

DEAR EREADER, YOU'RE THE ONE FOR ME

After a rocky start, sales of electronic readers have boomed. Should you buy one now or wait for the even cleverer devices coming our way? InGear reports

If you are reading this on an ereader you received for Christmas, you are in good company. Some 1.3m of the devices were given as presents in Britain — one for every 40 adults. The most popular was Amazon's Kindle, which clocked up worldwide sales of a million a week in December (about the same as the iPad), making it one of the fastest-selling gadgets of all time.

After a long period when sales were flat, it seems we have finally been convinced of the advantages of being able to store and read books, magazines and newspapers (including The Sunday Times) on a single device. In fact, Britain has become the biggest market outside America for Amazon's £89 entry-level Kindle.

It's a trend that is likely to continue because in developmental terms ereaders are still relatively young. This year will see the release of newer, cleverer versions offering, among other features, colour and

touchscreens and the ability to play games, music and videos and to browse the internet.

Expected to arrive in the UK within a few months is a touchscreen version of the Kindle with a higher contrast (but still monochrome) screen. The touchscreen makes it a little easier to use, but a bigger advantage is "X-Ray", a search feature that lets you find content quickly in compatible ebooks. It retails for \$99 (£63) in the US, \$20 more than the regular Kindle.

Later in the year will come Amazon's Kindle Fire, a 7in colour touchscreen device running Android that sells for \$199 in the US. It combines the performance of a tablet with the affordability of an ereader. "Consumers are heading for tablets which they can use as an ebook reader but also as a media player," says Jia Wu of Strategy Analytics, a technology consultancy.

"Amazon's strategy is not to make money on the device but to sell more books and videos. They're driving the

price of ebook readers lower and lower. I can see a £30 Kindle on the horizon."

The Fire has been enthusiastically received in the US and is believed to account for half the 4m Kindle sales in December. Analysts say it is eating into the success of higher-priced tablets such as Apple's iPad, and has lopped 2m-3m off the expected 15m worldwide iPad sales between October and December last year.

The news has fuelled rumours of a smaller, cut-price iPad 3 coming later this year (the cheapest current version of Apple's tablet has a 9.7in screen and costs £399) to go head to head with the new ereaders.

Other tablets coming to the UK include the Nook, expected in March. The Nook range of devices, already on sale in the US for \$99 to \$199, includes one with a monochrome E Ink screen similar to the Kindle's, and a colour touchscreen version similar to the Fire. The Nook is expected to be sold in Waterstone's, giving the high street bookseller the toehold in the ebook market it badly needs (WH Smith has tie-ins with several Kobo ereaders — see panel).

The range of content is also increasing, while the price of books is coming down as the devices are adopted by mainstream customers, as distinct from early adopters.

The hardback version of the Christmas publishing sensation *The Etymologicon*, by Mark Forsyth, is £12.99



The Fire is the first colour Kindle, due in Britain later this year

READING BETWEEN THE LINES

Ebookshops compared	WH Smith	Amazon	Google
Built into	Kobo	Kindle	None
Books (paid)	1.2m	0.9m	0.2m
Books (free)	More than 1m	More than 1m	Nearly 3m
Apps for PCs and smartphones?	Yes	Yes	Yes
Works on other readers?	Yes	No	Yes

Readers compared	Kobo Wireless	Amazon Kindle	Kobo Touch	Apple iPad 2
Price	£70	£89	£100	£400
Screen	6in E Ink	6in E Ink	6in E Ink	9.7in LCD
Touchscreen	No	No	Yes	Yes
Memory	1,000 books	1,400 books	1,000 books	10,000+ books
Connectivity	Wi-fi	Wi-fi	Wi-fi	Wi-fi and 3G
Battery life	10 days	1 month	1 month	2 weeks
Weight	221g	170g	185g	601g

at Waterstone's — but costs just 99p as a Kindle ebook.

WH Smith claims to offer the largest online bookshop, running to 1.2m paid-for titles, with Amazon close behind with 900,000. Both offer more than 1m free books too, while Google has in excess of 3m.

