

News digest

Book publishers take steps to electronic distribution

1 NEW YORK (AP) — Three book publishers announced electronic distribution ventures on Tuesday, a sign the industry is getting serious about making books available digitally for personal computers and handheld devices.

Random House Inc. made best-selling author Michael Crichton's novel "Timeline" available for free online at barnesandnoble.com but only to users of handheld computers with a Microsoft operating system.

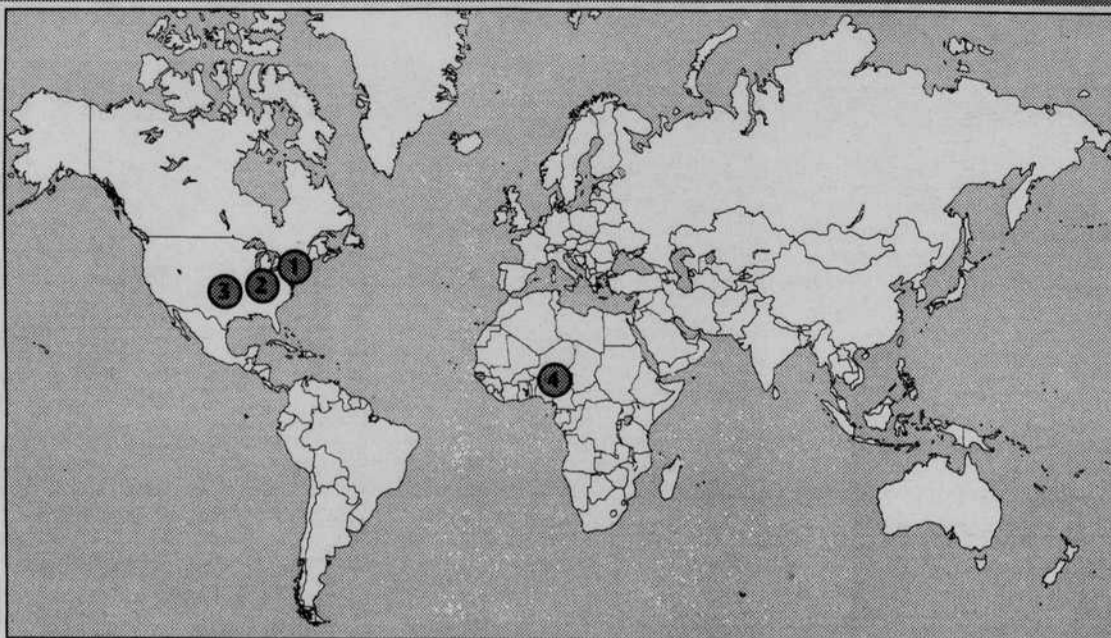
Also teaming up with Microsoft is Simon & Schuster Inc., which saw about half a million downloads when it released a short story by Stephen King online two months ago. On Tuesday, it released 15 Star Trek titles, saying the books would appeal to the "early adopters" of technology.

Separately, Time Warner said it had formed an electronic publishing division. It will solicit manuscripts for books and shorter pieces at a Web site that the company hopes to launch early next year. The site will also sell online versions of the books.

Two recent developments are pushing the publishing industry to move toward online distribution, analysts say.

One is the success of King's electronic book, the first online release by a big-name author, which demonstrated there is a market for e-books. The second is the growing online exchange — and piracy — of music, made easy by file-sharing programs such as Napster.

The new electronic books use encryption technology from Microsoft and Xerox aimed at preventing copying and printing.



Western Kentucky town hit by tornado Tuesday

2 LEITCHFIELD, Ky. (AP) — A storm that spawned three tornadoes ripped through this small western Kentucky town Tuesday, damaging homes and buildings, knocking out power and injuring at least 11 people.

The midafternoon storm hopped across town, hitting an industrial park and residential neighborhoods. At least five factories sustained heavy damage.

"Portions of buildings have been pretty well demolished," said city public works director Darrell Harrell.

The storm demolished one corner of a factory that produces office furniture, said William Thomason, mayor of this town of 6,500. Employees had about five minutes warning and reached shelter before the storm struck, he said.

Elsewhere in town, the storm

upended mobile homes, toppled trees and power lines and damaged roofs on many houses.

Web ticket seller refunds late or canceled flights

3 DALLAS (AP) — An Internet travel agency is hoping to generate ticket sales by offering partial refunds to airline passengers whose flights are late or canceled, whose luggage gets lost or who don't get the meal they wanted.

The offer was announced Tuesday by biztravel.com. It applies to flights on American, Continental, US Airways, British Airways and Air France. Continental and British Air are minority investors in biztravel.

Biztravel promises \$100 refunds for flights that arrive more than 30 minutes late, \$200 for delays of an hour or more, and full refunds for delays of more than two hours or flight-day cancellations because of something other

than mechanical problems.

It also promises smaller refunds for lost luggage, for seat assignments that are not honored or if a passenger doesn't get his choice of entree in first- or business class.

Customers will have 24 hours to file by phone or over the Internet for their refunds.

Analysts called the promotion as a huge gamble. They wondered how the company will make money with a refund offer far more generous than those offered by the airlines themselves.

Airlines rarely compensate travelers for weather or traffic-control delays, though passengers who are bumped from a flight are sometimes given a free hotel room.

"It's a pretty bold move," said Tom Parsons, editor of Bestfares.com, an online discount travel agency. "When you get into the busy summer season and the airlines are packing those planes pretty full, all it takes is one little

storm to put all kinds of delays throughout the system."

The man behind the promotion, Hal Rosenbluth, is chief executive of Rosenbluth International, a \$4.5 billion travel agency, which bought a majority interest in biztravel last summer.

Up to 100 killed as ethnic fighting rages in Nigeria

4 LAGOS, Nigeria (AP) — Christians and Muslims clashed for a second day Tuesday in the northern city of Kaduna, burning homes and places of worship. Officials said the death toll climbed to 100 despite a heavy presence by security forces.

After the second day of fighting in Kaduna, hundreds of residents fled south, carrying their belongings in bundles on their heads. Others took refuge in police and army barracks as homes and places of worship were torched and went up in smoke, witnesses said.

Kaduna State Governor Ahmed Mohammed Makarfi imposed an 8 p.m. to 8 a.m. curfew in a bid to contain violence, and an uneasy calm returned to the city shortly before the curfew took effect.

The fighting was a revival of bitter religious bloodletting touched off in Kaduna in February by plans to implement Islamic law, or sharia, in some northern states. Up to 2,000 died in the earlier fighting, many of them in Kaduna.

The clashes broke out Monday after some residents in a predominantly Christian neighborhood blamed Muslims for an earlier killing of a local man, police commissioner Mohammed Shehu said. Armed with clubs, stones and machetes, they attacked and burned homes of Muslims, who quickly launched reprisals.

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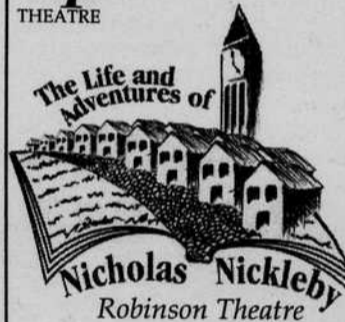
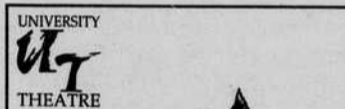
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