SA Book Fair features impact of eBooks on education

As part of this year's South African Book Fair, the topic of 'the future of eBooks: the impact of the digital eBook phenomenon" will be a key focus.

Riaan Jonck, CEO of Pearson South Africa believes that for the next five years print will retain a role in the South African education system, but that it would be beneficial for South African schools to start to incorporate a digital aspect into their education approach.

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Implementing a digital solution

"While the South African market is expressing an interest in introducing digital content and eBooks, there is still a huge textbook market and there are a number of challenges to overcome before we can fully integrate the eBook into our education system. As such we have yet to experience the full impact of e-publishing in the education sector."

Challenges currently facing South Africa include infrastructure to implement a digital solution, access to eBooks, digital rights to content, cost of digital devices, and training of staff. "Schools, colleges and universities need to be clear upfront about what they want to achieve by going the digital route and how they intend on implementing the measures required by students to access digital material. In addition, staff members will also need to be trained on how to use the device and how to get the most out of it."

The Publishers Association of South Africa (PASA) is hoping to bring these issues to the forefront at the fair. "We hope it highlights the potential positive impact of e-publishing within the education sector thereby opening up the avenue to a new kind of digital book retailing. However, this will require that South African publishers work hand-in-hand with the digital world to successfully reach the end consumer," says Mpuka Radinku, executive director of PASA.

Potential benefits

Jonck is confident that should South Africa overcome the digital divide, the local education system stands to reap the many potential benefits. "eBooks are convenient and portable. They also foster collaboration as they are interactive and allow students to share notes and interact with teachers at a greater level."

Jonck goes on to say that South African corporates could play an important role in bridging that divide. "South African corporates are already playing a role in education. Apple, Samsung and Intel are involved in embedding their products in schools and universities. As long as they are focused on achieving positive outcomes that will support improvement in teaching and learning, corporates should be involved. The ultimate goal should be to encourage the co-existence of print and digital education material," he concludes.

The South African Book Fair takes place from 13-15 June 2014 at the Cape Town International Convention Centre. Tickets will be on sale at the door at a cost of R50, and R20 for pensioners. Children under the age of 18 receive free entry. For more information, go to www.southafricanbookfair.co.za.