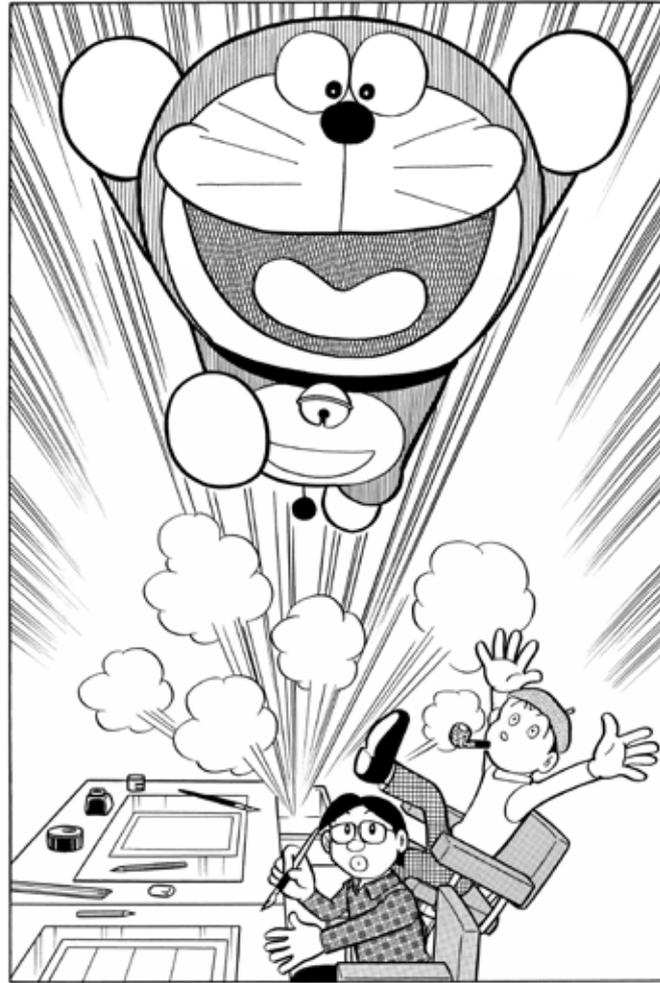


The BOOK and YOU

Making the Digital Connection



The now iconic robot cat Doraemon was born from the pen of manga artist Fujiko F. Fujio in 1970. Forty-three years later, in November 2013, a full-color electronic edition of the comic made its debut in North America. Japan's beloved Doraemon is connecting people across time and around the world. Voyager Japan is part of the digitization project. © Fujiko Pro

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Becoming Readers Who Write

President, Voyager Japan, Inc

Junko Kamata

❖ The Web Browser as eReader

The State of eBooks 22 Years Ago

Voyager Japan, Inc., was established 22 years ago, in October 1992, to pursue the possibilities of electronic publishing. This was long before we had Google searches or Amazon Kindles or Apple iPhones. The very notion of electronic publishing was still only a vague concept. The only form of publishing the world knew until then was a process in which publishing houses printed books on paper and channeled them to brick-and-mortar bookstores by way of distributors. Through the publication of countless books, the system had been refined into a fine-tuned machine whose various parts worked seamlessly with one another. There was no place for electronic publications in that workflow.

In 2011, the International Digital Publishing Forum (IDPF) responsible for the EPUB standard, a globally recognized file format for electronic books, published EPUB 3 as a final Recommended Specification. The EPUB 3 specification not only accommodates Japanese and other world languages, but provides for interactivity, accessibility, and multimedia functions. Its publication set off a new round of advances in ebook viewers, production tools, and distributions systems. No one working with electronic books today can be unfamiliar with this standard.

But back in 1992, there were no Internet-based booksellers, and only a very limited number of people had even heard of electronic books. People would ask, “Electronic publishing? What’s that?” And each time, I would launch into an impassioned explanation: “Electronic means digital, which is to say, using personal computers.

You use your PC to produce books with sound and video embedded in them, and publish them as electronic books. Then other people can read those electronic books on their own PCs.” We were convinced that digital media would be the wave of the future.

What’s So Great about Electronic Publishing Anyway?

Computers were expensive in those days, costing three and four thousand dollars apiece—even though they were like mere infants in capability when compared with today’s computers.

