



**WRITERSWORLD Newsletter - Issue No. 74**

## **Why books resist the rise of novel technologies**

**The humble paperback may be a throwback to the pre-digital age, but not everything has to be interactive**

**By Jonathan Weber: First published at Times Online**

I was a philosophy major in college, and one of my most memorable debates with a classmate had to do with the relationship between information and the form in which it is presented. He argued, rather absurdly I thought, that a computerised version of a book bore no relationship whatsoever to the original book itself. To him, the form was entirely integral to the essence of the thing, and to change its form was to create something entirely different.

After many years observing the evolution of various media, I've come to agree with this point, or at least a key part of it. Different types of media function differently, and even if the content is similar the form matters quite a lot. People ask me all the time if we're going to do a print magazine at New West (yes), and whether the print publication will be a paper version of what we do online (no). They also ask me whether I think newspapers are dead (no), and whether e-books and ubiquitous internet access will ultimately make paper obsolete (no).

I was prompted to think about these questions once again by Jeff Jarvis, who writes a very provocative blog called Buzzmachine and is usually very insightful, but in the case of his recent post entitled The Book is Dead. Long Live the Book I think he totally misses the point. The book, he starts out, is "an outmoded means of communicating information," and then notes that it's not alone among media that are faced with "better means of doing what they do." But to even frame the question in this way is a remarkably one-dimensional way of thinking about it for a savvy media guy like Jeff.

Books, for starters, are about a lot more than "communicating information." I like having books around because I find them pretty, for example. Their somewhat random presence is a reminder of things past, almost always in a nice way. A well-made book has a very pleasant feel, a tactile sensation that makes you want to hold it. The words themselves are only a part of it.

And when we think about the words, the "information", it's hard to separate them from the way in which they are being read. Books are usually read in a different physical context, and in a different mental space, than other types of reading material. They are, at their best, things that transport you, take you to another world, probably one far, far away from the frenetic information exchange that is the internet.

Mr Jarvis gripes that books represent "lecture media" – the bad old kind of media in which the professionals tell it to the laymen, as opposed to the good new kind of media that is a conversation among peers. Now Mr Jarvis is an evangelist of conversation media, but still: lectures have their place. I'm not looking to have a conversation with Dostoevsky, or Don DeLillo, or even a great non-fiction writer like Robert Caro. I'm looking to be carried off by their words, enchanted by their artistry, and the fewer digital distractions and yammering commenters, the better.

Now there are undoubtedly profound issues facing the publishing industry, and how it will survive and transform its antiquated self, and whether Google Print is a good thing, and how and when effective electronic tablets will emerge, and all that. I have no objection to the idea of a digital library that contains all books ever written, and makes books part of the internet search. If Google, or anyone else, can succeed in its mission of organising all of the world's information and making it accessible, great.

But the great narrative will always have its place, or at least I hope it will. If technology can make it cheaper, that's nice, though cheaper isn't always the ultimate virtue (people do still buy hardbacks even though paperbacks are less expensive). And one of the bigger mistakes one can make in considering the transformation of the media world is to assume that new things – participatory media, search-based information retrieval, instant access to information – will replace all that came before. Old media never die, they just become less important relative to other things. The book is not dead. Long live the book.....**THE END**

## **FREE BLACKBERRY 8700**

**WRITERSWORLD** have combined with the Interchange Group Plc to bring you the phenomenal offer of a free Blackberry 8700 Wireless Handheld™, the most amazing electronic communication device ever invented, which makes it easy to stay connected while on the go. You get uncompromising email, browsing and voice performance in one thin, stylish, lightweight handheld with a full QWERTY keyboard. Sadly this offer can only apply to United Kingdom residents. [\(Please click here to contact our chosen Blackberry retailer\)](#)

## **WORDS TO THE WISE**

Whether you use **WRITERSWORLD** or any other print-on-demand company insist that when your book is published you have a direct account with the printer. This will cost you nothing and you will end up with 100% of the royalties and the ability to purchase copies of your books at cost. Yes, with **WRITERSWORLD**, you get 100% of the royalties on sales of your book! You will get exactly the same distribution rights as the print-on-demand publisher and a monthly e-mail letting you know what your sales are. With respect, do not leave your book in the hands of any print-on-demand book publisher and be dependent on the publisher to know what your sales and royalties are and allow them to profit from the sales of your book. Also insist that your book's ISBN number is issued to you and your book's imprint page reflects you as being the publisher.

## **SUBSCRIPTIONS & LEGAL NOTICE**

Subscriptions to the **WRITERSWORLD** Newsletter are free and please distribute it freely.

**WRITERSWORLD** - The leading book publisher in self-publishing, print on demand books and book reprints in the United Kingdom that also issues the books ISBN number in the author's name, pays the author 100% of the royalties and supplies the author with copies of their books at print cost.

[www.writersworld.co.uk](http://www.writersworld.co.uk)

**www.writersworld.co.uk**  
**We can publish your book.**