

Bookworms Behind the Screen

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PATRICK BAY DAMSTED 31 JAN 2010

The evolution towards digital distribution and storage of books is unstoppable. The sales figures for Amazon's ereader are phenomenal. The community and the ecosystem around Amazon's Kindle are impressive and growing day by day. However, all of this is driven by the spiritual union which evolves between author and reader as the story unfolds.

Harvey Chute is a bookworm. He will read at airports and on planes. He will read at night by the light of his bedside lamp. He will read at the slightest opportunity. He devours book after book and has done so for a large part of his 47-year-old life. Harvey Chute is not the kind of guy you would expect to replace his paper books with an electronic book reader.

And it was not on the cards that Chute would be one of the driving forces behind the most active Internet forum for Kindle owners. “My first, instinctive, reaction to Kindle was similar to many book lovers: an interest in it, mixed with some scepticism about the ebook experience. I love the physical feel of paper books, even the smell of them,” Chute tells Blink. But on a trip to Atlanta, Georgia, he met the future in a coffee bar. “I saw a lady using an original Kindle and asked her about it. She was enthusiastic and insisted that I give it a try. It was my first time viewing an e-ink screen, and it didn’t take long for me to ‘get it’. I knew at that point that, for me, this was going to be the preferred way to do long-form reading.”

Harvey Chute was sold on a new way of reading. Amazon’s electronic book reader had entered his life, and today the Chute family are the proud owners of no less than three Kindles. “My wife has an original Kindle; and I have the current 6” Kindle (‘Kindle 2’) as well as a Kindle DX,” says Chute. He continues: “Kindle has definitely changed my reading habits for the better. I find it much easier to discover new books and convenient to download those books right from my Kindle. All of our Kindles are on the same Amazon account, so when my wife recommends a book to me that she has downloaded, I can immediately get it on my Kindle without having to pay again for it.” Chute is by no means the only Kindle fan. At Christmas 2009, ebook sales overtook sales of physical books on Amazon, and the surge seems unstoppable. The evolution from paper to pixel is taking place at lightning speed. On its peak day, 14 December 2009, Amazon shipped 9.5 million Kindles – the equivalent of almost 110 per second – to expectant readers worldwide, according to an official announcement from Jeff Bezos, founder and CEO of Amazon.

But Kindle is much more than just a success for Amazon – there is also a community and an ecosystem of related products emerging around the device. An example is Harvey Chute’s KindleBoards.com, the largest independent website aimed at anyone with an interest in Kindle. Since November 2007, 8,000 members have made more than 300,000 posts between them, and the number of page views has exceeded 22 million “Our members use our forums to express their passion in terms of ebook recommendations, ebook clubs, tips on ebook bargains and reviews of Kindle accessories,” says Chute, who founded KindleBoards because this was the perfect combination of his two interests, gadgets and books. There is no doubt in his mind why his site has become so successful: it is not about

ebooks or ereaders in general – it is exclusively about the reading experience associated with a Kindle. “I think our focus on Kindle has been a benefit for us. Kindle has quickly moved to a prominent position in the ereader market, and there are a lot of Kindle owners out there now. When they have questions or comments, they usually want to address those to people familiar with Kindle, not to ereaders or tech-gadget fans in general. That focus has also helped us generate a high level of expertise on Kindle. Our moderators, and many of our members, are deeply familiar with Kindle usage, troubleshooting and other tips. So for a Kindle owner, it’s a natural one-stop,” he says. Indeed a one-stop which is also a starting point for authors, both established and unknown, who now have new opportunities for getting readers for their books thanks to Kindle and the community around it.

A number of unknown authors are self-publishing their books as free or paid downloads on the Amazon platform. In addition, a substantial number of books which are so old that nobody owns the rights any longer can be downloaded to the Kindle. As reported by the Los Angeles Times at the end of December 2009, 64 of Amazon’s top 100 Kindle titles were priced at USD 0.00. To the book industry, a price of USD 0.00 sounds shocking, but for an unknown author, an ebook priced at USD 0.00 could launch a very lucrative career. “In fact, one author, Boyd Morrison, who selfpublished his book ‘The Ark’ on Kindle, became very popular on KindleBoards and was subsequently signed to a publishing deal from a subsidiary of Simon & Schuster,” says Harvey Chute. The book and its sequel are scheduled for release in 16 countries so far in 2010.

The evolution towards digital distribution and storage of books is unstoppable. The sales figures for Amazon’s ereader are phenomenal. The community and the ecosystem around Amazon’s Kindle are impressive and growing day by day. However, all of this is driven by the spiritual union which evolves between author and reader as the story unfolds. Thus, when Harvey Chute goes to bed at night in Bellingham, Washington, he will switch on his bedside lamp and his Kindle to immerse himself in a book because, as he concludes the interview, ” To use a bad pun, it really has rekindled my enjoyment of good books.”

For more information please have a look at [Harvey Chute’s independent Kindle community](#).

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