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Books for a digital detox

Who would have thought it? Cautious optimism has returned to international book markets. The feared widespread fire caused by mobile apps and e-books has failed to materialize, sales figures have stabilized - and in some markets they are even rising slightly.

People want to hold something haptic and tangible in their hands as an alternative to the digital experience. A study conducted by „[Two Sides](#)“ in 2017 found that 72 percent of readers prefer printed books in order to switch off from the digital information overflow. In a digital world, books are becoming the lean-back medium par excellence and can contribute significantly to deceleration.

It is well known that printed books have lost market share in individual segments, such as fiction in the form of paperbacks - in the US, e-books account for 19 percent of the total market (2017). However, this translates as a decline in sales volume of 10 percent over just one year. What is all the more surprising, however, is that the number of books sold in the US rose by 8 million in 2018 to a total of 695 million copies.

Change is the only constant

The US is not an outlier in this respect. According to [MediaControl](#) figures, the German market for children's and young people's books posted strong growth at a plus of 4.4 percent. By contrast, in Germany, the proportion of e-books has been stagnating for a number of years, and has stabilized at between 6 and 7 percent.



There is also consistently positive news from Great Britain. The book market there grew by 0.3 percent to 191 million copies sold in 2018, and sales rose by 2.1 percent to 1.63 billion pounds. What is more, the [Booksellers Association](#) recorded an increase in independent bookshops, an entirely contrary trend to the one in general retail. Especially when it comes to higher-quality books, consumers want to hold the books in their hands before buying them.

Adaptability of book publishers

But that does not mean that the publishing industry can move on to the daily agenda - change is much more ongoing and, as in many industries, the only constant. New forms of content generation, collaboration between authors, publishing companies and readers, and innovative business models will continue to keep the industry on its toes in the future.

And there's no need for the industry to hide - with a turnover of 122 billion dollars (source: Bookmap 2017 study), the global book market is three times as big as the music industry - and is a big player in Europe in particular. In 2017, European book publishers achieved total sales of 22.2 billion euros (source: European Book Publishing Statistics).

Books with Added Value

In general, there is a trend toward high-quality books with special features that offer additional haptic experiences. The possibilities are vast, ranging from special substrates through to shiny, matte or soft-touch foils, digital spot lacquering, one-color or multicolor hot foil embossing, rounded corners on the book block and cover, through to laser die cutting, and personalized printing of the trimmed edges of the books.

"Such added value is especially important in view of the competition with digital media for readers, especially if the book is sold in a brick-and-mortar store," says Erik Kurtz, Managing Partner of [Kösel GmbH & Co. KG](#), one of the leading book producers in Europe.



Book-of-One Production is Reality

Despite the positive news for printed books, the entire value chain for books faces massive challenges. In terms of production, the trend for increasingly short run sizes, through to runs of one copy, needs to be implemented efficiently in an industrial environment. This can only be achieved through complete digitalization. Production will only be on demand. Warehousing will increasingly be part of production. That is already technically feasible today.



Digital printing delivers the right answers. Currently 10 percent of all printed books in Europe are produced digitally. By 2022, the black-and-white and color volumes are expected to grow by 15 percent yearly (source: Western Europe Production Digital Printing, Market Overview Report; Caslon; 2017).

It is already possible today to use solutions from [Muller Martini](#) to produce books in soft or hardcover runs of one. Despite the high level of customization, the extensive integration and connectivity of all the modules ensures the necessary efficiency. “Mass customization” – the adaptation of a mass product to the needs of a customer – is no longer a thing of the future thanks to the high degree of automation over the entire process change.

Dynamic Publishing

The next topic that is to engage publishing companies and print service providers is dynamic publishing. That means that relevant variable content is prepared for certain target groups or even for individual readers. Based on templates that are available on online platforms, users can compile content from different sources, including their own images and texts. Photo books or self-publishing show in which direction things can develop. Further areas are education, travel and specialist books.

A typical example of dynamic publishing is, for instance, a reader possibly using a platform to compile a customized travel guide for their vacation to match their interests. The book is then printed and delivered directly. On the platform, the reader can determine which content he wants to take with him on his journey. The content is presented in an attractive, responsive design and then automatically sent to an app on the reader’s tablet or cell phone.

Attractive business models

During the trip, the book literally comes to life since various attractions are linked with photos, which can then be posted on social media. At home, you can create a personal photo book supplemented by information from the travel guide about the attractions and the sights.

This example shows that digitalization presents new opportunities for books. Amid the information overflow, print can be used to select what is really important and to retain it in book form. In the future, the challenge will be to combine the strengths of printed books with the possibilities of digital formats, such as immediate availability, customization, and up-to-date information. Then nothing will stand in the way of the book’s success story in the future.

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