

A Pilot Project Adds Security to Electronic Textbook Publishing

BY JEFFREY R. YOUNG

SOME textbook publishers predict that they'll soon face an ultimatum: Publish on line or perish. But they're having trouble creating technology to keep students from pirating textbook material that is published electronically.

The latest attempt to find a model for distributing electronic textbooks and course packs is a pilot project by Houghton Mifflin, the Follett Corporation, and the State University of New York at Buffalo. Three of the university's summer courses have begun using new electronic textbooks equipped with "digital rights management" features.

Students can view the electronic textbooks using a standard World-Wide Web browser—either Microsoft's Internet Explorer or Netscape's Communicator. But the students first must download a free "plug-in" for their browser software. That is where the rights-management features reside.

The plug-in insures that students can read only the textbooks, or sections of textbooks, that they've paid for. It also helps keep students from passing the texts on to friends. And the software supplies publishers with detailed information about which sections of the

The new software might soon blur the line between textbooks and course packs—bundles of supplementary material. Houghton Mifflin is experimenting with including a variety of "content modules" in its on-line textbooks, adding professors' notes and short articles to the textbook material, says Alison Zetterquist, vice-president for new ventures. In some cases,

the company might include audio and video materials as well.

In the meantime, more and more professors are building their own course Web sites, with "content modules" that they create themselves or pluck from cyberspace. That raises the question of whether publishers need to be involved at all.

Ms. Zetterquist, not surprising-

ly, says there is a continuing need for textbook publishers. "What publishers do is not just print," she says. "We go through extensive development, review, market testing. That's something that's hard to do without a publisher. We feel that our value-added is pretty compelling."

Joseph J. Tufariello, Buffalo's senior vice-provost for educational

technology, said in a statement that students would benefit from the pilot project, by "being taught with the use of CD-ROM-based materials that provide timely up-to-date information, which can be accessed and customized to meet their educational needs."

Follett, which manages college and university bookstores, hopes to distribute the textbooks. ■

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textbooks are most popular with students. The publishers can use such data to refine their textbooks, cutting unpopular sections and expanding popular ones.

For the pilot project, students have been given the texts on CD-ROMs, but Houghton Mifflin hopes to make the material available over the Web by next year. The company declined to send a demonstration copy of any of the textbooks.

Another company, Reciprocal, makes the rights-management software, and it is trying to attract additional textbook publishers as customers (<http://www.reciprocal.com>).

SOFTWARE CONTROLS ACCESS

"The market is prime for these publishers to go ahead and get their content on line," says Matthew P. Moynahan, senior vice-president and general manager of Reciprocal's publishing division. "You have a captive audience of students who have a significant bandwidth, and who are also cost-conscious."

He says the software controls "who can access the text, when they can access it, and for how long they can access it."

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