

# **The Future of the Publishing Industry: What Will Happen if Bookstores Close?**

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**December 2, 2016**

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## Introduction

The publishing industry is an ever evolving world filled with creative writers, innovative thinkers, project people, and, of course, books. One of the major aspects for creating revenue for publishing houses, and authors themselves, is bookstores—-independent and chain. However, it's no secret that bookstores are closing. What is going to happen to the publishing industry, and authors both current and new, all together? The topic for my proposal is that: what is going to happen to the publishing industry if the bookstores, both chain and independent, close for good?

## Current Situation— Where We Are Now

When we think about books, some people might think about the feeling that overwhelms them when they open a new book, and escape reality for a moment or two as they immerse themselves into the world it creates for them. Others might think back to the moment they finished their all-time favorite book for the first time. Maybe some people think back to the time they first stepped into a Barnes & Noble or Borders bookstore and looked through the many shelves of books they had. This was not only a lovely experience for customers of the stores, but also for the writers themselves. The more people shopped, they were able to discover new authors, and book sales would keep growing—publishing houses were sitting quite pretty.



One of the big bookstores giants, Borders, closed in 2011—due mostly to losing out on sales because people were shopping online— and independent bookstores seem to be closing faster than we can blink. With the world of online book selling expanding, what will happen to our paperbacks and the stores that sell them? Is Barnes & Noble next? Are all bookstores doomed for failure? What will happen to the publishing industry as a result? What will happen to authors, both established and undiscovered, and their craft? What will happen if bookstores close all together?

Right now, part of the reason for these bookstores closing is due to the market for buying books online. Whether you're buying the book to read on your NOOK, Kindle, or iPad or if you're buying it online, because it's more convenient than going out to shop, you are taking away from the sales of bookstores— both independent and chain. It was reported that e-book sales are skyrocketing and paper book sales aren't doing so well, that they have fallen by 2% (CNNMoney). Consumers just aren't spending money like they used to. These issues have only

showcased the problems within bookstores—books are going digital and stores are going under.

### **Why We Shouldn't Ignore the Problem**

If we simply ignore this issue and move on without doing anything about it, the problem will only get worse. Booksellers within these stores can only do so much when it comes to selling their books, people will only buy if they want to. You cannot force customers to buy books they do not want, and if you're too pushy about it you could potentially lose a sale and a valuable customer. This could also spell problems for new authors because if there's limited shelf space in the stores, they cannot get their work recognized by a publishing house nor will they be able to out their work out there. In addition, it only makes it harder for these bookstores to stay afloat when their biggest competitor is the internet. If this problem is ignored, then bookstores everywhere could potentially go out of business and it will make it more difficult for the publishing industry to survive.

### **Problem, Solution, and Project Plan**

#### *The Problem*

The problem I identified in the publishing industry is: what is going to happen to the publishing industry if the bookstores, both chain and independent, close? There are a few smaller questions that fall in line with this question like: what will happen to new and current authors, what will happen to e-readers, and how the publishing industry is doing now.

From my research, I have discovered that e-reader sales have been on the rise, new authors are being discovered by Publishing Houses via the internet, and that book sales—in chain stores—have stabilized (Wahba). However, if book sales were to drop and every single bookstore closed the publishing industry should rely on e-book sales and online sales. Sales on e-readers, like the NOOK and Kindle devices, have been skyrocketing but if bookstores were to close all together, the only places readers could go to buy books are on devices like iPads, Kindles, and various different tablets because NOOKS would become much more limited, or even obsolete (Klenke). The publishing industry will have to rely primarily, or exclusively, on the internet to stay afloat.

#### *The Solution: Strengthen Where the Books Are—The Internet*

#### *Problem One: What Will Publishing Houses Do if Bookstores Close?*

#### **Step One**

Publishing houses rely heavily on the revenue bookstores bring in for them, what will they do if they close? Even if the bookstore itself closes, chain bookstores, like Barnes & Noble, could still be operating via the internet— many customers buy their books online, and just because the physical bookstores are closed doesn't mean they won't be operational online. If they aren't doing online sales, then the publishing houses are going to have to focus their attention on their websites. Consumers will be able to buy books online directly from their

websites, so it would be pertinent to redesign their websites to make them more user friendly and sale-driven.

### Step Two

Publishing houses will also have to make their books readily available on e-readers. If Barnes & Noble is still around online, they will want to remain partners with them. They will also want to partner with Amazon, Google Play, iBooks, etc., if they aren't already, so they can get their titles out to e-reader users.

### Step Three

Marketing books is going to be really important if bookstores close. They are going to want to focus on marketing their books on their websites, through Facebook/YouTube/Twitter/etc. ads, and they will want to encourage their authors to promote their new and old titles on their own social media platforms.

#### *Problem Two: How Will New Authors Get "Discovered"*

This problem isn't really a step-by-step process, but more of a suggestion publishing houses might want to make to new authors. The internet is a fantastic way to get your content out there if you are a writer and there are multiple platforms in which you can do it. Among the more popular writing platforms, there is: Wattpad, Archive of Our Own, and LiveJournal.

