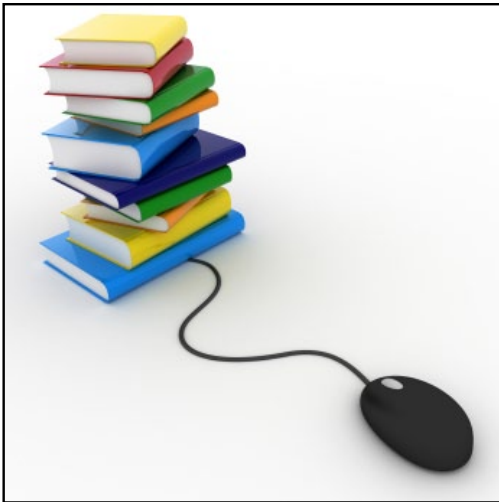




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What's in a Name?

Responding to Industry Innovation, NASTA Becomes SIMRA



In March, the National Association of State Textbook Administrators changed their name to SIMRA, the State Instructional Materials Review Association. The name and brand shift signaled leadership's acknowledgment that how knowledge is created, distributed and consumed is quickly changing.

producers have to know as much about pixels as they once did about paper.

Students and administrators are increasingly seeking information, including that which is contained in textbooks, from multi-modal sources. This means that textbook manufacturers and those who review best practices of content generation and production, must be versed in the nuances of how information looks and is experienced digitally, as well as how learners learn best across multiple applications and devices like iPads, mobile phones, eReaders, and interactive PDFs.

"We need to start talking beyond ink on the page," said Alan Griffin, current president of SIMRA and Curriculum Content Specialist with the Media/Instructional Materials Center.

SIMA is an organization charged with producing standards that improve the quality of instructional materials. Those materials were traditionally printed, but as digital technology has improved and the cost of creation has decreased, more information is now developed and distributed digitally, which means more textbooks are also going digital. To compete in this market, textbook

The speed with which this transformation from print to digital is happening has caused industry leaders some consternation but the general attitude toward the transition from print to digital is positive. Still, change is often uncomfortable. Just as students have had to improve their digital literacy, learning what it means to pull information from "the cloud" or "bookmark" a relevant source for a school paper, so too must SIMRA and its industry partners refigure what it means to produce "quality" instructional materials delivered digitally.

The standards by which SIMRA "grades" instructional materials has and continues to focus on issues like content, organization, and assessment, but new categories of review that reflect

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this turn toward the digital have been added to SIMRA's core standards. Accessibility standards, for example, might have once meant keeping an eye toward types of binding, the weight of paper, or the type of inks used. While the goal remains the same—to create a textbook that is, in both form and function, accessible—accessibility must now also accommodate issues like browser compatibility and screen resolution.

SIMRA's 2012 conference keynote speaker, Karen Cator, is the Director of the Office of Technology at the US Department of Education. Her selection as keynote speaker and the content of her presentation "Building Smart Demand in a Time of Digital Textbooks", is another clear indicator that inclusivity of the digital approach is imperative if SIMRA and partner associations are to remain relevant. Indeed, the 2012 SIMRA conference was dominated by discussion of digital resources in schools and improvements to the review process that will support effective learning and teaching, much of which is increasingly digital.

Though the industry approaches a digital horizon, SIMRA brand-change committee Chair Alan Griffin wanted to be clear: this isn't the death of traditional textbooks.

Indeed, for years now, education and technology enthusiasts have predicted the death of the textbook and yet, it hasn't happened. Part of the print textbook's longevity, undoubtedly, has to do with the fact that administrators and students are more conservative than, say, music lovers, who were rather quick to adopt a more portable and exchangeable form of entertainment.

But the benefits of digital textbooks are undeniable: generally, they're far cheaper to produce than printed texts; they are easier to protect from piracy and copyright infringement than printed materials; and the cost of purchasing a license is often far less than the cost of purchasing a book, even a used textbook. Further, digital textbooks

offer producers new revenue models like the rent-a-textbook model. Ultimately, such innovation will increase distribution, reduce cost, and improve student success. And student success is at the core of the SIMRA mission.


