How-to books have always implied a user experience that could never truly be delivered, simply because printed books or even e-readers are not intrinsically interactive. Now, with the growing popularity of tablets, Open Air Publishing is hoping to cash in on the next iteration of how-to books with apps designed specifically for the iPad.

“I saw the explosive growth of the iPad and realized it’s much different than the Kindle. It opened up an opportunity to think of books and what they will be. The Kindle is great at re-creating paper, but with the iPad I saw the opportunity to change what a book really was because I foresaw that the logical conclusion of an interactive reading device was that it would have interactive experiences,” said Jon Feldman, CEO of Open Air.

“We think about the best way to teach each concept in a how-to book. In some cases that’s writing, but in many cases it’s a mix of writing, photographs, illustrations, interactivity and video. It’s a product that’s a better way to learn, built from the ground up for this medium,” Feldman said.

Over the past year, Open Air has worked with Inking to create four iPad how-to book apps: one on photography, titled “Master Your DSLR Camera,” and three with food and beverage themes, “FOOD52 Holiday Recipe & Survival Guide,” “Speakeasy Cocktails: Learn from Modern Mixologists” and the most recent, “The Better Bacon Book.”

HANDS-ON LESSONS
“Master Your DSLR Camera” is designed for aspiring photographers who purchased a digital single-lens reflex camera because they wanted to take better pictures than they could with their smartphone, but find themselves leaving their digital camera on auto mode because they’re intimidated by the manual settings.

Printed books for something as hands on as photography leave a lot to be desired. “With a black-and-white paperback book trying to make you a great photographer, there’s a real disconnect between the promise and the results. Plus, a 200- or 300-page book can get really boring and intimidating,” Feldman said. “We thought we could do this better.”

Like a traditional how-to photography book, “Master Your DSLR” takes you through the basics of how a digital camera works, photographic techniques and camera settings. But because it’s an interactive app, you can also, for example, slide your fingertip across settings from ISO 100 to ISO 6,400 and observe how adjusting the camera’s light sensitivity affects a picture in a dimly lit room.

BARTENDER SECRETS
“Speakeasy Cocktails,” meanwhile, begins with a bit of history about the failed social experiment, Prohibition (1919-1933), that gave rise to illegal alcohol parlors and is the iPad app’s namesake. The opening chapter describing speakeasies in the 1920s sets the tone with a rollicking, scratchy rendition of Cole Porter’s “Anything Goes.”

The app quickly shifts gears to contemporary cocktail making with a description of the tools of the bar-

Open Air’s Recipe for How-To Books
By Chuck Lenatti
tending trade, including the Boston Shaker, Cobbler Shaker and Parisian Shaker. Users can also purchase these tools with a couple of taps within the app. “Old school” and “new school” cocktail recipes are dutifully categorized under the predominant spirit. The real stars, however, are the two mixologists who demonstrate their behind-the-bar techniques: shaking, stirring and rolling, as well as measuring, swizzling, muddling and garnishing. Jim Meehan and Joseph Schwartz also demonstrate the proper way to mix drinks, from a martini to a mojito. Not all recipes have videos – that would be redundant – but they all include links to videos of the techniques required.

The presenters play a major role in the success of Open Air’s books. The personalities of the bartenders, as well as the two cooks in the “Holliday Recipe and Survival Guide,” jump off the screen in a way that isn’t possible with printed books. “Besides being an expert on the topic, we look for people who can connect with the audience,” Feldman said. “It’s hard to know until you see it, but people like Martha Stewart and Oprah are fantastic at connecting with the audience, and that’s what you look for in our camera talent.”

IPAD BOOKS FROM THE GROUND UP

From the outset, Open Air’s books are conceived as apps for the iPad rather than books that morph into a tablet platform. “When you’re thinking of content from the ground up, you think about all of the content at the same time, whereas a traditional publisher...
Another plus for tablet books is that they will always be stored on your tablet and ready when you need them.

About a week before release will give the manuscript over to the digital team whose job it is to convert it into EPUB and .mobi for publishing to e-book format,” said Feldman. “There’s no time to change it, add more photos make it more interactive or add videos.”

Traditional publishers, Feldman said, would have to alter their model for design to embrace this kind of interactivity. “And even if they changed it, they would still be making content primarily for the book first and then adding the other stuff, whereas we’re not writing unneeded paragraphs because we’re only writing for the digital medium. The most widely used applications are made first for the iPad,” Feldman said. “The same will be true with books; people will want something that’s unique and made for this platform, just as with the early days of television, where people wanted stuff that was made for television and not repurposed radio shows.”

Instant Books: Just Add Digital

One of the benefits of Open Air’s ground-up digital approach is speed to market. A traditional publisher will take 18 months or more to get a book from first author meeting to its release in stores, Feldman said.

“Another plus for tablet books is that they will always be stored on your tablet and ready when you need them; no hunting for that cookbook you last used for Christmas dinner. ‘Whether you’re in the mood for reading a novel or magazine, or need to reference a drink recipe, food recipe or camera settings, you’ll have it with you, and that is what’s exciting about this form factor for books in general,’ Feldman said.

For its how-to books, Open Air focuses on high-quality writing and dynamic presenting talent, and on a beautiful design aesthetic that is easy to follow with high-definition photos and videos that take advantage of the iPad screen. “On the iPad, people are looking for high quality and we strive to outdo ourselves with every book,” Feldman said.