

Google and Amazon to Put More Books on Cellphones

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More electronic books are coming to mobile phones.

In a move that could bolster the growing popularity of e-books, Google said Thursday that the 1.5 million public domain books it had scanned and made available free on PCs were now accessible on mobile devices like the iPhone and the T-Mobile G1.

Also Thursday, Amazon said that it was working on making the titles for its popular e-book reader, the Kindle, available on a variety of mobile phones. The company, which is expected to unveil a new version of the Kindle next week, did not say when Kindle titles would be available on mobile phones.

"We are excited to make Kindle books available on a range of mobile phones," said Drew Herdener, a spokesman for Amazon. "We are working on that now."

Google's move greatly expands the number of e-books that are available for reading on the go. The Kindle currently offers about 230,000 titles.

But the public domain books available through Google Book Search are not likely to be the most popular titles, as they are older books for which copyrights have expired. In contrast, the Kindle library includes scores of newly released books, including many current best sellers.

Google said it would like to make other books available on mobile devices in the future, including out-of-print titles and current books it scans with the permission of publishing companies.

"This is our first step, but it is an important step," said Frances Haugen, product manager for Google Book Search.

Unlike the version of Google Book Search for PCs, which displays scanned images of book pages, the mobile version simply displays text, allowing users to download printed material more quickly over wireless networks.

Several book reading programs are already available for the iPhone and other mobile devices, including Stanza from Lexcycle and the eReader from Fictionwise. They are quickly growing in popularity.

But just as camera phones have not replaced digital cameras, smartphones are not likely to replace dedicated e-book readers like the Kindle or the Reader from Sony, analysts said. These specialized devices have screens about the size of a paperback book and use a technology that does not require backlighting, which makes them easier to read in most light conditions. They also have longer battery life.

While mobile phones are good for quick access to reading material, their backlit screens are "terrible for long-form reading," said Evan Schnittman, vice president for global business development at Oxford University Press. "It hurts the eyes. The pages of a book are the size they are because of hundreds of years of experience of what works best." Still, over time, the market for reading on cellphones could grow, especially as new, more capable mobile devices become available.

"Consumers will trade a certain amount of quality for convenience and cost," said Michael Gartenberg, an independent technology analyst.

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