The Common Core Standards that SIMRA develops, now includes standards and specifications for digital instructional materials, a task that cannot be completed alone. More information on this can be found at <http://simra.us/wp/>.

Griffin said that though the organization's name has changed, its commitment to its partners has not. SIMRA will continue to work with publishers, bookbinders and related associations, as well as its member-state committees to finesse the digital component of the Common Core Standards.

The next generation of instructional materials, Griffin predicts, will be customized to serve the individual needs of teachers and students. This requires a smarter and more frequent assurance of quality. It will be a challenge for SIMRA to keep up with the shifting soil of the digital environment, but it's a challenge for which SIMRA member-state committees and partners are ready.

"The change in name signifies that this organization seeks to plant seeds that will grow digital trees, which will support the establishment of our next generation instructional materials," Griffin said.

No one knows what the horizon of digital textbooks looks like, exactly, Griffin said, but he was clear that SIMRA wasn't in the business of thwarting innovation. "We're not interested in recommending devices, per se," he said. "But," he added, "We will continue to look for the combination of device plus content that best helps students learn."

That combination will be, at least in part, mediated through a screen. 

Flexible Book and Bible Covers

By Werner Rebsamen



Most people are only familiar with either soft cover or hardcover bindings. Very few are knowledgeable about all the different kinds of flexible book covers, as it is a highly specialized field that requires advanced bookbinding skills. Every year, our industry produces books bound with flexible covers in very large quantities. This is especially true in binding Bibles and other books, which often require flexible covers. Go to any store that sells books and you see many examples – pocket calendars, diaries, travel guides, novels, manuals, fiction and most of all, books in the religious categories. On the Internet you will find lots of information about the bindings of all kinds of books, why designers select special colors for the covers, and similar topics. I have never found, however, an in-depth article on the manufacturing of flexible book covers. After a most interesting career as a bookbinder, especially in the area of binding Bibles and other religious books, I will try to sort-out all the different kinds of flexible book covers in terms that aren't too technical. We will describe only those flexible cover bindings that

require end-sheets. There are, of course, many other flexible book cover structures, using single, leather-like materials with cut-flush edges. These binding types are not part of this article. We shall concentrate only on covers with turned-in edges and book blocks cased-in in a conventional fashion, with the exception of leather-lined book cover structures.

Integral Cover Bindings

Recently, while visiting a bookstore in Germany, I found some interesting bindings that looked like conventional hardcover structures. Upon closer examination, I found that the cover boards and dust jackets were missing. The covers had flaps like a dust jacket, yet they were part of the actual

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Integral covers are made at high speeds. They look and feel like hardcover bindings but use no cover boards or conventional covering materials, and require no dust jackets. Bindings are not suitable for libraries. Photo courtesy of Werner Rebsamen.



Crafting flexible book covers requires advanced bookbinding skills. Photo courtesy of Werner Rebsamen.

cover structure. These flexible cover bindings may be considered to be an in-between version of a soft cover and hardcover binding. They are, however, much different from a soft cover as they have protruding, turned-in edges, similar to that of a conventional hardcover binding. In addition, they have conventional end-sheets. I first experienced such cover structures in the late 1950s while working as a journeyman bookbinder in Holland. They were called Integral cover structures. A thin, flexible and coated white Bristol cover stock (a 240-260 g/m² Chromo Carton), usually used for soft cover bindings, is printed on one side only. The printed cover is then die-cut. On a specially engineered Integral book-cover machine, the sheets are scored for the turn-in edges and the spine—first parallel, then at a 90 degree angle. The overlapping edges receive a coat of adhesive and are turned-over via a plough folding device. Rollers then press down the turned-in edges. This is done at high speeds, at up to 160 m/min. These finished Integral book covers are then processed, that is cased-in like any conventional hardcover binding. Different names are

used for these imitation hardcover structures (e.g. Flexi Cover). In short, these book cover structures require no cover boards, no conventional covering materials, no inlays, and no dust jackets. They look and feel like a hardcover binding but are produced at a lower cost.

