The E-Print Industry and Bookseller Market: 
A Strategic Perspective

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The bookselling industry is no stranger to technological changes in its environment, especially in terms of digital technology. The industry has seen and been affected gravely by the aforementioned, in particular the companies of Amazon, Barnes & Noble, and Borders. The three of them have danced around each other over the past decade with Amazon outshining them and challenging the pace of Barnes & Noble and Borders in terms of price and convenience. They did so again when technological advances once again sent a new product to market; only this time technology is threatening the bookselling business as a whole. But Amazon has quickly grabbed the starring role in the e-reader phenomenon, leaving Borders and Barnes & Noble in the dust. It is a mystery exactly what Borders’ fate will be in the end. Will they pull themselves together to make a comeback in the bookselling market or will they falter altogether?

Keywords: E-reader, Digitalization, Print industry.

INTRODUCTION

The e-reader has certainly made a noteworthy uprising in the past year, but surprisingly e-readers have been around much longer than the e-readers we see in the market today. The concept can first be associated with Project Guttenberg, an effort founded in 1971 by Michael Hart who first had the idea of being able to digitalize some of the oldest written or printed documents still in existence today in order to ensure that their words were preserved and never forgotten, just in case the originals were ever destroyed. The project is named after the very first written or printed work after the Dark Ages that was produced in mass on a printing press, the Guttenberg Bible. One of the first historical documents that were digitalized through Project Guttenberg was the United States Declaration of Independence. This effort represents an idea that has carried through to today. Digitalizing some of the world’s oldest documents was meant as a means of preservation, adding years of life to the frail pages of the books in places such as the Yale University Rare Books Library which possesses one of only fourteen copies of the Guttenberg Bible still in existence today (Hart, 1992).

This concept of digitalizing written works has indeed evolved. The difference between the Guttenberg Project and the present is the fact that the advancement in technology has made digitalized books and documents more accessible now. The idea has developed into keeping libraries of books in your pocket rather than worrying about the preservation of older written masterpieces. With this in mind came the development of digital software capable of displaying something similar to a book format. Sony initially was the first out with something similar to the current perception of an e-reader today with their Sony Librie in 2004. Even at its earliest stage, the potential for the market that exists today was present, but at that point it was anyone’s guess as to what company would be the one to tap into that potential for market share and profit. The answer finally came out in 2007 with one of the first e-readers that we are more familiar with today (Abel, 2009).