When researching this topic, there was an interview on CNN where a journalist talked with self-published author Taran Matharu. They talked about how new authors are getting their start up in the book-writing world by use of the website Wattpad. This is basically an interactive website where the authors can create and upload new stories and their fans can interact and give them feedback along the way. Matharu talked about how he was self-published until he was noticed by a large publishing company who then teamed up with him to help him sell his books. He owes his success to Wattpad, and so do many other authors, like E.L. James and Marissa Meyer (CNNMoney).



### **Outcomes— What Could Happen**

#### *Outcome for Publishing Houses and Consumers*

If we strengthen where the books are online, the publishing industry may not have anything to fear about becoming obsolete. Sales for e-readers will skyrocket if bookstores go out of business and people will still buy books that way. It helps that e-readers are electronic as well because electronic devices will always be improved upon and people will continue to buy them, even if they have one that works perfectly fine. Companies that sell e-readers also can count on the fact that that they can break easily and will need replacing if they do so. In addition, publishing houses sell their books online and people without e-readers, or those who prefer paper books, will buy books online.

### *Outcomes for New and Current Authors*

Writing as a craft will not die if bookstores close down, either. If authors become more involved on social media, they will be able to continue to promote their old books and talk about their new books as well. This is also an advantage for them, because if they strengthen their presence online they will be able to connect with their fans in a more personal way. As for new authors, they will need to create an online presence for themselves through the websites that were mentioned previously. It is hard to be discovered by publishing houses now, but if book buying and writing becomes heavily reliant on online spaces, it might make things easier.

### **Qualifications**

I am a junior at Saginaw Valley State University, where I have been studying Professional and Technical Writing as my major for a year. I have been focusing my research on the publishing industry because I have a strong interest in going into editing and publishing as my career when I graduate. In addition, I am employed by Barnes & Noble so I can also see what the publishing industry is doing from a retail perspective. Based on the research I have done previously, and the research I have done now, and my employment at Barnes & Noble I can be confident that my statements about the publishing industry are sound.

### **Cost and Benefits— Making the Best Out of a Bad Situation**

Though it wouldn't be an ideal situation if bookstores closed all together, that doesn't mean it would spell complete disaster for publishing companies. The loss of revenue from paper books would be devastating for the publishing industry, but based on my research it will not cripple them. Books are in huge demand on phones, NOOKs, and desktop computers, this is really promising for the publishing houses because that shows there's a market out there for books, even if they're sold online or through an e-reader or smartphone. I have mentioned earlier that publishing houses just need to "strengthen where books are in the media", which is a direct quote from the Digital Book World article. They are trying to iterate that as long as publishing houses keep up with book buying trends, they'll be okay. The article even discusses that new authors are marketing themselves through social media and that it's really working. This is promising for up and coming authors and will encourage them to keep writing.

In addition, there's already been conversation among the big players in the publishing industry. In an interview with Richard Nash, an entrepreneur and an acknowledged publishing "Big Thinker", he says that the future of the publishing industry will still be able to thrive and engage readers as long as they know how to "find the good stuff", meaning new authors. He says, "'Making good maps,' Nash concludes, 'is the key task at hand for us now. For the book industry to thrive and to continue to engage readers, we must create a landscape of discovery.'" This quote in itself is a good representation of the strategy publishing industries should include when considering new authors to sign on (Bonn).

Finally, publishing industries are just going to have to adapt to the shift in where the consumers are if bookstores close. This will not be hard, however. In an academic journal written by John Duhring, he discusses that publishing houses, and their industries, are

adaptable to change. Specifically, in the introduction of this journal, Duhring discusses that publishing can be adapted by non-traditional publishing institutions. He also showcases that publishing houses can evolve into new things like, as he suggests, a publishing “studio”. This is encouraging that the publishing industry is able to adapt to the ever changing buyer’s market and that they are able to evolve as the consumer’s, and the publishing industry’s, tastes change (Duhring).

### **Final Thoughts**

The publishing industry is always evolving because consumers’ tastes are changing, whether it’s in the books that they read, how they buy them, or how they’re reading them. If bookstores were to close all together, it would not cripple the publishing industry though it would hurt their revenue. The publishing industry will have to adapt to the change by making their books accessible on e-readers and revamping their websites to be more buyer centered. They will also have to advertise their new books on websites like Facebook and Twitter.

Additionally, new authors will have to establish their presence online by putting their work on websites specifically designed for writers to write their stories or books. Current authors will have to establish their online presence more, as well, by promoting their new books on their social media accounts. Though it would not be ideal for bookstores to close, there is a way that the publishing industry can thrive and that’s by strengthening where the books are on the internet.

Thank you for taking the time for reading my proposal. If you have any questions or comments, you can contact me by my email: [eebrown2@svsu.edu](mailto:eebrown2@svsu.edu).

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