As stated, these Integral cover structures have been around for almost 60 years, but never emerged as a threat to the actual hardcover bindings. However, with refined, high-speed machinery that can produce thousands

of such covers each hour, and the ever present pressure to lower prices, we may see, in the near future, more of these flexible, hardcover imitation bindings.

How to Make Flexible Book Covers

The production of such covers is a highly specialized field. Not too many bookbinding facilities are capable of producing flexible, round corner covers in larger quantities. Worse, as you will see later, there are so many different styles of cover structures. However, they all have one item in common—round corners. Turning-in corners requires special skills or highly specialized case-making machinery. This was not taught at the Academy of Fine Arts in Switzerland where they educated master bookbinders. When I started my career in the United State, at the printing and binding facility of the Concordia Publishing House (Lutheran Church Missouri Synod) in St. Louis, they had to teach me how to, on flexible covers, turn-in corners by hand. I must admit, it is not an easy task. But after tens of thousands of covers and corners, I became a true expert! At that facility, those

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The Reece case-making machine at World Publishing. Photo courtesy of Werner Rebsamen.

covers were all produced by hand. After 5 years, when I moved on to the nation's largest Bible manufacturing company, World Publishing in Cleveland, Ohio, we produced up to 100,000 books a day, a large number of

which were Bibles with flexible covers. Many of the books featured gilding on all three sides. At this facility, they had several Reece case-making machines, capable of producing from 200 to 300 covers each hour, depending on the dimensions and materials being processed. The rounded corners were exceptionally good. Although these unique flexible cover case-making machines have been around for some time (1920 British Patent), it was not until the 1950s/60s that they became more popular. Specialized bookbinding facilities started to use them, replacing the very slow and labor intensive process of turning-in corners by hand. These Reece case-making machines used to be built by Compo Industries

located in Massachusetts. They were the experts at making round corner machines for both flexible covers and loose leaf binders. Reece case-making machines were rather unique, as they required no liquid adhesives to craft a flexible cover. The covering materials used, such as imitation leathers like Sturdite or Skivertex, to name a few, were coated at the mill with a thermoplastic adhesive. The Reece case-making machine's heated plates then reactivated the thin adhesive coating. For genuine leather covers, we had to apply the thermoplastic adhesive ourselves. The dies used on Reece case-making machines were rather complex and expensive, yet we had to produce flexible covers with different radii, from 1/4 inch to 7/8 inch, the latter for extra large divinity circuit Bible covers. Add to that all the different dimensions, trim-sizes, from small pocket-size books to large, bulky editions. Only the last few years have large bookbinding machinery companies come forward with high-speed case-making equipment capable of producing round corners, but the quality of these corners leaves much to be desired. In addition, using a protein adhesive for making those cases, this bookbinding expert has seen many unfortunate problems with flexible covers warping out of control.

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Limp-Style, Flexible Covers

Even relatively low-cost Bibles have to be bound into flexible covers with round corners. Church parishoners simply prefer limp-style flexible covers over conventional, hardcover bindings. The less expensive Bibles usually feature book blocks stained or sprayed red or yellow with a gold-like looking lacquer. The more expensive bindings feature gilded edges on all three sides with round corners. The normal trim size books have edges extending 1/8 inch and required corner radii of 1/4 inch. On books with trim sizes over 6 x 9 inches, the protruding edges are made slightly larger and therefore the covers required corner radii of 5/16 inch. On flexible covers, most of these structures consist of a thin, flexible board and a leather imitation covering material. In our Bible binding times, most of the covering material was a coated and grained cloth or a coated and grained latex saturated paper. Genuine leather covers were an exception, yet we produced those in a most unique way on our Reece case-makers. After that operation, we grained the finished covers and achieved the most flexible covers with exceptionally beautiful corners. The leather (mostly pigskin) on those finished covers was smooth, and received a levant or other grain pattern, like buffalo or similar.

