Multi-Package Distribution of eBooks with Additional Content
A Position Paper for the W3C Workshop on Electronic Books and the Open Web Platform

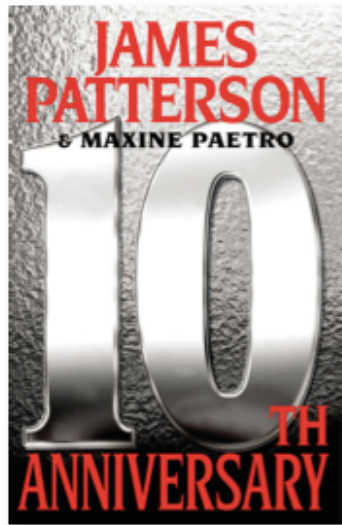Jim Dovey, Kobo Inc.

December 10, 2012

Abstract

eBooks utilizing the ePub3 standard can take advantage of features such as *media overlays* to provide additional content, ancillary to the main content stored in the HTML5/XHTML content documents outlined in the ePub3 specification. This allows, for example, the addition of audio files and SMIL files providing 'read-along' functionality.

It is Kobo's view that having such functionality available only within a single eBook SKU is not ideal, and that a better solution would be to package each self-contained piece of ancillary content in its own package. The main eBook could then have links to optional auxiliary packages to make use of their features, which provides a number of benefits to all involved.

Background

Electronic publications have the potential to bundle a lot of additional features beside the text and images that make up their print counterparts. A potential downside of this integration is the ballooning of an eBook's size and even price. It can also lead to consumer confusion: a copy of The Hobbit could exist in four forms: a regular eBook, an eBook with read-along audio, an eBook containing annotations (e.g. 'The Annotated Hobbit'), and a version with both annotations and audio. Each would have its own SKU and price point.

To demonstrate the size discrepancy, consider the ePub3 read-along edition of *10th Anniversary* by James Patterson and Maxine Paetro. The size of the compressed ePub file is over 200MB, as seen in Figure 1.

10th Anniversary

by Maxine Paetro
Size: 205.3 MB

Features:

ePub3, media-overlay, cover-image

Figure 1: *10th Anniversary* with read-along audio

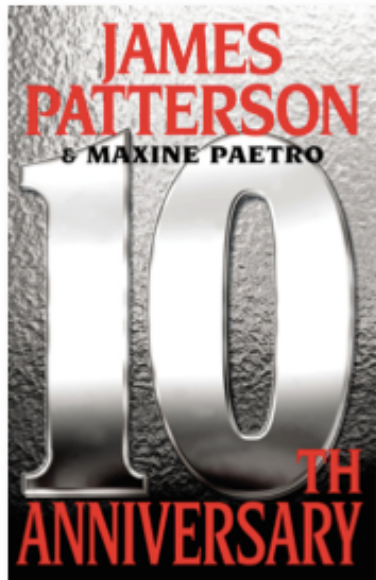The non-audio edition of the eBook, however, is substantially smaller, as evidenced in Figure 2.

At present, a reader might visit a store and see 2 SKUs for the same book, with greatly different prices.

Proposal

It is Kobo's position it would be better and more flexible to make a single SKU available which provides the basic book, and to make the read-along components (the audio and SMIL files) available as a separate, additional package. The same could be said for any other type of additional content, whether audiovisual or textual, such as annotations and liner notes or comments by an author (similar to the 'director's commentary' tracks on DVDs).

The idea provides a number of benefits to all parties involved:

- A publisher can release a 'plain' eBook on the same date as the release of its print counterpart, and can later make the audio content available as an add-on

10th Anniversary

by Maxine Paetro
Size: 2.5 MB

Features:

ePub3, cover-image

Figure 2: *10th Anniversary* without audio content

for existing eBook owners when the audiobook is released on CD. A separate edition of the eBook is no longer necessary, and no delays need be a factor in attempting to release an all-in-one title, since the audio can be added later.

- Stores and content providers gain a way to minimize their SKUs and avoid confusing their customers with multiple copies of the same title.

- Both stores and publishers can benefit through the staggered release of additional content, thus bringing readers back into the fold. The nature of the content can also have distinct marketing benefits; the release of a new book in a series could be accompanied by liner notes or commentary for the previous volume. Similarly, a preview of the new book could be added to the end of the previous volume as is frequently done in new editions of the older books.

- Customers gain access to a powerful à la carte method of purchasing content: they can purchase a book at the regular price, then rather than purchasing both the book and the audio agin to obtain the new data, they can pay a smaller amount to add the audio to their existing edition.

- Collectors or avid readers no longer need to consider waiting for an edition with

extra features– they can buy the book on its release date and pick up the extra content later.

There are other ways in which this form of package linking could be utilized. For instance, part-works could not only provide a link to their next part, should it have been purchased and downloaded, but can actually integrate it. For example, were Stephen King publishing *The Green Mile* as a part-work today (as he did when he originally wrote it in 1995–1997) then each part could not only stand on its own, but it could gradually build into a single book rather than a set of 100-page excerpts— the end result, to the user, would be a single copy of *The Green Mile* in their digital library.

Similarly, magazines like those in which Edgar Rice Burroughs, H. P. Lovecraft, and Arthur C. Clarke serialized their work in the first half of the 20th century could be implemented in a similar manner. A single issue could be a simple package containing stand-alone articles and which references packages containing that issue's serialized excerpts. As above, once a reader has purchased all the issues which comprise a complete story, that story could appear in their library as a publication in its own right.

Position

We at Kobo feel that there are a lot of opportunities in looking at this form of packaging, and we believe that it can be implemented with only modest adjustments to the ePub Open Package Format (OPF) specification. We would welcome debate on the issue, and can provide a detailed technical proposal upon request.