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Inkling (Review)

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textbooks—along with self-assessment tools, note-taking, and highlighting features—enhances the user experience. For collaborative learning, users can follow notes from classmates, faculty, and others throughout the text. It also allows discussions visible in a social stream, similar to a social media feed.

Contents

At the time of this writing, the Inkling store offered thirty-four medical titles, with thirty additional medical titles soon to be released, along with five titles in the health sciences category. A broad spectrum of preclinical content is covered, including anatomy, anesthesia, biochemistry, cellular and molecular biology, doctoring, embryology, endocrinology, genetics, histology, immunology, internal medicine, neuroscience, pathology, pharmacology, and physiology [1]. Inkling also offers a wide range of nonmedical categories.

Intended audience

Medical school faculty and students are the target audience for Inkling's preclinical texts. Inkling sells directly to individuals and to institutions. At the time of this writing, they are not targeting medical libraries directly; however, this may change in the near future as they work with publishers and libraries to establish library licensing and purchasing models for Inkling titles.

Major features

Inkling's major features are:

- interactive quizzes and self-assessment tools ("Test Yourself");
- multimedia: high resolution images, audio and video, podcasts, slideshows, three-dimensional models, animations, and more, integrated into the text;
- share and save notes, highlights, discussion within the text;
- tap key terms for definitions;
- intuitive search feature: searches key terms, concepts, figures, and notes;
- integration with learning management systems such as Blackboard and WebCT;

Inkling. Matthew MacInnis, founder and chief executive officer, Inkling Systems, 153 Kearny Street, Fourth Floor, San Francisco, CA 94108; info@inkling.com; <http://www.inkling.com>; free website. Free application available for iPad at App Store; <http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/inkling/id379351586?mt=8>.

Purpose

Inkling strives to build digital textbooks that streamline learning and create an engaging experience for both teachers and students, while keeping prices lower than traditional textbooks by partnering with major publishers such as McGraw-Hill, Wolters Kluwer (LWW), Thieme, Pearson, Elsevier, and more.

General description

Inkling is a cloud-based platform for interactive textbooks, or smartbooks, designed for the iPad. The smartbook concept aims to challenge traditional teaching, learning, and publishing concepts as it engages users in the reading and learning process. Multimedia throughout the

- supplemental information including online-only content; and
- free iPad app in the App Store.

Usability

Inkling's interactive platform is user friendly, and the textbooks are easy to navigate. Major features seem intuitive to access and utilize, especially for users who have experience working with electronic texts and social media platforms. Users who have experienced only print, analog forms may need a bit more time to learn the digital layout; however, Inkling seems to make the transition from print to digital an easy adjustment.

Advantages over other formats

In general, the main advantages for electronic book formats over print formats are convenience, accessibility, and cost. E-books are compact, available on the go, and often less expensive than their print counterparts. Because Inkling creates digitally born textbooks, they are able to capitalize on the e-book format, which allows content producers to incorporate unique features not found in the print version or other digital versions created as portable document format (PDF) files of the print, such as streaming videos, interactive self-assessment tools, and sharing options from within the text.

In addition, Inkling's object-oriented platform allows content to be arranged on cards rather than traditional pages. These cards allow users to seamlessly move through a text without having to flip pages or click a "next" button. Still, cards contain page numbers that correspond to the print version of the text. This is especially useful for finding references to specific information such as citations.

Another advantage of Inkling's digital format is that about 30%–40% of all titles are cheaper to purchase than the print version. Unlike many other e-book formats, Inkling offers individuals the option to buy by the chapter, so users can purchase only the content they need. For institutional purchasing, some volume purchasing discounts are available. In addition, every title provides a free sample chapter, so

users can review a title before buying it. Inkling allows complimentary copies of Inkling titles for librarians, faculty, and administrators, with a cap of 4 free titles per account. All of these options make Inkling textbooks more enticing over the print and even over many other e-book formats.

Deficiencies and disadvantages

As of the time of this writing, the greatest disadvantage to the Inkling platform over other platforms is that Inkling does not offer licensing and purchase models for libraries. Other disadvantages include its device specificity, catering only to the iPad (a web client will soon be released), and the lack of print and export features due to publisher restrictions.

Technological and administration issues

The Inkling platform for the iPad is designed so that complete titles or chapters can be downloaded and saved locally in the Inkling app without losing usability features. Video is the only feature that cannot be downloaded, as it is streamed from the Inkling servers via an Internet connection. Flash is not required to display any of the Inkling content (iPad does not support Flash). Inkling uses HTML5 and JavaScript to deliver and display content that resides in the user account. Users are able to access purchased content on up to two devices at a time. All licenses are perpetual.

Timeliness

With the release of Inkling 2.2, Inkling committed to delivering content updates as soon as they are available. This means that previously purchased content will be updated automatically whenever new information is available. This update addresses a major issue that has been cited against Inkling in some earlier reviews of the platform.

Brief comparison to other similar products

While competitors offer e-books or e-texts that are usually just PDFs taken

from the print books, Inkling takes the content from the publisher and recreates the content in digital form. This allows Inkling to incorporate interactive multimedia into textbooks. Inkling also offers social collaboration within the texts and allows users to "follow" others and share comments. A major competitor to Inkling's medical market, VitalSource, also offers these features. Other competitors include Apple's iBooks, CourseSmart, and Kno.

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Reference

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