

Tizra Media Backgrounder

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What is Tizra?

Tizra is a young company with a simple premise: The best way to create successful online information products is to put the right tools directly into the hands of people who really understand the content and its potential users. This might seem obvious, but after years developing custom sites for organizations like Oxford University Press, McGraw-Hill and The World Bank, Tizra's founders felt the available approaches fell short. Publishers who really wanted control were stuck with custom software. And publishers who couldn't afford custom software gave up control over their online businesses...or waited and hoped for a better option.

Tizra was founded in 2006 with a relentless focus on solving this problem. Tizra Publisher is the first product to result. The initial release is geared toward adding value to the vast stores of PDF in publisher inventories, however the underlying Tizra platform was designed from the outset with other content formats in mind, ranging from .epub to MP3 to Microsoft Word.

What is Tizra Publisher?

You could summarize Tizra Publisher with buzzwords like "white labeled online information storefront," or "role based knowledge management portal," but it's probably better to start simply by listing a few of the things a publisher gets the moment they open an account:

- 1) Their own publications website with its own web address
- 2) Ecommerce and content management features that let them sell online books by the chapter, the page, or in any sort of collection they want to combine pages into.
- 3) Discoverability features that let them make products findable in Google and other search engines.
- 4) Design customization features that let them completely re-skin and re-organize the site so it looks and works as they want it to using a drag and drop interface and standard CSS web design tools. They can even apply different branding to different parts of the site.
- 5) An online book reading interface that solves usability problems associated with online PDF, without making users learn new software. (It also works on web enabled handhelds like the iPhone.)
- 6) A web control panel that lets publishers manage all the above features without software developers, sysadmins or other IT support.

The publisher can start to put these features to work literally in minutes. Step by step videos showing how are on the Tizra website at...

<http://tizra.com/index.php?page=tour>

The first step is to upload a PDF file, which the system immediately splits into individual pages and indexes so it can be searched. The system also extracts any metadata in the file—like title, author or table of contents entries—so they don't have to be entered by hand. At this point, the publisher can simply click the "Publish" button and the book will be accessible online in an easily browsable and searchable web format. Or they can enter a price and promotional blurb and make the book available for sale. Click another button and the full text is available for indexing by Google and other search engines. Tizra handles credit card transactions, or on some billing plans gives publishers the option of integrating with their own payment processing systems.

At this point, the publisher is open for business with a simple but effective digital book selling site, but it's where they can go from here that really sets Tizra Publisher apart.

How is Tizra Publisher different?

Tizra's web based Software as a Service approach is a dramatic departure from traditional custom software. There's no initial software development investment or lead time, no complex RFPs or project management, no software installs, no IT staffing or infrastructure cost and no software maintenance costs. Tizra hosts everything on its own servers, and deploys upgrades to all users on a regular basis.

While there are other ways to put books online without custom software, all of them impose hard limits on the publisher's ability to build brand equity online. Standardized online publishing offerings such as Amazon Shorts, Kindle and the Google Book Search Partner program are all geared toward fitting books into rigid pre-established frameworks under another company's banner. The identities of books and their publishers are reduced to thumbnails of covers and logos, presented alongside content from many other sources. Ultimately the brands that end up strengthened as destinations in users' minds are those of Amazon and Google.

Also, in a market where the best practices are still emerging, the ability to test and learn quickly is crucial, and neither Amazon nor Google allow publishers anything like the freedom to remix and experiment with different combinations of content, pricing and merchandising that Tizra Publisher does.

With Tizra Publisher, publishers can sell any subsection of a book, down to the individual page, or they can group selections of content into larger collections by topic, author, or other theme. Sales terms are also easy to experiment with. Currently, publishers can offer pay per view or subscription access with variable duration and pricing, and can offer special terms to members of selected user groups. They can also offer access to corporate or institutional accounts, with IP based authentication or individual logins, and with the ability to specify a maximum number of concurrencies or "seats." And they can let users

buy access to downloadable, watermarked versions of selected sections of documents for offline reading and printing.

