

Google starts new chapter in the battle for e-books

The internet giant is set to launch an online book store

By Nick Clark

Google has opened a new flank in the war for the e-book market as executives this week flew to Germany's Frankfurt Book Fair to talk publishers into joining their imminent online book store.

The rise of the e-book has dominated talk at the Frankfurt Book Fair this week, when the technology giant revealed its plans for Google Editions next year. A spokesman for the web giant said: "Google's whole business is based around helping people find the information they need. A large amount of information is not on websites, it is in books, and we want to make sure that these books are not forgotten."

The plan is to launch an online bookstore with about 500,000 titles available to anyone with a web browser in the first half of next year. Google will sell the books itself – taking 37 per cent of the revenues and handing the rest to the publishers – or act as an access point for users to buy through another online retailer with Google keeping a small share of the sales. It wants to create partnerships with thousands of publishers around the world.

Google Editions builds on Google Book Search, the group's plan to scan out-of-print books and make them searchable for internet users. Currently anyone with an internet connection, including some e-readers, can access extracts of all of the 10 million books it has scanned, although only a million or so books not protected by copyright can be downloaded in the form of a PDF file.

Many are predicting that 2010 will be "the year of the e-reader" and the number of devices hitting the market is increasing. There is also the spectre of the much-rumoured Apple "tablet" hanging over the market, which is expected some time next year.