Amazon now sells as many ebooks as it does paperbacks, and all but one of its 10 digital bestsellers costs less than £1. Some of the cost savings are made possible because authors are able to self-publish rather than use traditional publishing houses. In some cases, it's as simple as uploading a text file or Word document. Authors earn up to 70% of an ebook's list price — a much higher rate than with traditional publishing.

For example, the biggest-selling Kindle book of 2011 worldwide was *The Mill River Recluse*, a novel by Darcie Chan, a first-time author. Over on Kobo's bookstore, one of the bestsellers is a thriller by the little-known self-published writer John Locke. Both titles sell for just 99 cents (63p).

A group of publishers have responded to plummeting prices by setting up an industry-wide system in which they set the retail price of books and retailers get a fixed cut of sales. This has been blamed for a jump of as much as 50% in the price of some ebooks in America. The EU is investigating whether the price-fixing agreement is hurting consumers here.

The growth in popularity of ereaders also promises cheaper subscriptions to newspapers and magazines. The Kindle price of *The Sunday Times* — albeit a version that lacks colour photos and some puzzles — is 99p, less than half the price of the paper version, and it is "delivered" wirelessly early each Sunday morning. A multimedia, colour, Kindle Fire-friendly version of the newspaper, similar to the award-winning version already available for the iPad, is being prepared to coincide with the launch of the Fire in the UK.

COMING SOON

Amazon Kindle Touch Due Early 2012
This touch-sensitive Kindle is already outselling its buttoned-up counterpart in America, and should arrive here shortly.

Waterstone's Nook Due March
Waterstone's could get its own ebook reader this spring. The Nook, made by the US bookseller Barnes & Noble, has the best battery life on the market — up to two months.

Amazon Kindle Fire Due Christmas 2012
A UK launch for this all-streaming, all-dancing multimedia tablet is on the cards — but not until Amazon gets its instant video service, cloud music player and Android app store working beyond US shores.

Apple iPad 3 Due 2012
That there will be a new iPad this year is a given. What form — or forms — it will take is less certain.

Analysts suggest two versions are being readied: an upgrade to the existing tablet, and a smaller, more affordable iPad to meet the challenge of the Fire.

PLANET OF THE APPS

Matt Bingham
THIS WEEK
Tinkering with videos



ACTION MOVIE FX Free; iPhone

There are plenty of apps that allow you to modify still photos taken with your mobile, but few for video. An exception is *Action Movie FX*, which promises to add "Hollywood special effects" to your videos. It's no idle boast, as the app was made by the production company of JJ Abrams, director of *Star Trek*.

Use it to shoot a video then select an effect — a missile attack and a falling car are supplied; others cost 69p a pair — and choose how and when to position it. So a boring monologue can be curtailed by a huge explosion, or a street enlivened by a people carrier dropping out of the sky. With practice you can make a realistic-looking clip to email or post on Facebook.

iSUPR8 £1.49; iPhone, iPad

Instagram, which makes photos look as if they had been taken by a

Box Brownie, has been a huge hit for the iPhone. *iSUPR8* aims to do the same for video, by modifying footage to make it jumpy, grainy, weirdly coloured and speckled with hairs and dust — just as if it had been taken on an ageing Super 8 film camera.

The results give an authentic look to your clips and, unlike *Action Movie FX*, it allows you to apply the effects to existing footage stored on your phone or tablet and upload clips to Twitter.

VIDEOCAM ILLUSION Free; Android

Video-processing apps for Apple devices only work on footage after you've shot it. Not so *VideoCam Illusion* for Android, which shows you what it's doing as you film. Choose from five special effects, such as "light tunnel", which makes it look like you're speeding, and six filters — one of which, "pencil" mode, is jaw-dropping, taking what the

camera is seeing and applying a hand-drawn look to it. Some users report that the saved footage can turn out to be juddery due to dropped frames, but our powerful dual-core Motorola Razr phone had no such problem.