In the course of only a few years, CPUs went from 16-bits to 32-bits, and displays went from 640 x 400 to 1280 x 1024 pixels, and from 256 colors to millions of colors. The pace of the advances exceeded all of our expectations. Apple, HP, NEC, Fujitsu, Hitachi, and other PC makers introduced one new model after another. In order to continue distributing digital content, we were repeatedly forced to update our ereader software and production tools. And even with updates, the majority of our books still failed to sell. We were disheartened, exhausted, and on the verge of capsizing. But the lure of digital media never let go of us, and our unshaken desire to be part of its future kept us going.

The most difficult part of producing a book is the writing. If the book is printed on paper, that writing is preserved in a physical form that can last forever. But when the book is published electronically, it is far more difficult to give lasting shape to the writing you poured heart and soul into. With both hardware and software in the equivalent of a perennial growth spurt, change was the only constant. Electronic books that took advantage of the latest hardware capabilities were

destined to become obsolete right along with that hardware. I actually began asking myself, “What’s so great about electronic publishing anyway?”

Then, in 2008, Apple opened the App Store—a store for selling applications that worked on the iPod Touch.*¹ The iPod Touch had proved itself astonishingly easy to use. This is fabulous, we thought. We can create apps that combine the functions of an ebook reader with ebook content. But we quickly ran up against a fatal flaw in the system as far as selling books was concerned: Apple placed a screen on the content; setting its own unilateral rules, the company determined what was acceptable and what was not. And in fact, book apps we submitted to the App Store were rejected for reasons we could not agree with. A comic was rejected for including a bathing scene; a work of criticism was turned away for touching on Steve Jobs’ record. Did the company really want to stymie publishing activity—arbitrarily, at its sole discretion? This was the system Apple had introduced with such pride? Well, it wasn’t going to work for us. We needed to find a system that offered more freedom.

“Any Difference?”

The turning point for us came in 2011, the same year the EPUB 3 specification was published. Voyager Japan began developing a new system based on a concept called “Books in Browsers,” in which the user’s web browser becomes the platform for reading books. Taking the two initial B’s, we called the system “BinB” (pronounced “bee in bee”). Any smartphone, tablet, or computer with an HTML5-capable browser can serve as a reading device. So long as you are connected to the Internet, the procedure for reading a book is no different from looking at a web page.

Until this, we had mainly been developing around our own proprietary .book format, but now we adopted EPUB 3. It was time for a course change, to fall in step with the world standard.

The tag line we chose for the Voyager Japan display at the summer 2011 e-Book EXPO Tokyo

was “Any Difference?” The question was intended to ask how reading an ebook in a web browser was different from reading it in a dedicated ereader app. Paper-based books are easy to just pick up and read, and we take it for granted that that’s how books should be. But with an ebook, you first had to go through the trouble of downloading and installing an ereader app. We had discovered that this was a surprisingly high hurdle for many users, who would simply give up because they didn’t know how to install. In order to remove that hurdle, we needed to get rid of the separate app. But we couldn’t simply do without anything at all—something had to replace the app as a reading platform. And for that, we chose the web browser.

Our early tests confirmed for us that the browser could deliver a good reading experience. With the browser as our platform, we could easily and quickly make our books available to users on any number of different devices. And there would be no screening or rejections.

So after 20 years, we were at long last able to provide readers with a way of reading digital books that did not require a special effort. BinB includes the necessary functionality for reading ebooks—opening the file, turning pages, jumping from one chapter to another, managing a library of titles—and it is as easy to use as looking at web pages. All readers need to do is turn on whatever devices they own with a web browser and hit a button that says “Read.” This hurdle-free user experience has led the system to be adopted by online booksellers such as the Yahoo! Bookstore Japan and Booklive!, as well as by publishers such as Kodansha and Shueisha on their own sites. The fact that it can be linked with Google Analytics to obtain marketing information that is not available from Apple or Amazon is another important attraction from a business point of view.

The reading public is still divided in its attitudes toward ebooks. People often comment that printed books are easier on their eyes, or that they like the smell of the ink, they like the feel of the paper, they feel better having a physical object to keep on their shelf. I used to fire back that ebooks

now use better fonts and are easier to read, the text is in vertical format, and you can easily search the text. But with this new system, I no longer feel the need to be argumentative.

With BinB, my enthusiasm for electronic publishing has been rekindled, and I'm feeling reenergized. With the web browser as the platform, anybody and everybody can read ebooks. Internet users all over the world can become ebook readers. A new age has dawned.

