



Dawn of the digital book

Several companies are anticipating the iPod of the literary world. How will this change affect authors and the publishing industry?

Caroline Kean, partner and head of litigation, says the digitisation of books is inevitable. "The publishing world should learn from the music industry that you should embrace it and make it work for you rather than fight it." She says authors are understandably concerned about copyright infringement but material can be safeguarded on the net by DRM technology which wraps up the authorised content to control further distribution.

On the question of whether the copyright laws sufficiently robust to deal with the digital age, the answer is not so straightforward she says. "Yes, in the case of legitimate companies such as Amazon and even Google which are coming under increasing attacks by rights owners. They are now looking to structure deals with those rights owners so we are moving into a more regulated space than we have had in the past. But no, because, inevitably, there will be plagiarism and piracy, as with any other media put on the net, and there is little that you can do to stop it effectively. You can pick people off one at a time and get particular sites closed down and awards for damages if your copyright is infringed. But the scope of the internet is so vast and so many people are dealing internationally that the cost of closing them down is, in many cases, frankly not worth it."

The key is to keep potential problems in proportion she notes. "There is a lot of mystique about the internet which frightens people. What you have to do is get ahead of the game and exploit it so you can regard piracy as just an occupational hazard."

See "Dawn of the digital book" The Guardian, 10 December 2007 for further details.