COACH'S EYE £2.99; iPhone

Here's a clever idea. Take some video with this app and you can replay it, slow down the frame rate — or freeze it altogether — then use the tools provided to draw on top of the footage and write notes too. You can then email the annotated video, or upload it to YouTube. It's meant as a coaching tool for athletes, golfers and the like, but would be fun for everyone — although the price might put off casual purchasers.

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For the definitive guide to apps and games, go to thesundaytimes.co.uk/theapplist

DON'T PANIC

Your tech problems solved by our experts

Q I put my entire music collection into my iTunes library and then onto my iPod, but a few months later I accidentally wiped the lot from the PC. Is it possible to take the tracks off the iPod and put them back onto the computer?
D.J. Pleasley, Derbyshire

Windows). Click the View tab and find the option for "Hidden files and folders". Tick it and select OK.

A new folder will now have appeared on the iPod, called iPod_Control. Open the folder, find the sub-folder called Music and drag it across to your PC. This will copy all the music held on the player.

Now open iTunes again and select "Add folder to library" from the File menu and point it at the Music folder you copied across. Your music collection will soon be imported back into iTunes.

Tony Smith

pattern, meaning I have to drag them back to their original positions. How can I make them stick?
FC, Bedford

A This is probably a result of one or more programs or games you run changing the screen to a lower resolution. When this happens, the PC will reshuffle whatever's on the desktop to keep everything in view, but it's failing to restore the icons to their original positions once the screen returns to its normal resolution.

The solution is to download DesktopOK, free from softwareok.com. This clever software lets you store the positions of your desktop icons on a range of screen resolutions, through which you can cycle at the click of a button. As an added bonus you can set it to hide selected icons to help keep the computer's desktop looking pristine — perhaps for when your boss happens to wander by. **Nigel Powell**

Email your tech queries to dontpanic@sunday-times.co.uk

GAMES

New titles this week



BOOM STREET Nintendo Wii; £30. Age 3

Tired of playing traditional board games over Christmas? Try a virtual board game instead. *Boom Street* takes its inspiration from *Monopoly* and adds a dash of genuine financial strategy. Up to four players use the Wii controller to roll a die on the screen, moving their colourful characters around a board and using in-game cash to buy property. So far, so much like *Monopoly*, but there's a twist in this digital land grab: because you can buy shares in "districts" — areas of the board where other players have properties — you can start to affect the value of their portfolios. If a rival is becoming too successful, purchase shares in their district, and then dump the stock, pocketing a profit before the shares drop in value. It's a clever idea that you'd need a degree in accountancy to keep track of in real life, but is handled instantly by the console. Just like investment banking — without the bonuses. **Steve O'Rourke**

INFINITY BLADE II iPhone, iPad, iPod Touch; £4.99. Age 9

The first *Infinity Blade* game set a benchmark for iPhone and iPad graphics. The visuals in its sequel are as stunning as before, but now the gameplay has considerably more depth.

Once again you take the role of an armoured warrior, wielding swords and magic against a succession of fantasy monsters and human fighters, earning experience and gold as you go. This time around, an involving and twisting storyline connects these fights, which are visceral, one-on-one affairs that require you to dodge, block and parry attacks before laying into your foe, all accompanied by growling dialogue and tremendous sound effects that are best appreciated over headphones. Also new is an added flexibility with weapons, and we are promised that "clash mobs", or multiplayer fights, will be coming soon. Just make sure you've got a gigabyte of space to spare for the download. **Stuart Dredge**

CALL OF DUTY: BLACK OPS ZOMBIES iPhone, iPad, iPod Touch; £4.99. Age 17

The *Call of Duty* games might be kings of the console but the series has struggled to make a mark on the iPhone and iPad — in part because the titles seem limited compared with their sprawling console equivalents. Which might be why this spin-off concentrates on just one aspect of the combat simplified and work very well on the touchscreen, and there are plenty of maps to keep your interest up. As with any zombie game, though, it's not for the gore-averse. **Stuart Dredge**

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