❖ **Regaining Our Voice**

Record Events as a Witness, and Send Out Your Report

On the Internet, the individual user is not only a consumer of information but a dispatcher as well. Until recently, ebooks remained an insignificant entity occupying only a tiny niche, hardly even considered books at all. So it wasn't easy for individuals to embrace them as a means of expression. But now that ebooks can be read in any web browser, the world is about to change. The Internet is a medium by, of, and for the individual.

We already use the Internet for our daily communication needs. Calling it "a medium" may suddenly make it seem like something more distant, but isn't it fair to say that traditional media have all been extensions of our native ability to communicate? Conversations and letters passed between you and a personal acquaintance may seem like too small a thing to associate with what the term "media" conjures. But consider the concept of "word of mouth": it implies a process of receiving information and giving information in return or passing it on. Those conversations and letters have long served as forms of media on the personal level.

The Internet is very different from newspapers and magazines—not to mention television. With these traditional forms of media, we are all passive recipients of information. The information gathered by the various media organizations is edited down for our benefit and presented in the form of articles or programs. The portion we get to read or watch probably

represents less than a hundredth of the information originally gathered.

I think of the coverage of the March 2011 triple disaster on the northeastern Pacific coast of Japan. TV stations continually repeated the same news, over and over. I couldn't help but wonder about what was being left out, what was going on behind the scenes. Nuclear power is perfectly safe. Really? I had my doubts. So I went on the Internet to see what media outlets overseas were reporting, to watch videos being uploaded by private individuals, to follow what people were saying on Twitter and Facebook. I learned that an acquaintance had abruptly moved to the United States; that data centers in western Japan were seeing a huge spike in traffic; that foreign companies were pulling their staff out of Japan. It was the information I obtained over the Internet that confirmed just how bad the situation was.

The Internet is a vast, open doorway to the world. We have in our hands a medium that allows us to sound off freely and make our voices heard around the globe.

Let's Start Writing

Now let's take another step forward. I want to speak to those who have never considered writing and publishing a book of their own.

There may be many who've never thought of writing a book, but we'd be hard put to find anyone who's never read one. Ask any hundred people, and they will have read at least a hundred books among them. And how did they read these books? They read until they got tired, or they got so caught up that they couldn't go to sleep, or they learned valuable lessons that changed their life, or they ached to fall in love themselves as they followed the story—to list just the first few possibilities that come to mind. Do any of these ring a bell for you?

And think about this, too: Has the amount of time you spend reading books declined by any chance? It has for me. If anything, I spend more of my time these days writing. I'm referring to such things as writing emails related to work or updating my Facebook page. These sometimes

turn into little dialogues. Someone offers an opposing view, or I receive a flurry of “Likes.” I enjoy this give and take, the way it feeds on itself. I get the urge to write something about ebooks or digital media, or to see if I can come up with a precept for living in my own small way, or maybe to post a whimsical verse. Each exchange prompts a desire to say something more.

And sometimes I feel the need to take a stand. Newly formed opinions tend to be weak. No matter who you are, it takes courage to express your views publicly. But if I can overcome that fear and put an opinion into words, then I definitely want people to read what I’ve written. “Writing what you know from experience, saying exactly how you feel—that’s what’s best.” A little bit of encouragement like that, and even I can write.

Then if you did write a book, how would you want it to be placed in readers’ hands?

Would you like it to be sold in bookstores like Kinokuniya or Junkudo? That is to say, do you want it to go through the normal retail channels? If so, it means you either have to personally visit each bookstore and ask them to carry your book, or you have to sign a contract with a distributor to handle that task. It’s not really something you can do on your own.

Some 80,000 books a year flow through the existing retail system, and it has been fine-tuned to best serve the publishing houses. As individuals, the chances for us to elbow our way into the bookstores are extremely limited. We must first gain the attention of an editor or publisher, and *then* get them to bring our books out as commercial authors. There are vanity houses that will publish any book for a fee that runs to several hundred thousand yen*² or more. They will handle the layout, and have the book printed and bound. It’s then possible to get that book onto bookstore shelves. But since book buyers have never heard of us, just to have someone pick up the book and look at it will take a small miracle. Getting the book into the hands of readers is a good deal more difficult than we

might imagine.

And that’s exactly where ebooks come in. With electronic books, both the production step and the distribution step can be much simplified, and the costs are lower as well. Email, social networks, and blogs can be used to generate sales directly from producer to consumer. In effect, it’s like farm-direct produce at a farmer’s market. You can’t make a television show all by yourself. But going it alone is possible with an ebook: you can in fact enjoy the satisfaction of producing a book all by yourself. That is the true wonder of ebooks. So ladies and gentlemen, let’s start writing!

