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Friday, March 14, 2008

## Discovery patents e-book invention

But the Silver Spring company has been mum about its 'new way to distribute books'

by Steve Berberich | Staff Writer

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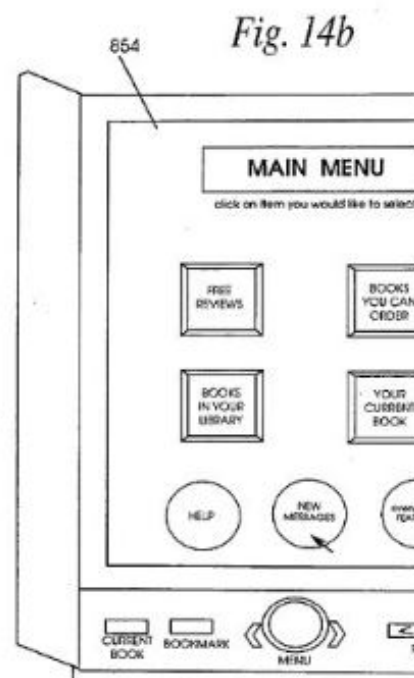
Discovery Communications of Silver Spring may have it in its pipeline.

Though the company has been mum, it is has garnered a patent for a product that may be the latest entry in the e-book market, which has seen slow growth so far. Discovery's patent is for an "electronic book secure communication system" for the home and library.

According to the U.S. Patent & Trademark Office on March 6, Discovery was awarded a patent on an invention for "a new way to distribute books and other textual information to bookstores, libraries and consumers."

Attempts to contact several Discovery management and communications personnel have been unsuccessful, with officials not responding to phone calls or e-mails in the last week by The Gazette's press time.

Still, Discovery's patent application provides comprehensive details on the superiority of the company's e-book system "invention" over currently marketed systems. Discovery's e-book home system is essentially an electronic library in



Illustrations courtesy of U.S. Patent & Trademark Office. These illustrations were part of a patent granted to Communications of Silver Spring for "a new way to and other textual information to bookstores, libraries consumers."





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itself, usable through a portable electronic viewer. The patent includes a book-shaped reading device.

The system places text into a video signal format and a subsystem allows it to be received while readers can select books or periodicals. The patent promises a revolution in the distribution of books. “Not since the introduction of Gutenberg’s movable typeset printing has the world stood on the brink of such a revolution in the distribution of text material. The definition of the word ‘book’ will change drastically in the near future,” the patent information says.

Analysts say they have heard such hyperbole before about e-books. They have had a stop-and-start history since the 1970s. Possibly the widest distribution was through unauthorized conversion of printed books online using on scanners or on Adobe Acrobat’s “capture” feature, without compensation to the author or publisher, according to a roundtable discussion published by PubNewswire.com in November 2004.

Consumers have been able to read e-books on personal and handheld computers, mobile phones and other communication tools.

But in recent years, several companies have marketed special e-book receiving devices, preceding Discovery’s concept.

A portable e-book reader was released by Amazon.com in November. The device, called Kindle, took three years in development, according to Amazon information. It is Amazon’s first consumer electronic device and starts at \$399. The wireless, rechargeable device lets the reader download books, blogs, magazine newspapers to high-resolution electronic paper display that looks and reads like real paper, according to company information, even in bright sunlight.

Jeff Bezos, Amazon.com Founder and CEO said in a press release, “We also wanted to go beyond the physical Kindle is wireless, so whether you’re lying in bed or riding a train, you can think of a book, and have it in less than a second. No computer is needed — you do your shopping directly from the device.”

Amazon offers 101 of 112 current New York Times best sellers and new releases, each for \$9.99. A keyboard allows customers to add notes while reading, editing, deleting and exporting notes, highlights and clipping key passages. They can bookmark pages for future use. In its patent application, Discovery’s reader potentially would also include those functions.

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Analyst James L. McQuivey recently reported on the Kindle, “We love the device, but we hate to break it to that it will be lucky to sell more than 50,000 units in its first year.” He is the principal analyst with the techn market research firm Forrester Research Inc.

McQuivey said Amazon’s price is too high. He added that the Kindle, though solving some publisher and ret problems in marketing e-books, fails to solve readers’ problems. He said paper books still hold the edge in st contrast, portability, tactile experience. McQuivey said, however, that Amazon has “planted its flag in the e-reader space” in anticipation of the technology’s greater popularity. Discovery’s patent is written in a similar accelerate the market.

The most important advance the Kindle offers, said McQuivey, is an ability to tap into high-speed mobile ph networks, instead of synchronizing with a PC, allowing readers to find books from nearly anywhere.

Would communications giant Discovery take it further? Its invention is “a novel combination of new techno involving the television, cable, telephone and computer industries.” Top 10 or 20 book titles could be transm video during normal programming, reads the patent application. “Using the entire video signal, thousands of may be transmitted within just one hour of air time.” Its e-book reader would use a high resolution LCD disp “both read books and to interact with the home library software.”

Meanwhile, e-books so far only represent less than 1 percent of the trade publishing business “even by the n optimistic estimates,” observed McQuivey.

According to the International Digital Publishing Forum in conjunction with the Association of American Pu retail sales of e-books reached \$31.8 million in 2007. Sales increased 59 percent more than the \$20 million in sales. Sales in 2005 were \$10.8 million and in 2004 were \$10 million when Christopher Simmons, founder o Neotrope Press and an e-book publisher lamented the sluggish beginnings of the market.

“For the average joe or jane, however, e-books are still in need of the comfortable reading device, that’s eith affordable, or disposable/recyclable in the form of some type of digital paper with activated ink capsule,” wr Simmons. “With new technologies coming around the corner, the growth of ‘electronic reading’ online, and proliferation of portable multimedia content devices, e-books have the potential to ‘take off’ finally, but it’s i they will ever replace printed books and the “joy of reading” which is so dear to so many.”

Current competitors include Sony, which has only sold a few tens of thousands of its reader device for e-boo according to Sony information. Other e-book reading devices are Cybook from Bookeen, Sigma from Panasc Simputer from the Indian company Amida.

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