From printed books to e-books: (cultural) costs and benefits

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An (almost) reassuring view...

printed book and e-text are natural allies...
An (almost) reassuring view...

Printed books offer:
- best reading experience
- unsurpassed ergonomics
- physical durability (under conditions)
- well-established models for rights management
- ‘trusted’ source
An (almost) reassuring view...

E-texts offer:
• tools for text manipulation, analysis, search, encoding…
• easy distribution and duplication
• few physical constraints
• digital durability (under conditions)
• multimedia integration
An (almost) reassuring view...

...the pros of one medium are often the cons of the other
An (almost) reassuring view...

a recent (interesting) example...

Search MILLIONS of pages to find books like never before

Learn more
The e-book threat...

e-books seem both to stem from and to threaten this alliance
What is an e-book?

- Four wrong or only partial answers
  - e-book = electronic text simulating the layout of a book
  - e-book = portable reading device
  - e-book = oxymoron
What is an e-book?

- To get a ‘good’ e-book we need
  - electronic text (encoded, marked-up and with added metadata)
  - user-friendly (hardware) reading device
  - user friendly (software) reading interface
Is the e-book a threat?

- the e-book is a challenge to the ergonomic perfection of printed books
- the e-book aims to be an evolution of our (book-centered) cultural tradition
- if the ergonomic challenge is won, the e-book might actually pose a threat to printed books (not to books as cultural media)
Is the e-book a threat?

- But there is a real threat: the de-objectification of the book
  - due to the fluidity of electronic texts (and hypertexts)
  - due to the perspective of web-based e-books
  - due to software obsolescence
  - due to ‘turn-it-into-ebook’ tools
  - (most important) due to ‘rent-a-book’ policies of Digital Rights Management (DRM)