

Pioneer in Mobile Apps



A steadfast proponent of XML, Gurvinder Batra is no stranger to the publishing industry. As cofounder and CTO of KiwiTech (kiwitechcorp.com) and formerly of Aptara, he has parlayed his publishing BPO experience into a first-mover advantage in the

world of mobile applications.

With nearly 200 apps to its credit, KiwiTech is on a roll. “Our first market entry is Classics2Go, once a top 10 paid app in the e-book category and now featured in Wiley’s *Incredible iPhone Apps for Dummies*. Another e-book app, Don Quixote, has been ranked #1 in Spain, while The Blind Side app, offering photos and video links, is climbing up the charts,” says Batra. His team also developed the much talked about What to Drink with What You Eat iPhone app with Hachette’s editors, authors, and marketing executives. “Instead of just creating an e-book from the print product, we showcase food and wine pairings in a fun and user-friendly manner.”

Here’s Batra offering some interesting perspectives on the e-book and mobile content space.

What are the biggest game-changers in this segment?

Several factors have led to the rise of e-books, including the development of a universal standard, ePub, improved handheld devices allowing content mobility and interactivity, faster broadband connectivity and, finally, economic pressures forcing publishers to seek digital alternatives. Given all these changes over the years, I believe e-books are here to stay.

Will Apple’s iPad change the e-book industry as we know it?

It will surely revolutionize the publishing space. Its ability to handle complex materials will prompt all publishing segments to go mobile. It offers a multifunctional platform for educational and professional uses besides enabling numerous day-to-day applications. I believe iPad will be very successful.

Is Apple’s agency pricing model a good thing?

The model shifts the control back to the publisher; so, yes, it is a positive thing. It would be interesting to see

how it develops after the iBookstore launch.

Are current publishing standards dynamic enough for our ever-sophisticated gadget world?

XML is now widely accepted in the publishing industry, and some publishers have even asked authors to create content using XML. As for e-books, we have ePub, a simpler yet robust standard that allows publishers, device manufacturers, and other aggregators to distribute content faster. Obviously, ePub must evolve further to cater to much more complex content.

Five years from now, what kind of e-book device will be available, and how will people view e-books?

Mobile technologies have certainly been adopted faster than even the personal computer or the Internet. The new generation expects everything to be in rich digital format, and they want to access information, perform transactions, or read e-books anywhere, any time. Mobile technologies make this possible. By 2015, work will be focused on mobile devices such as the multifunctional iPad. Reading, whether it is fiction or educational titles, will go the same route while also enabling readers to connect to related e-communities simultaneously. Print will still be around, albeit on a much smaller scale.

What is the next big thing on the horizon?

I think that would be the creation of communities, especially of readers with access to books, journals, and other content formats. At KiwiTech, we have created CaféBiblio, a cross-platform that allows students to access textbooks on iPhones and iPads as well as to communicate with their teachers, peers, and others in the academic community. Our goal is to further enrich the learning environment.

Any advice to publishers thinking of moving into e-books and mobile apps?

First of all, publishers must embrace the digital world by offering digital versions of their titles as soon as possible. And they must determine how best to differentiate themselves in a marketplace that is significantly different from the print world. Eventually, all content types will be available digitally, and digital content as a rule must be highly dynamic, as users have got used to a media-rich environment. —T.T.