

How will digitisation shape the future of publishing? Frankfurt Book Fair survey reveals online bookselling as most important development of the past 60 years

The organisers of the Frankfurt Book Fair - the global meeting place for the book world - have conducted a major survey to find out how digitisation will influence the future of the publishing industry, and who will be the driving force behind it. Over 1,000 industry professionals from over 30 countries responded to the survey, issued via the Frankfurt Book Fair Newsletter. The most interesting results:

- China's digital influence in international publishing predicted to increase threefold in next five years
- consumers, Amazon, Google believed to drive the digitisation process
- e-content will overtake traditional books in sales by 2018
- online bookselling named as most important development of the past 60 years

As the much-hyped e-readers hit the stores, and digitisation continues to revolutionise all aspects of the book trade, this year over 70 per cent of respondents revealed that they feel ready for the digital challenge. The survey also reveals that current opinion is divided on the future of the e-books and digital content versus the printed word. 40 per cent of respondents expect e-content to overtake traditional book sales as early as 2018 - whereas a third predict that this will never happen.

Perhaps more surprisingly still, almost 60 per cent of respondents do not currently use e-books and e-readers at all, and 66 per cent of industry professionals still expect traditional books to dominate the market in five years time, with very few expecting e-books (seven per cent) or e-readers (two per cent) to be the main sources of revenue by 2013.

The industry predicted, however, that consumer attitudes would evolve - with over half thinking that Internet users will be more willing to pay for digital content in five years time than now.

Who is really in charge?

When asked who was driving the move towards digitisation in the book industry, only seven per cent felt that publishers were leading the way:

- 22 per cent said that consumers were pushing the move towards digitisation
- online retailers like Amazon (21 per cent), Google (20 per cent), and the telecommunications sector (13 per cent) were not far behind
- only two per cent felt that authors were driving this aspect of the industry - and governments lagged even further behind with only one per cent

Who is currently leading the sector in digitisation?

- over half said the US (51 per cent)
- Japan was in second place, with 15 per cent, followed by Europe - excluding the UK - at 11 per cent
- only five per cent named the UK as the dominant market in terms of digitisation

Which market will be leading the sector in digitisation in five years time?

Respondents predicted that the international balance will shift in the coming years:

- only 29 per cent predict that the US would still be leading the way
- China followed with 28 per cent
- respondents still expected Europe (17 per cent) and the UK (three per cent) to be trailing in this area

Challenges facing the industry

70 per cent of respondents may feel ready for the digital challenge, but industry professionals nevertheless recognised the need to work together to tackle certain issues. The following top four concerns will be discussed at length during this year's Frankfurt Book Fair:

- copyright - 28 per cent
- digital rights management - 22 per cent
- standard format (such as epub) - 21 per cent
- retail price maintenance - 16 per cent

When asked how prepared interviewee's companies were, they named three main areas in which they felt that more input was needed

- knowledge and strategy - including market research, and understanding and developing new business models (26 per cent)
- networking - with new co-operations and business partners (22 per cent)
- technical infrastructure (20 per cent)

Digitisation opens up new fields of co-operation. With which other sectors should the publishing industry work more closely?

- 22 per cent thought that mobile handset manufacturers and networks would be the most important future partners
- film (20 per cent), other consumer goods (19 per cent) and the music industry (18 per cent) followed

- only 13 per cent thought that the gaming industry was an important future collaboration

60 years in publishing - past and future

In this 60th anniversary year of the Frankfurt Book Fair, industry professionals were asked to look back over the major developments in the past six decades:

- 39 per cent cited online bookselling as the most important development in publishing in the past 60 years
- other main developments identified were marketing (20 per cent), book fairs (15 per cent) and chain store bookselling (17 per cent)

The survey looked at how digitisation might shape the future of publishing, and whether some of the main components of the industry would still be around in 60 years time:

- 25 per cent forecast that the retail bookseller would be obsolete in 60 years
- the agent's demise was also predicted by 21 per cent, and a similarly bleak future was expected for editors (14 per cent)
- 12 per cent of industry professionals think that e-readers are a passing craze, and will be gone in 60 years' time

Juergen Boos, Director of the Frankfurt Book Fair comments: "The Frankfurt Book Fair brings together thousands of publishing and media professionals, and the annual survey is a chance to take stock of the new trends and changes affecting the industry. This year the results offer a fascinating insight into how digitisation - identified in 2007 as publishing's major challenge - might shape all aspects of the book trade in years to come. The results are thought-provoking: such as China's predicted dominance in the digital sector in coming years, the recognised need for new co-operations with other industries, and the expectation that despite technological developments, the printed book will still be around in years to come. The 2008 Frankfurt Book Fair aims once again to ensure that the industry is well-equipped for these developments with a range of seminars and events focusing on the digital future."

Over 280.000 visitors are expected to join over 7.000 exhibitors from about 100 countries, with over 2.700 events taking place over the course of five days at the Book Fair.

The fully searchable Frankfurt Book Fair Calendar of Events is available at:
www.book-fair.com/calendar/

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