From MS Word to eBook in 5 Minutes

But what exactly does producing and distributing your electronic tome entail? In the case of Voyager Japan’s new web publishing tool called Romancer, launched in July 2014, it goes like this:

The first step, of course, is to write the book. Many of you will already be using Microsoft Word as your word processor. Please go ahead and draft the book in Word. Save your completed file in .docx format—this is the file you will use. If you are creating a comic book, you will need to save your finished work either as a PDF or in image files.

Once you have completed and proofed your final draft, you’re ready to produce the ebook. Upload the file to the Romancer site, and press the “Convert” button. Then wait. It will take only a few minutes—a little longer if you’ve used a particularly large number of ruby characters, it’s a play script, or in certain other cases.

The screen that appears when the conversion is finished shows two different links. One lets you download a copy of the ebook to your computer. The converted file will be in EPUB 3 format. Of all the ebook formats that have been developed, this is the most widely accepted, most portable format. It is compatible with a large number of existing ereader apps.

You can port this EPUB to sell your book through Amazon’s Kindle Direct Publishing (KDP)

service, which allows individuals to publish their own books.*³ Just sign up for a KDP account, and you, too, can sell your book on Amazon’s site. There have already been many books written about KDP, and there are numerous testimonials and how-to guides on the web.

The other link is a URL that you can click to go directly to the converted book in your browser, or copy and send by email, social networking, or other means to those whom you wish to read your book. Through the power of the Internet, anybody who receives this URL will be able to open your book in his or her own web browser anywhere in the world. Each time one of your recipients sends the URL on to someone else, you gain another reader. You make a connection with a growing web of readers through your book.

The URL for the book takes readers to a page that uses the BinB system. So anyone can read the ebook simply by entering the URL in their browser’s address field. The only technical skill required of the reader is the ability to view a web page.

You will no doubt hear from your readers about typographical errors. It’s easy for even professional proofreaders to miss kanji conversion errors, yet somehow they seem to stick out like sore thumbs once the book is in the hands of readers. Also, when you yourself look at the book again after releasing it, you will

probably discover lines you’d like to rephrase for one reason or another. This, too, is something that happens to the pros. In such cases, all you have to do is correct your own source file and upload it to Romancer again. Click on the “Convert” button, and in a few minutes you have a corrected edition.

For those reading your book in their browsers, the corrected edition is available at the same URL as before. This feature can be used to produce a serial publication as well.

❖ The eBook Awaits You

Take Your First eBook Step

Your ebook journey begins with a single book.

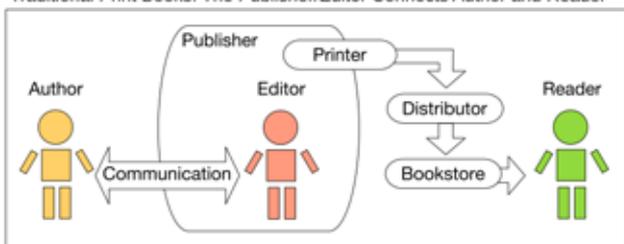
I wonder if you’ve heard of Aozora Bunko—the name literally means “Blue Sky Library” (www.aozora.gr.jp). It’s an Internet library of Japanese literary works that are being digitized because their period of copyright protection has expired and they are now in the public domain.

The library got its start in July, 1997. The website launched with just five electronic texts in the collection: *Yo ga genbun-itchi no yurai* (How I Got Started with *Genbun-itchi*), by Shimei Futabatei; *Takasebune* (The Boat on the River Takase), by Ōgai Mori; *Midaregami* (Tangled Hair), by Akiko Yosano—in two separate editions from 1901 and 1933; and *Sangetsuki* (The Moon Over the Mountain), by Atsushi Nakajima.

A large number of volunteers flocked to the project as soon as it was launched. They established a system for working together to select titles, gather source materials, and enter and proof the texts. By the year 2000, the collection held over 1000 titles. The late Michio Tomita, long the leader of the project, spoke of his astonishment at how rapidly the site had reached the 1000-title threshold, with so many more volunteers pitching in than he had ever imagined possible. In 2014, the number of titles surged past the 12,000 mark.