All of this power and flexibility is available to non-technical users through one simple control panel that makes it possible to manage branding, sales offers, documents and document subsections with tagging and drag and drop tools familiar from consumer web applications like Flickr, Delicious and Blogger.

For software developers who want to integrate Tizra Publisher's capabilities with other websites, there is also a REST API, which makes it possible to create seamless user experiences, such as single sign-on and shopping carts that work across multiple websites.

It's worth noting as well that currently Google does not offer sales of digital books at all—just links to other bookselling sites. The only direct source of income for publishers is a share of advertising revenue. (Tizra Publisher customers can *also* earn ad income by placing Google AdSense ads alongside their book content if they want.)

How are customers using Tizra Publisher?

Though MIT Press is one of the top university presses in America, Tizra Publisher still offers advantages over what it would be practical for them to develop in house. Chief among these are speed and flexibility. They can test new product ideas almost as quickly as they can conceive them, rather than waiting weeks for implementation. MIT Press also demonstrates confidence that the platform is robust and secure enough to handle hundreds of titles, and large-scale commercial traffic. Their recently launched Tizra Publisher is called CISnet...

<http://cisnet.mit.edu>

One of the first publishers to open a site for business using Tizra Publisher was Cabazon Books, a tiny publisher of a beautifully designed series of city guides called the eat.shop guides. Cabazon has a very distinctive design sensibility, and Tizra Publisher was able to match it so their Tizra Publisher online books became a true extension of the eat.shop brand. For example, here's a page on their Tizra-hosted site...

<http://onlinebooks.eatshopguides.com/pageview/hvhp/20t4i/119eg/11>

The eat.shop books are good exemplars because their structure very neatly lends itself to a great many repackaging ideas—each book is divided into from 87 to 132 restaurant and store writeups, each occupying one spread. They are starting off simply by selling each online book at a discount off the print price (\$10 vs. \$14.95 plus shipping), and with a one-year subscription offer which gives access to all of the guides (8 at the moment, and 9 more soon to come). At \$50 this is a good deal both for publisher and purchaser, particularly given viewing hundreds of searchable reviews on a handheld ([see iPhone photo](#)) is a pretty nice alternative to schlepping printed travel books around.

Another early adopter is the New York Botanical Garden Press, which with three journals, five book series and more than 200 books is one of the largest publishers at any botanical garden in the world. Their Tizra Publisher site went live this past summer with graphic design matching rebranding the press applied at the same time...

<http://ebooks.nybgpress.org>

When will Tizra Publisher be available?

Tizra Publisher is available now and is constantly being enhanced with new capabilities. For updates, check the Tizra blog...

<http://blog.tizra.com>

Who is Tizra?

Dr. David Durand, CEO

David has been working with markup languages and hypertext since 1984, contributing to standards including XML, XLink, WebDAV, and TEI. With Steven DeRose he is co-author of *Making Hypermedia Work: A User's Guide to HyTime*. He has worked on projects for West, McGraw-Hill, the European Molecular Biology Organization (E-BioSci, ORIEL), IBM, and Sun, among others. He has a PhD in Computer Science from Boston University, and until this year was Adjunct Assistant Professor of Computer Science at Brown University.

Abe Dane, President & COO

Abe has been working in publishing and e-commerce for 20 years, at Popular Mechanics, Hearst New Media, MIT, and Ingenta. At Hearst in 1994, he launched the company's first magazine branded web site, and then was founding editor of HomeArts, a magazine portal that became one of the web's top ad revenue earners. He then started his own company, which developed a photo e-commerce system sold to Eastman Kodak. At Ingenta, he worked on projects for organizations including Oxford University Press and Gale, and headed development of information commerce and custom website software. Prior to 1994, he was a technology journalist, reporting from Sarajevo, the Arctic and the back seat of an F-15 fighter for Popular Mechanics. His work earned an MIT Knight Science Journalism Fellowship in 1993.