Flexible, Divinity Circuit Covers

Gilded book edges need some protection. I assume this must be why divinity circuit covers were introduced to the Bible binding trade. In the late 1960s, while employed as plant superintendent at the Thomas Nelson Bible bindery, we received a complaint that the gold-edges on the Bible were not waterproof. The owner went to church on a rainy day with her Bible in hand. We simply sent her a replacement Bible free of charge. Extended, flexible edges also have other benefits, like allowing inside scoring. When

wrapped, those flexible edges give such bindings a special appearance. Most popular are flexible covers with the edges extending 1/4 to 3/8 inches. Of course the bulk of the book had a lot to do with that decision. Very thick, illustrated Bibles sometimes had extra large edges, 3/4 inch and required corners with 7/8 inch radii. Also very popular are zipper closed Bible covers, which give the treasured content ultimate protection. These flexible covers are made as any other limp-style described but featured extensions from 7/16 to 5/8 inches. Such a wide divinity circuit is necessary to sew-on the zippers.

Leather-Lined Covers

The very best and most expensive limp-style covers contain no paper linings. A piece of genuine leather is lined on the inside with a thin, die-cut sheet of skiver or bonded leather. Crafting a leather-lined cover requires advanced bookbinding skills, as different techniques used. Some use sets of tin plates,

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The fine and often expensive leathers are die-cut to size. The edges/turn-ins require skiving. No paper linings are used. The covers are all leather. Photo courtesy of Werner Rebsamen.



Finished, leather-lined bindings and covers, using genuine Morocco leather. A Florentine border stamping enhances the gilded edges. On behalf of the publisher, I had the privilege to bind a personal copy for the Pope (and keep a sample cover). Photo courtesy of Werner Rebsamen.

others die-cut the leather exactly to size and used special skiving tools, a device that scores and skives the leather in one pass. These days, skiving machines are computerized. While attending drupa, I visited the Fortuna company and was simply amazed at how skiving machinery and technology have progressed. After skiving the genuine leather, these pieces are then lined with die-cut pieces of bonded leather panels on the inside. The spine area of the cover remains free and the spines on the books are lined with a hollow, tubular liner. After gluing the book block into the all-leather cover, the remaining hinges are glued down. An endpaper panel is then taken from the end-sheet and glued over the hinges. Again, this is a highly skilled, labor-intensive process and to follow it, you may refer to the enclosed photographs.

Many times, we furnished our Bible covers with a Florentine border. This enhances a gilded book block as the stamped gold border lines do reflect off the gilded edges.

In conclusion, there are of course many other flexible cover binding styles. For example, small pocket Testaments with a flap and button, that looked like a wallet. There was one style, however, that never succeeded. Many decades ago, while still working in the Bible binding industry, an inventor approached us and tried to sell us a much more economical, limp-style cover. The samples were made of extremely soft casted vinyl. Yes, they were very flexible, had round corners, could be purchased with any grain or color and manufactured on high-speed machinery and best of all, could be had at a lower cost. We

made a few sample books, and very quickly found out that those who treasure a good Bible binding prefer the warm touch of leather or even an imitation leather. Those cold, slippery vinyls may be good enough for some children's toys but never for a well-crafted, limp-style binding. Nevertheless, we must always welcome progress. We now implement many new covering materials which look, feel and have a touch like real, warm leather (PU, Poly Urethane based). As stated earlier, our major case-making machinery manufacturers finally figured out how to produce limp-style covers with round corners at relatively high speeds. Using these new PU covering materials, there are unfortunately still some occasional warping problems for which we must find solutions. This writer is actively involved with the industry's challenges and, if and when we find the necessary solutions, we will update our readers in another *ShelfLife* or *Endpaper* article. 📖

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