

# PACKAGING BOOKS

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I work for a major content publisher who distributes web content via intermediaries. As is often the case, those intermediaries are far larger and more powerful than my employer, and already control the relationship with our readers.

Of course I'm talking about book publishing. EPUB files are packaged web content, which we upload to Amazon, Apple, and Google, who sell the ebooks to customers while retaining all the data they get from the readers.

I have followed with interest the development of new packaging formats, from the W3C [TAG's multi-part mime format](#) (now abandoned) to Google's signed exchanges and bundling. The developers of Google's packaging efforts often list book publishing as a possible use case, but the proposals themselves are problematic. The book publishing industry has a very different business model than many other forms of web content. Our revenue comes largely from direct sales rather than advertising—readers buy individual pieces of content. Books

at least aspire to immortality, while signed exchanges expire after seven days. Moby-Dick was published 61,000 days ago! Readers expect that books will outlast their author, publisher, or distributor. Long-term access to web content, over years, decades, or centuries, is also of interest to librarians and archivists.

But our existing packaging method has its own problems. EPUB currently uses OCF, based on the zip-based packaging of open office documents. But OCF has nothing to say about the origins of an EPUB, or how it fits in the web security model. We can't reliably use the simplest JavaScript in our books. Worse, EPUBs don't have URLs.

How would packaging work with paid content, from paywalls to micropayments to the traditional ebook model of selling content directly? This is our big question. Advertising shouldn't be the only model for supporting content creation on the web, and the web shouldn't be designed around only this one model. We have many other questions, of course. How would unsigned exchanges work? What happens when you GET a package? Can packages be used for ad-hoc content distribution? I email you a package; you double-click and it opens in your browser. How can web packaging become as simple as PDF?

We hope for a packaging model that makes it easier rather than harder for anyone to publish; that does not further enable a web dominated by surveillance and advertising; that remains true to the web of documents and links that transformed the world.