changed; it has become driven more by digital media.

We take this opportunity to share our observations and outline opportunities for Arab publishing companies to go digital as well as the opportunities for international companies to step into this market and cooperate with local businesses.

### Opportunities in e-commerce

With a swelling number of consumers online, the Arab world has seen significant growth in e-commerce. Spot on PR, a PR agency operating in the region for many years, states in Ten Middle East digital predictions for 2011 :

"With over 1.8 million consumers in the UAE alone shopping online, the revenue currently being spent on overseas retail sites will be augmented by more revenue spent locally. Payment options such as PayPal are also opening up in the region, taking us beyond cash on delivery" (<http://www.spotonpr.com/middle-east-digital-predictions/>).

It's good news for publishers that books are number 2 in the top list of online purchases! Many consumers presently purchase from websites like Amazon.com, due to the lack of availability of English and other Western language books in local bookshops. Others visit online stores that exclusively



Beatrice Stauffer

sell Arabic titles. These include Neelwafurat.com (based in Lebanon) and Araboh.com specializing in children's and educational books and many others. "The greatest sales are from consumers in Saudi Arabia and London, UK, reports Salah Chebaro, owner of Neelwafurat.com. Other online stores include Almaktabah.eu, Adabwafan.com (both based in Lebanon), and Furat.com which aims to offer titles and audiobooks published by Syrian publishers. Ketabook.com (based in Morocco) has a specialized section for periodicals on the Maghreb and caters mainly to libraries.

### The e-book market

Major Arab publishers have begun converting their lists into e-books using the PDF format or ePub which now supports Arabic script.

Kotobarabia.com, an Egyptian based company founded in 2005 was the regional pioneer in converting print books into e-books. Technology firms are moving fast to find solutions suitable for Arabic script.

New Thinkers ([www.nthinkers.com](http://www.nthinkers.com)), a Saudi software company specialized in developing bookstore apps (available in the Apple, Android and BlackBerry stores) partnered with the Saudi giant Al Obeikan to create Noon Bookshop for the Apple apps' store. Al Ertiqaa Books (<http://www.ertiqabooks.com>)

has acquired 1500 titles in only one month and will launch an online store shortly with a collection of 3000 offerings.

Piracy rates continue to pose a real risk in the region. "Existing DRM systems do not support the Arabic script, that's why Ertiqaa decided to develop its own software" explained Hashem Suleiman Operations Director at Ertiqaa.

### The app marketplace

Of the 300 million which constitute the population in the Arab world, 34% are under the age of 15 – this represents an enormous market for children and young adult products. Though tablets and e-readers are too expensive for most Arab consumers, for residents of the Gulf countries, who enjoy a greater purchasing power, these devices are affordable and have become a part of the local life style. Pioneers among Arab children book publishers recognized this potential and have been experimenting in the development of apps and enhanced children's books (e.g. Jordanian publisher Salwa Books has 'Ay Shayy' and Al Khayat al Saghir from Lebanon 'Haltabees' for the iPad, Kalimat launched 'Dajaja Bak Beek', an animated children book for the iPhone developed by the Tunisian software firm Sanabil Med).

An example of an international pioneer is the German Paragon Software Group who offers software for smart phones and specializes in multilingual dictionaries and encyclopedias. Paragon developed the Arab-English dictionary app 'Al Mawrid' in partnership with the Lebanese publishing house Dar El Ilim Lilmalayin.

According to Jeanne Kolesnik, Business Development Director at Paragon Software Group, "Al-Mawrid dictionary for iPhone is particularly popular in the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Egypt and Lebanon. It was listed among the top 100 applications

across the whole App Store in Saudi Arabia and UAE."

### Supplying the School Market

With governments strategically investing in education and developing IT infrastructure in schools and universities, the demand for educational products has been on a constant rise. Earlier this year, Hachette-Antoine, a joint venture between the Hachette Group and the Lebanon-based publishing house Librarie Antoine, hooked up with Promethean to develop the e-learning tool 'YA HALA!' which teaches Arabic as a foreign language. Emile Tyan, Hachette-Antoine's General Manager clarified "We continue developing software for interactive whiteboards. For us, this is a long-term investment, financially and in the sense of human capital. When outsourcing IT development we realize that the developers are learning at the same time we do".

Other white board providers like Smart Technologies have been very active through their regional office in Dubai. Earlier this year, Smart launched an E-Commerce store on its SMART Exchange website (<http://exchange.smarttech.com>).

Ketab Technologies ([www.ketabtech.com](http://www.ketabtech.com)) founded in 2006 in Amman, Jordan, offers all kinds of hardware for classroom use, such as digital pens, interactive boards and sheets as well as a wide range of educational software.

For a more detailed insight into digital publishing in the Arab world and information on existing technology infrastructure, we recommend the study 'Digital publishing in Emerging Countries' by Octavio Kulesz.

*Beatrice Stauffer, Sales Manager at ADIBF was instrumental in introducing the eZone at the fair. She has been attending major digital conferences at international book fairs and is enthusiastic about how digital initiatives translate locally.*



## Addressing Copyright in the Digital Arena Salah Chebaro, Owner, NeelwaFurat (nwf.com)

*What is the state of piracy of Arabic content in the digital arena?*

Piracy is increasing dramatically in the Arab World. I can safely say that more than 50 percent of all media products produced in Arabic are pirated over the internet and that all [REALLY? ALL OF THEM?] best-sellers are pirated over the internet and in paper format. Piracy steals wealth from people who deserve it and gives it to those who don't. We in the Arab World have a big problem with unemployment; solving the piracy issue would definitely help in creating more jobs and promoting an urgently needed intellectual interactivity inside our closed societies, thus elevating the Arab World to a new level of prosperity. On the other hand, this issue, if not resolved, will certainly have a big negative impact on our part of the world.



Salah Chebaro

*What do Arab governments do to tackle piracy?*

Arab governments have actually done a good job of putting in place laws and regulations to limit piracy. The major problem is the implementation of these laws, especially when those very people who benefit from piracy are sometimes connected to people in the government.

*What do publishers do to protect their content?*

Publishers try their best to protect themselves, but their efforts are usually in vain. Since lawyers take a lot of time and money, usually publishers would rather stay neutral and not confront an entity that is actually stealing from them.

*What does the Arab Publishers Association do?*

We are currently trying to establish a new nonprofit organisation which is connected to the rest of the world through IFRO (the International Federation of Intellectual Rights), which will protect publishers in a cost-effective manner since they will be acting as a group and not individually, and thus will help protect both Arabic and foreign media products from piracy inside the Arab World and protect Arabic media products from piracy in the rest of the world.

## The eZone @ADIBF – Be There on Time!



Keeping pace with the fast development of the digital revolution, the ADIBF has been featuring a dedicated area for digital content and new technologies for the publishing industry for two years. Exhibitors offer digitalisation solutions, online platforms for Arabic content, apps for children's book publishers, devices for digital content and much more. Exhibiting companies have the opportunity

to step into the MENA market, where governments are leading major digitalisation projects and investing strategically to make more digital content available in Arabic. Arab publishers have been following international digital initiatives closely and are keen to learn about solutions that help them go digital. It's a new market with great potential and endless opportunities!

