

# IF:Book: A Think Tank Explores the Future of the Book

Chris Meade is director of IF:Book UK, the Institute for the Future of the Book, [www.ifbook.co.uk](http://www.ifbook.co.uk), which is exploring how the convergence of the written word and new media will forge new forms of expression. “A major consequence of the shift to digital is the addition of graphical, audio and video elements to the written word,” says Meade. “More profound, however, is the book’s reinvention in a networked environment.” Meade sees this new form of networked book as something not bound by time or space. He explains that this new type of book is now an evolving entity that involves readers, authors and texts. “We’re creating something that’s always a work in progress,” Meade says.

In his view, we’re in the very early stages of this shift with many industries vying for control over content. “A lot of publishers are trying to make a straightforward shift to digital in the form of ebooks, but the most exciting thing now is with what can happen on a tablet. We’re also seeing an amazing transfer of power to the creators, and we’re all in thrall to the search engine. Now, an individual or group can create something and then spread the url directly, without needing anyone else to be a part of it.”

In terms of development, Meade says, “A lot of people say you need to understand how to code to really make something today, but on the other hand, there are more tools coming along that make it easier to create. It’s important for authors and illustrators to be creative and to experiment. They need to get confident about creating stories in this medium, and people are beginning to get the hang of how to develop for an app. We’re seeing an amazing transformation in a very short period of time, including with our audience, many of whom a year ago said they wouldn’t read on screens, but now they’re doing it.

“I think we’re waiting for a phenomenon of genius to appear – much like a Harry Potter for the screen, a literary work born digitally that really uses the capabilities of the device. Some artists like David Hockney, [www.davidhockney.com/art.shtml](http://www.davidhockney.com/art.shtml), who uses iPad and video cameras to create his art, are already pushing the boundaries of what can be done. The tablet is where the reading experience and multimedia come together,” says Meade. “I believe we’re at a tipping point.”

According to Meade, individuals pursuing work in this area should check out the New Media Writing Prize, [www.newmediawritingprize.co.uk](http://www.newmediawritingprize.co.uk)