

A Little Lite Reading

By Jan Howells, ARM



Foxit Software has entered the e-reading device market with its first generation ARM-powered eSlick reader, which focuses on support for ebooks that use PDF as a first choice file format. Designed to be easy on the eyes, it uses an electronic-paper display technology that provides a sharp, black and white screen that looks and reads like it would on real paper, according to its maker.

Now you can forget about being weighted down with hefty novels, magazines and files of documents to sift through when you are on the move - you can now pack them all into a 6.4-ounce (180g) device that is thinner and lighter than a typical paperback. The eSlick from Foxit Software is not the first on the block - it is going head to head with the Amazon Kindle and Sony Reader. However, it claims to be very versatile and the cheapest in its class with a \$259.99 introductory price tag. Foxit has undoubtedly captured the imagination of consumers.

Via Foxit's PDF generation and viewing technology, users can read their favorite newspapers, magazines and novels or go through work documents in PDF format with a one-button click. Foxit's PDF creator converts printable documents in TXT, PPT, DOC, XLS and HTML formats into a PDF format and downloads to the eSlick device in less than one minute, according to Foxit. Via the pre-installed Foxit Reader users can magnify pages from 50% - 400%. The reflow mode allows users to read text that has been automatically reorganized to fit the screen size and control the font size from a menu.

In addition, users can download digital books from online libraries and eBook stores and transfer them to the eSlick. The eSlick is built on a Samsung S3C2440 ARM® based processor running at 400MHz. "We went for a design that has a proven working record," explained Roger Diaz, Director of Business Development at Foxit Software. "Of course the ARM platform is very important - it provides all the process power we need to render complicated PDF files. Power consumption is very important because battery time is one of the major concerns on eBook reading devices."

The eSlick has an internal memory of 128MB and comes with a 2 GB SD card - with support for up to 4 GB - allowing consumers to carry a library of up to one thousand books in the device. The 6-inch screen utilises an E Ink Vizplex electronic-paper display technology that provides a 4-level gray scale screen at 600 x 800 resolution that reads like it would on traditional paper. Reading with eSlick in sunlight is the same as reading at home, since light reflects off words and images on the screen rather than shone with a backlight. The eSlick screen does not have the angle-of-view issue associated with LCD screens, which means comfortable reading for a longer time and does not strain the eyes. While there are other ebooks on the market, Foxit believes that the eSlick is out in front in the PDF stakes, as it has specifically been designed for the format, featuring reflow capabilities as well as document creation and editing. "eSlick is the only electronic book or document reader that supports PDF very well and although the current version works with just PDF and Text, development on the eReader, ePub and mobipocket is on going," explained Diaz. "Image formats like BMP, JPG, GIF, PNG will also be supported. There are plans to offer support for office formats such as DOC, PPT, XLS. Additionally,

eSlick comes with software that converts any printable documents into PDF."

Based on E-ink technology, the eSlick does not use any power to maintain a page display - it only calls for a power charge when an image is changed. A single Lithium battery charge provides up to 8,000 pages of continuous reading, according to Foxit Software. The eSlick battery fully charges in three to four hours. The eSlick runs on a Linux operating system. "We have been working with embedded Linux for years and we feel comfortable with using it," Diaz explained.

For anyone who cannot take library silence and likes music while they read, the eSlick boasts a built-in MP3 player. MP3 files can be transferred from a computer onto the device via an USB stick. Once downloaded, the user simply presses the music button on eSlick to go to an MP3 folder and bring up favorite tracks.

The device has a headphones port and ships with a set of headphones, so you do not have to disturb others as you listen while you read!

The initial version of the eSlick lacks wireless connectivity, so users cannot get automatic newspaper deliver direct to the device. However, for users who want a lightweight device to read books and their own documents on, wireless is not essential.

The big question is will e-readers kill off paper books. "I don't think that they will totally go away, but the development of electronic readers like eSlick will give everyone an option to select how they read their books and documents," Diaz concluded.

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