

DRM Strategies Scenarios

For or against DRMs ?

Before answering right away, let's analyze the situation. Let's use a simple model : writers want readers to pay for reading their ebooks. (We leave other actors away for a while).

The writer's choices

An eBook writer has two possible choices:

1. **Security** : if he is afraid his book being hacked, he wants to protect it. Among all possible protection techniques, the DRM looks the most practical. He'll find a publication platform which will guarantee the protection of his work.
2. **Trust** : if the writer trusts his readers, he could decide to leave his document in a open format, DRM free. He than hopes that all readers aren't pirates and enough of them will pay for his work. This writer has been thinking about if pirates cost more or less than a security system.

The reader's choices

A reader who wants to read eBooks also has two possibilities :

1. **Surrender** to DRMs: because this reader has some technological preference (iPad, Kindle...) and trusts this supplier to provide him a global satisfaction, this reader accepts to abandon certain advantages of eBooks in favor of DRMs. He is aware there is a lock-in risk, that it will be more complex to share or give eBooks to others or when he changes his eReader. Nevertheless he trusts his eReader supplier.
2. **Refuse** DRMs : This reader is against DRMs because he finds that it's against his reader's freedom. He wants to be sure to be able to tranfer the eBook he bought on another machine, another reader, in an other format...



If we consider the combinations of the 2 strategies for the reader and the writer, one can consider 4 DRM strategies scenarios (see table here under).

4 DRM Strategies Scenarios		Readers	
		Surrender (Ok to DRMs)	Refusal (No to DRMs)
Writers	Security (with DRM)	1. Power to the Distribution Platforms (eBookStores like Apple, Amazon,...)	3. Impossible Love
	Trust (without DRM)	2. Hack Zone	4. Blind Trust

Scenario 1 : Security and Surrender : Power to the distribution platforms

In this scenario, the writer wants to use DRMs and the reader agrees. Everything is fine ! Maybe not. Let's observe that they both very much depend on the distribution platform which establishes the digital rights. The DRM platform can require an exclusivity to the writer. Obtaining a copy after a loss could be priced too high for the reader...

Scenario 2 : Trust and Surrender : Hack Zone

If a writer doesn't want to impose DRMs to his readers, he risks to loose some potential readers : those who have bought a proprietary eReader (Kindle, iPad...). Being able to read DRM-free eBooks when they are not purchased via the distribution platform will require a lot of hacking for both the writer and the reader. The writers can make use of an application on each of the AppStores if it is allowed or make many format conversions to support all systems, especially if PDF or ePub aren't fully supported. If the writer doesn't solve that problem for the reader, the reader will have to hack the eBook by himself and will than maybe decide not pay for it because of all the work needed for being able to finally read this eBook. A solution to prevent the hacking work is to force all eReaders manufacturers to support open standards.



Scenario 3 : Sécurité et Refusal : The Impossible Love

If a writer absolutely wants a DRM on his eBook and if the reader refuses them, we have a loose-loose situation that I call « Impossible Love ». The reader is probably interested by buying the book, the writer wants to sell it but their principles makes any deal impossible. Personally, with my iRex DR1000S and running Linux on my PC, I'm in Impossible Love with a lot of eBook vendors (mostly those based on Adobe and Apple).

Scenario 4 : Trust et Refusal : The Blind Trust

The write who dares to publish his work without DRMs allows readers who refuse DRM to read his eBooks. The writer will have to accept that some readers will never pay for his book. Let's note it's already the case for paper books : we have all read books we have not paid – lended or given... This system is only working if there exists a sufficient proportion of honest people who recognize the value of an eBook and are willing to pay for it.

Maybe there are ways to incent people to be honest – what am I writing here ? :-). Some theories pretend it's impossible to protect a digital asset 100% with systems like a DRM. Indeed, how to avoid that pirates (or Google ;-) scans the eBook via screen captures combined with OCR, for example. If you wan to sell the eBook, complementary paying services should be offered. If Apple still sells music, isn't it thanks to the very goog complementarity of the iPod/iTunes couple with its « cool image » ? That's service.

Hybrid Scenario : Security than Trust ?

Of course, the optimal system will be a combination of the 4 scenarios. We just need to find where to put the cursor where both sides are satisfied. Here is a system that (maybe) could work : Security than Trust.

In this scenario a reader first buys an eBook with DRM. He has afterwards the possibility, after a « probation period after which one thinks he is trustworthy » to ask for a DRM free version for archiving purposes of personal convenience. A DRM platform should than have a freedom process based on policies.



My point of view

Of course, as a reader, I'm in favor of a « Blind Trust » system. But if I had to live from my writing, I would maybe like « Security » better. If we love eBooks, we will have to accept DRMs, at least at the beginning. Installing trust in the market is crucial. Readers must show they can be trusted. In return, writers will have to let go, by providing more and more DRM free eBooks.

On their side Distribution platforms will have to show more flexibility by supporting more standards and format conversion and support, which will allow to own cross-platform eBooks.

As Entrepreneur and IT Architect in the field of eReader and ePaper applications, I will work towards that goal :

Imagine, Design and Implement eReaders Applications
which balance correctly security and trust
such that all actors can benefit from those new eBook technologies.

Jean-François Declercq

