

ARTS & BOOKS

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A new chapter in the war between computers and books unfolded in September 2005 when a large American writers association sued Google for using books without permission on its e-library project.

Google, the well-known internet search engine, has been working for months on a massive e-library project : the Google Print Library Project. It consists mainly of scanning a large proportion of the book collections of the greatest American universities, such as the University of Michigan, Harvard University, Stanford University, the New York Public Library and Oxford University. The idea is to enable readers to download these texts via Google. Hence the search engine will make money by selling advertisements on its web pages. But it seems the company never asked the authors' agreement. Hence in mid September 2005, The Authors Guild, the largest association of published writers, filed a lawsuit against the company. Google immediately responded with an official message. Susan Wojcicki, vice president of product management, writes "Google respects copyright. The use we make of all the books we scan through the Library Project is fully consistent with both the fair use doctrine under U.S. copyright law and the principles underlying copyright law itself, which allow everything from parodies to excerpts in book reviews." However Google did put the project on halt, while waiting for the outcome of the lawsuit.

This story is but the latest episode in the epic battle between books and computers. So far books seem to have the upper hand as relatively few e-books are available. Paper supporters rejoice when remembering the pioneering failures of Stephen King's. The world's most widely read author did manage to sell a short-story over the internet, *Riding The Bullet* in March 2000. King made it onto the cover of *Time* where his achievement was hailed as a revolution. However his subsequent attempts at e-books were not quite as successful as his first efforts. When he tried to launch a pay-per-read epistolary novel exclusively on the net, readers and fans alike turned their back on him. Only the first chapters of *The Plant* were posted between July and Nov. 2000. King did not entirely give up on e-books as he then published several books simultaneously in print and on the web. But the results were not very conclusive.

Authors, publishers, and readers still seem to be allergic to e-books, but times might change. Or so does Google bet.

Sources:

"Authors Guild Sues Google, Citing "Massive Copyright Infringement"" www.authorsguild.org 20 September 2005.

"Do-it-yourself.com," *Time* 27 March 2000.

<http://googleblog.blogspot.com>

www.stephenking.com