

Today's Gutenberg Press: ebooks

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<http://greatstorybook.com/todays-gutenberg-press-ebooks/>

Life in the e-Commerce Boom

When I was living in Seattle (Washington, West Coast USA), I worked at Amazon for a couple of years. At that time, e-commerce was booming. Amazon still only sold books. It was way back in the early ages, before they had One-Click purchasing options, way before you could get an ebook from Amazon, and even before most of the books we sold had an actual Book Description. The "Take a Look Inside" button was added after I left the company. When I was there, very little information about any of the books could be found on the site. So customers would email and ask us to tell them what the book was like. If we didn't know, we would go to a local bookshop during our lunch break and try to find out.

Getting out and going outside into the real world! On Market Day in Homburg, early Springtime.

This was e-commerce! By today's standards, almost nothing was readily available online. If you wanted to know what the Real World Scoop was, you had to go out into the real world and look. Today, that's no longer the case. You can find pretty much anything online, and much of the information is provided for free.

Amazon and Gutenberg Press

Amazon employees back in my day (in technology terms, I'm ancient at 41 years of age) were college educated. I remember thinking I should probably go back to school for an MA, because so many of my co-workers had one. I only had a Bachelor Degree. At least three of my co-workers were working on getting their doctorates. Our education was necessary. We used Unix and were actually writing the email responses that are now currently sent automatically with a click of a button. Yes, I worked there before the prevalence of blurbs.

Most of us were in our 20s, quickly approaching our 30s, and we were dedicated worker bees because we all felt we were part of something new and potentially amazing. We were building what would become the primary information and shopping portal for books, and though we didn't know it at the time, we were integral in ushering in a new era in publishing. As the Gutenberg Press created an explosion in the availability of things commoners would be able to read – because it was just that much more available – Amazon, I would argue, is fostering today's new Gutenberg Press, the ebook.

What currently sits closest to the cashier's counter in our Hugendubel store. An ebook reader from Hugendubel.

Not Just Books Anymore

Most people know that Amazon doesn't just sell books anymore. (Never mind all the household appliances and random stuff they currently sell.) They now offer KDP Publishing (for ebook publishing), and they have backed-up that publishing program with all kinds of marketing tools so that absolutely anyone with anything to say about anything at all can make an ebook available to the masses on an international scale. With a lot of hard work, talent and luck, writers can even manage to make a living off of their ebook sales. I'm not talking about the ebooks selling for \$65 a copy, either.

Writers are making a living from ebooks selling for a couple of dollars a piece. They are quitting their day jobs. Really. They aren't all rich, naturally, but they are able to make a decent living from their writing.

It has never been easier or cheaper or faster for an author to get their words distributed and in front of thousands of readers.

The Revolution

This has put the publishing industry on its head as they scramble to compete with best-selling novelists who are making a killing on the market by offering their books as ebooks – a very different product where publishers are discovering they should want to own distribution rights for those as well. Many publishers don't have ebook distribution rights and are kicking themselves for it because more writers are self-publishing their work in electronic form (in addition to the publisher's paperback and/or hardback editions), and they get to keep a much higher margin of the profit.

Who would ever have thought that the writer (of all people) would one day earn a larger royalty than the printer or distributor! This is a revolution, but instead of bloodshed there are only tears – of joy for the creators, and of fear for those who are watching creators walking away from traditional publishing.

Seeing the Change

Only ten years ago most people didn't believe ebooks could ever take-off. The primary demographic for ebooks was really just other writers. Then Amazon brought the Kindle on the market. Apple gave us iPad. With such nifty gadgets, we now **have** to get ebooks and fill those little monsters up, creating for ourselves expansive libraries rivaling the public library around the corner and shrinking it down to something I can fit in my favorite purse. It's cool! For the first time I can dust-off 1,426 books in under 30-seconds. Fire hazard? Risk of flood? *Scoff*. These natural disasters will never again take my favorite stories away from me. I can easily rescue my entire library as I head out the door with all my family members on my arm!

Our lovely three-story Hugendubel shop in Homburg.

Of course, I still love my expansive bookshelves filled with old books that I read over and over. Nothing could replace those and I mourn the books I've lost to a water damage disaster in the past. I love the tangible feel of a book in my hand, the crisp paper between my fingers, the way it sounds when I turn the

page. The smell of books.

What's Happening In My Town

Now in my town I found that across the way from my favorite bookshop, Hugendubel, there are big signs splashed on the old building sitting currently vacant, suggesting that the bookstore will be expanding into that building. I was very excited that in the face of so much upheaval for most bookstores, my own Hugendubel was doing so well that they would nearly double their shop space.

Not so. I went in to ask one of the shop clerks about it. She corrected me. They aren't expanding, they're moving over to the smaller space. I asked her what would become of the larger Hugendubel store. She had no idea and I don't think she cared. The corners of her mouth involuntarily turned down and I understood at once that my favorite bookstore was not doing well.

As I Left The Shop

As I left the shop, I noticed that there was a new product near the doorway: a Hugendubel ebook reader. They call it the Tolino and they're selling it for only €99.

I don't know what is going to become of real bookshops. But I feel a pang of worry that Hugendubel is actually downsizing rather than expanding, because no matter how people read, one thing is certain: they'll always need places to go in the real world. We cannot exist electronically.

I wish very earnestly that Hugendubel would be expanding their store so that at last Homburg could have a café in their shop, as is the case in their Frankfurt store. If they got bigger, we could at last have open mic nights, poetry jams, and book signing events right here in town, in the real book bookshop. I feel like shaking the shop management, crying in their ears, "Why can't you figure out how to adjust?"

What will be renovated and become the new Homburg Hugendubel.

We Need Bookshops, Not Just Readers

There is always a need for bookshops. Always. They just need to become something more than a library. They need to become community centers where there are things to do and creative people to meet. It could be a place where they provide workshops on how to write a book.

Hugendubel could become a place where authors meet and chat over coffee, it could be the place where book distributors and editors hangout before they go to the Frankfurt Buchmesse nearby. That event is the largest book fair in the WORLD. How is it possible that a bookstore in a wealthy town like Homburg could be downsizing?

This is unquestionably an era of change, with transitions that will make some people and break others. It should not be a time when bookshops are in danger of going under. That just cannot happen. They need to

be as clever and heroic and as brazen as the characters in all the books they're selling, and all the ebooks that will be read on the ebook readers they're now bringing to the market.

In the face of destruction there is always a chance for renewal. Let's not lose sight of opportunity in the book industry just because there are changes we didn't expect to see or didn't want to believe.

WRITERS!!!

Don't be afraid of tackling the ebook industry. It can only help you. Doing so on your own is not easy – because there are so many things that can go wrong when you don't know what you're doing. But you *can* do this.

I'd like to offer myself as someone you can turn to with questions you might have, or problems you've encountered along the way. My dream is to build a strong resource for creative people here, and I believe strongly that we can all help each other by sharing problems and difficulties. Ultimately, that can lead to an exchange of all sorts of solutions that we can then all share with each other!

Keep creating, no matter what.
