

E-books

In 2004, Sony launched an e-book in Japan. The product made little impact. This month, the company is launching its new e-book Reader. Users can download thousands of titles from the Internet. The question is: will it sell?

- 1 Which book(s) are you reading at the moment? How often do you read a novel? Compare your answer with a partner.
- 2 Study the publicity material. Guess the missing information (a–e). The answers are in the article.

Sony® Reader

A new way to experience reading! Portable. Light. Browse thousands of e-book titles online using the new Connect™ online store. Uses E-ink, a breakthrough in technology. Play music, read blogs and other web pages.

Your Sony® Reader holds (a) books. Price – buy your Reader for only: (b)

Specifications: Weight (c) Length (d) Width (e)

Sony's new e-book Reader

Sales of e-books are growing. However, sales of e-books make up just a tiny per cent of the total book market. Sony want to change that. This month, the company launches its new reader in the US. It is about the size of a paperback book, 175.6 mm long, and 126.6 mm wide. The e-book Reader is portable, weighing just 250 grammes. The device uses E-ink and according to the manufacturer, offers a reading experience which is similar to reading on paper. The Reader recognises different file formats such as pdfs, and allows users to read blogs and play certain MP3 music files.

Is this really an innovative product? There have been several attempts by different companies to make e-books popular, and none have really been successful. In 2004 Sony launched a similar version in Japan. It failed. One reason was the high price. The big difference this time around is the number of e-books which have been made available to read. Sony has done deals with major publishers such as Penguin and

HarperCollins to sell digital e-books via its Connect™ online store.

Is Sony attempting to follow the model of Apple's iTunes by making thousands of books (that publishers have translated into Sony's format) available through downloading? However, there are big differences between storing songs and books. Usually, we only read one book at any given time. Why would anyone wish to carry around the 80 books which can be stored on each device? Perhaps the Reader will attract those users who do need regular access to huge manuals while on the move. Some business users may appreciate the chance to read pdfs.

Sony are making impressive claims for its product, but it is being criticised on Internet forums for continuing to believe that the public want this product. Perhaps the main reason e-books have never taken off is simple: many people prefer to read a book. So the big question is – will the Reader sell? With a current price of \$350, the answer is far from sure.

- 3 Read the whole article. What do you learn about the new e-book Reader?

- 4 Decide if the following words are nouns (N), verbs (V) or both (N / V).

market _____ product _____ launch _____ sales _____ format _____ price _____
 deal _____ download _____ claim _____ access _____ fail _____ impact _____

- 5 Discuss the following questions in small groups. Be ready to report back your ideas to the class.

- (a) Would you buy Sony's e-book Reader? Why / why not?
- (b) Do you think this product will be successful? Why / why not?
- (c) Write a short piece of publicity material which explains the benefits of one of your company's products, or one that you know well. You are going to try and persuade the others in the class to buy the product.