

Time to read

... a good Vook!

I am a slavish user of my iPad Gen 1 – as an e-reader. Ok, so I read most books off my iPad... easier when travelling, easier when tucked up in bed. But every now and then I think, if I could only see that scene or talk to the author - just now!

Or would I, indeed, trade my imagination for a quick fix? Well the idea of combining the Internet with reading has its attraction. Yes, I know just what we need in a time when the necessity to be 'still' is gaining more and more momentum in the psychology stakes. However, this convergence of books and digital media (vooks) has developed an e-readership hooked on diets, exercise, gardening, and now, reading for leisure.

Brad Inman (founder of Vook) is in the forefront of those pioneers re-imagining the printed page. With digital media having already changed the nature of news and music, for example, and with the steady rise of e-books, it is little wonder that entrepreneurs such as Inman wanted to re-think the kind of experience that books might one day deliver.

Vooks?

How do we define vooks and, more importantly, how are we integrating this convergence of media and text into our core work of fostering reading enrichment. Or will we bother?

iBraryGuy considers vooks (*Vook adds vonderful new twist to reading!*) as a:

wild, new innovation that takes the text of a well-written book and blends it with high-quality video and the power of the Internet into a single, complete story.

The videos actually enhance what you are reading and you do not have to switch platforms to watch them as you read. There is even a sweet, social dimension to vooks. As you are reading, you can connect with authors, others' reads and even your friends through social media.

The new frontier seems to be a landscape in which all of these media types are combined into a single, self-immersing package (<http://s313714823.onlinehome.us/ibraryguy/?p=339>).

But vooks have their skeptics. Even though they are participatory and interactive and embody today's Gen Y culture, and even though they can engage readers across the learning spectrum, psychologist Maryanne Wolf (*Proust and the Squid*) asks a fair question "Can you any longer read Henry James or George Eliot? Do you have the patience?" Her perspective is supported by the Director of Harvard University Library, Robert Darnton, who says reading is changing and we should at least show some concerns about the loss of sustained reading.

Mosley is another (*Six easy pieces, Devil in blue dress*) doubter. He has no interest in mixing the two mediums and claims he would never allow videos to substitute for prose. He adds,

Reading is one of the few experiences we have outside of relationships in which our cognitive abilities grow ... And our cognitive abilities actually go backwards when we're watching television or doing stuff on computers (AP English Language blog (<http://bit.ly/qfumRe>)).

Another distractor for vooks comes from neuroscience again and this time the focus is on multi-tasking—moving from the book to the computer.

According to UCLA psychologists (<http://bit.ly/pBkiS3>), multitasking while reading slows the brain down and increases the room for errors in comprehension/ learning.

Interesting this 'heat' focused on the video side of the vook. Reflect on picture books and how they have transcended the 'early childhood audiences' to establish a firm foothold in young adult literature. In some ways, the vook could be seen as the next progression.



Image <http://promo.simonandschuster.com/vook/>

And why not? Book trailers are a growing reading activity in schools. With our focus on delivering alternate ways to engage students in reading, vooks might just be the next serious consideration. The video inclusions support so many young people's preferences for reading "through the visual".

Let's face it, as hybrid books, vooks will have its followers and, like Mosley and Darnton, its detractors. Some good points to consider might be that the structure of the book/ media hybrid creates a 'reading-plus experience'. From comments about vooks and reading enrichment gleaned from various blogs, young readers say they feel compelled to read (especially resistant, adolescent male readers). They like the active component—to 'read' a good interactive vook, readers must go back and forth between the book and the website. For example, the reader might read 20 or so pages and then view the next part of the story, before being lead back to the more traditional book format. This is quite an active way to read which fits well into the research on engaging boys, in particular, to read for leisure.

Finally, students who have been engaged with the ever-growing market of vooks say they are intrigued by the new mode of storytelling and express a desire to create their own vooks.

Getting our students to create their own vooks might be something worth considering. Combining traditional print-bound text with interactive online components, it enables the social construction of reading and writing.

PS A really good interview is with Patrick Carmen on the *kidsread* website. He discusses the process involved in developing a vook... fascinating reading (<http://bit.ly/rr2Gs2>).

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