



# *From Paper to Screen*

## *A Transbook conference*

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# The Future of Digital Children's Publishing

Transmedia storytelling is taking off, but the debate continues as to what digital technology means for the publishing sector. What are the trends and outlooks in digital children's publishing, and what are the strategic implications for creation, technology and the publishing market – three intrinsically -linked issues? This conference provides an overview; of recent changes in a sector shaken up in the last few years by digital technology

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**Vincent Monadé** President of Centre national du livre - CNL **FRANCE**

**Térence Mosca** Director of TM consulting **FRANCE**

**Cyril Laborderie** Project Manager of ERDLab at Cap Digital **FRANCE**

**Jennifer Kotler-Clarke** Vice-President of Research and Evaluation at Sesame workshop - Sesame Street **UNITED STATES**

**Marion Jablonski** Director of Albin Michel Jeunesse **FRANCE**

**Sam Arthur** Co-founder of Nobrow **UNITED KINGDOM**

**Michael Kim** General Director of i-ePUB Inc. **SOUTH KOREA**

**Marianne Durand** General Director of Nathan Jeunesse et Jeux **FRANCE**

**Warren Buckleitner** Editor of Children's Technology Review **UNITED STATES**



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**Transbook**  
*children's literature on the move*



“Digital publishing is profoundly changing the creation process and how we tell children stories. But the real revolution lies with how digital technology is being used by young readers as well as adults”, said Vincent Monadé, President of the CNL (France). In France, people who read e-books spend 59 minutes reading on screen, a practice which remains rather limited, according to recent figures: e-books represent only 1.1% of the market in France, but 11.5% in the UK and 13% in the US. Such differences stem, no doubt, from the complexities and problems involved in publishing and distributing e-books, despite their obvious creative potential.

### TRANSMEDIA: AN ASSET

The act of reading on a digital device generates an incoherent debate, made worse when the subject is educational content: do apps help children’s development? Jennifer Kotler Clarke of the Sesame Workshop (United States) believes so, as long as the content involves transmedia storytelling and strictly adheres to certain theoretical principles.

For decades, Sesame Workshop (which produces the Sesame Street television show) has been developing educational programmes designed to enable children to acquire important knowledge and skills. Each project is based on scientific research which has identified four pre-requisites to effective learning in children: children must be active, engaged, immersed in meaningful content, and the content must be socially interactive.

Does transmedia-based educational content meet these conditions? Telling a story using several platforms and adapting it to the nature of the medium provides a variety of complementary and enriched content a child can use to play, explore, experiment, share and interact with – exactly what he or she needs to learn.

Sesame Street has developed transmedia storytelling on all fronts: in games, a theme park, live shows, a television channel, apps and publishing. Sensitive subjects such as autism, divorce and managing a diet with Cookie Monster are just some of those explored.

According to Jennifer Kotler Clarke, the most important thing in transmedia creation is to put oneself in the children’s shoes, to understand their point of view and produce something that really interests them. The same applies to apps: “you are no longer just an ‘illustrator’ or ‘author’ – you are a psychologist”, insisted Warren Buckleitner, Editor of the Children’s Technology Review and an important contributor to the seminar.

### EXAMPLES OF DIGITAL CONTENT

Currently, digital titles, far from an industrial endeavour, are developed with research and development in mind. Two editors, Marion Jablonski from Albin Michel Jeunesse (France) and Sam Arthur from Nobrow (United Kingdom), have re-published two print titles in digital format: *Les super héros détestent les artichauts* at Albin Michel, and *Professor Astro Cat’s Frontiers of Space* at Nobrow (see the Transbook master class on the subject, held on 6 June 2015).

In both cases, re-publishing the work in digital format added value by adapting and enriching the narration with sound and music features, animation and a high degree of interactivity via games and the option of creating of personalised avatars which can be exported to social media and whose adventures can be followed on Web TV. The book’s pages are not scanned as is, but re-framed for smoother reading and multi-directional navigation.

