Chapter 4
Designing Resources for IWBs:
The Emerging Roles of Educational Publishers and Materials Writers

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ABSTRACT
The following chapter will be of interest to all those involved in creating resources for the Interactive Whiteboard with a view to commercial publication, either via an established publishing house or via the web as an open resource. It will also inform those who are already involved in digital publishing or who are considering implementing a digital publishing strategy. It is not aimed at providing solutions, but at stimulating publishers and authors to ask the right questions and to consider the management of change that may be required within their company. The chapter will look at the challenge from organizational, creative, production and commercial standpoints. It will conclude with an examination of the emerging role of the teacher as an IWB materials writer, and how new paradigms are emerging which may increasingly mesh the parts played by the practicing user and the commercial publisher of IWB resources.

INTRODUCTION
The growing demand for digital resources in the field of education poses a range of new challenges for mainstream educational publishers. This is especially true for those creating materials intended for the Interactive Whiteboard. This is partly because among all the innovative tools being deployed in the classroom, the IWB has the most rapidly growing presence. There are a number of reasons for its popularity. A full discussion of these issues is outside the scope of this article, but they range from the simple “wow!” factor to the political agenda, with the bulk acquisition and installation of IWBs being presented as visible evidence of government spending on education. At the 2006 IATEFL (International Association for Teachers of English as a Foreign Language) conference, it was mooted that IWBs would “fail” in the marketplace for three basic reasons – high cost, inadequate teacher training and
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poor commercial content (for a discussion of this, see Bax, 2006). The prediction of lack of take up has proved to be anything but true, as increasingly individual schools and entire education ministries rush to provide IWBs for staff and students; but while the costs are falling dramatically (it is now possible to buy an excellent portable IWB for under $600, or even to make one yourself – see Lee, 2007) there remain the twin issues of effective training and medium-appropriate content from commercial publishers.

Demand for appropriate software resources is increasing, yet in business terms publishing for IWBs is unlikely to be a highly profitable revenue stream in its own right. Another factor is the growing expertise of teachers themselves – the more technically aware are quite capable of producing their own quality web-based resources and in effect becoming their own publishers, potentially to a very wide audience. For publishers creating materials for the digital environment new paradigms are needed for both business and editorial operations. My own background is in educational publishing, particularly in the field of English as a Foreign or Second Language, and it is fascinating to observe the new dynamism – and the new challenges – faced by the educational publishing industry as digital content and its delivery becomes increasingly part of the mainstream.

From the business standpoint, commercial publishing for the education and training market has remained largely unchanged over the years. Educational publishing is, overall, a conservative industry. Consequently, many of the publishers currently recognized in the field of IWB software, such as 2Simple (www.2simpleshop.com) and Espresso (www.espresso.co.uk), are what might be termed publishing's “digital natives” – those who have grown up with digital technology and to whom this world is utterly familiar (for more on the term “digital natives”, see Prensky, 2001). These publishers pursue little or no commercial activity outside software publishing and had no existence before the widespread introduction of the IWB and class PCs. They are not involved in major textbook publication, as textbooks and supplementary materials continue to be mainly paper-based (though it will be interesting to see what changes the steadily-growing adoption of e-book players such as the Kindle have on the paper-based textbook market). The business models of such digital publishers depend not on the sale of class adoptions of course books, but on the sale (and renewal) of site licenses – a system whereby a piece of software, such as an IWB resource, is licensed to multiple users within a school for a limited or unlimited period, in return for a relatively substantial (three to four figure) license fee. Critical revenue mass is achieved from sales to multiple institutions, and profitability through sales volume coupled with low costs, other than initial development (the cost of hosting or even CD-ROM storage is negligible compared to the cost of maintaining book stocks in a warehouse depository). There are, of course, many educational publishers with their feet in both the paper and digital camps – notable examples are Macmillan Education, Pearson, Oxford University Press and Cambridge University Press. Alongside the aforementioned digital publishers, which tend to be smaller commercial operations, these well-known publishing houses already have a range of digital material available on CD-ROM or for installation on a local school intranet, featuring interactive games and activities. This chapter is primarily aimed at those working with or for established publishers in the textbook/supplementary materials market, who are relatively new to IWB publishing.

BACKGROUND

Resources for the IWB may be stand-alone products or supplement main course material, which is generally delivered in traditional paper format. In order to contrast the established paper-based publishing model with emerging new paradigms