Albin Michel Jeunesse has also published stand-alone, paper books which come with a free, optional digital add-on that works using image recognition with the book. The idea behind the project was to create a standard format which can be released as a collection, and invite illustrators who are just starting out to explore these new formats with the publisher’s help.

A publisher cannot produce an e-book alone – a new team of developers, musicians, sound engineers and animation professionals is needed. Each publisher adopts their own strategy: Marion Jablonski decided to outsource production to an agency (Les Valseurs), while Sam Arthur created MiniLab, a subsidiary which developed the Professor Astro Cat app. And once the e-book is published, how is it distributed by the publishers?

## DISTRIBUTION: EXAMPLES IN KOREA AND FRANCE

Koreans are avid internet users and view content essentially via streaming. As an example, children use tabs and smartphones 5 to 10 times a week, for an average of 30 minutes at a time, and nearly 80% of children between the ages of 3 to 5 use internet daily.

Major telecoms companies in Korea have tried to meet this demand by commercialising educational tabs and apps, but have not been as successful as hoped. Michael Kim, General Director of digital publisher i-ePub Inc, believes that publishers should take charge of digital publishing, and have been the most intuitive in their publication of hybrid titles which combine paper and app-based textbooks. A subscription system allows readers to download the e-books available on the platform.

In France, enhanced e-books in ePub 3 format and apps are only available in the iBook Store, a single distributor system which limits reading to IOS computers and tabs.

Distribution of such digital works occurs in an environment totally foreign to the world of books, where games – and things being free – is prevalent. Two methods of distribution co-exist: the in-app purchase and the freemium. In-app purchases offer free initial content as a demo and invite the user to purchase the remaining content. In a freemium set-up, the app is offered but users must pay as they make their way through the game.

Nathan Jeunesse modelled its distribution on these systems, explained General Director Marianne Durand, but got around limitations with the principle of preloading: tabs for children are sold with the apps already integrated. However, this method doesn't encourage the user to download other apps.

Nathan Jeunesse also developed a source app format, allowing economies of scale on long-running collections. A series of digital books was released and included an application library operating on an in-app purchase basis. A video adaptation of the apps, distributed via TV box subscriptions and video on demand, is also available. A YouTube channel also publishes videos so as to reach a wider audience, with income generated by advertising.

The retail site T'choupi et moi recently started a service which allows parents to personalise books by adding photos of their children, for example, and order customised print editions.

Distribution methods and reading formats are closely linked and affect the creation and production of e-books, particularly in children's

literature. Shortcomings in distribution systems and formats are an obstacle to sales: "it's kind of like buying the same book twice, in two different stores, and needing two different pairs of glasses to read them", concluded Marianne Durand.

## A STANDARD FORMAT ON THE HORIZON?

EDRLab (the European Digital Reading Lab), which relays the major projects of the IDPF<sup>1</sup> in Europe, is working towards this goal: develop an ePub 2 and 3 standard format and help establish an open source ecosystem. Cap Digital Project Manager Cyril Labordrie explained that EDRLab uses Radium technology, which is based on these interoperable formats and allows any operating system and device to read an e-book, freeing readers from the obligatory commercial platform from which they purchased the title.

DRM difficulties are another subject at the heart of EDRLab's work. This summer, the lab will release DRM LCP – Light Content Protection: a copyright protection system liberated from Amazon, Adobe and Apple and usable by all.

Freedom, interoperability, accessibility are EDRLab's motto. Aside from its technical activities, the association has also decided to promote the ePub format with the aim of developing a genuine European network for e-book design and production which takes into account the real needs of its members and the publishing industry.



<sup>1</sup> The International Digital Publishing Forum is a non-profit association working to establish an e-reading standard association that is open and accessible to all.

TRANSBOOK IS A EUROPEAN PROJECT FOR THE DIGITAL TRANSITION OF THE CHILDREN'S BOOK INDUSTRY

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