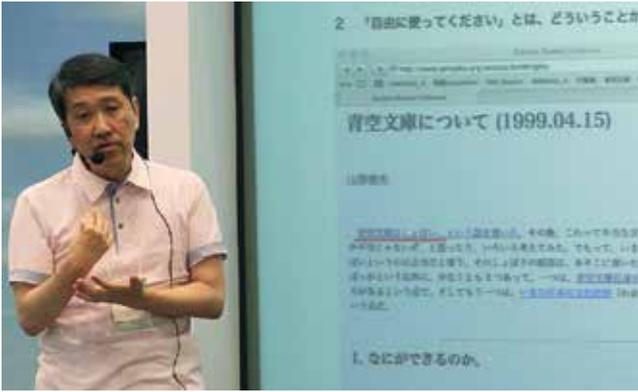
In the introduction to his book *Hon no mirai* (The Future of the Book; <http://aozora.binb.jp/reader/>)

Traditional Print Books: The Publisher/Editor Connects Author and Reader



Books on the Internet: Electrons Connect Author and Reader Directly





Michio Tomita speaks out against extending the period of copyright protection. Tomita was instrumental in getting electronic publishing off the ground in Japan. Both the Kindle and the Kobo Reader relied on the availability of a large library of texts from Aozora Bunko at the time of their release in Japan. After Tomita's death, Hon no Mirai Kikin (The Future of the Book Foundation; <http://honomirai.net>) was established in order to support the activities of Aozora Bunko into the future.

main.html?cid=56499), Michio Tomita says, “The book is now something up there in the sky, just waiting for someone to begin reading it.”

Just as the “Blue Sky Library” began with only five titles but has grown to over 12,000, your single ebook is the start of something bigger for you as well.

Books Rooted in Person-to-Person Connections

Thanks to the nature of my work, I have had occasion to read a great many ebooks. Natsuhiko Kyōgoku’s novel *Shineba ii noni* (Why Don’t You Just Die). Atsuo Inoue’s biography *Kokorozashi takaku: Son Masayoshi seiden* (High Ideals: An Authorized Biography of Masayoshi Son). Dan Kogai’s self-help book *Dangen* (Dan Says). Shūhō Satō’s manga *Burakku Jakku ni yoroshiku* (Say Hello to Black Jack). Takao Saitō’s manga *Sabaibaru* (Survival). Natsumi Iwasaki’s high school novel *Moshi kōkō yakyū no joshi manejā ga Dorakkā no “Manejimento” o yondara* (If the Girl Manager for a High School Baseball Team Looked for Advice in Peter Drucker’s *Management*). And so on.

My motivation for reading these ebooks was not quite the same as it might be for the general reader. To be precise, I read them in the course of helping to produce them, or while researching the ebook products being turned out by other companies. Would I have read them apart from these circumstances? It’s hard to say. But the more important question may be: Would I have been able to find them?

How do you make it possible for people to find your book on the web? “Discoverability” is not just an issue for ebooks, of course; it is just as critical for traditional paper-based books as well. What keywords will make the title of your book appear among the top hits in a Google or Yahoo! search? How do you get your title to circulate on social networks? They say you can generate a huge response by advertising all over the Internet and running TV commercials, but who among us has that kind of money to throw around?

Any information placed on the web must coexist with an overwhelming volume of other information, much of which is available at no cost. If you want someone to read your book, you have to get them to select your book from among everything else on offer. As with the small miracle it takes to get a shopper to look at your book in a brick-and-mortar store, you can’t really expect your book to be discovered through a search engine.

As I wrote before, all media are essentially an extension of our native ability to communicate. Person-to-person communication is built on a strong foundation of trust. It’s impossible to say how many books I’ve read because they were recommended to me by a friend. I’ve also often bought books on-site after going to hear a lecture I was interested in. These are purchases I’ve made because a direct connection was established between the author—or someone else who knows the book first hand—and myself. When it comes to discoverability, your connections with those who know you and your ebook are your strongest asset. Since the ability to offer sample sections, as well as the utter simplicity of going from purchase to actually reading the book, are both superior to print-based books, you should be able to use these connections to help people discover and read your book.

The Six Essential Characteristics of Electronic Books: “EBOOKS”

Every one of us possesses a unique store of knowledge and experiences and viewpoints that only we can write about. I challenge you to channel your thoughts and feelings about these into an ebook, using your own words. I can

scarcely imagine how much the circulation of such books over the Internet will enrich our society. I'm eager to read the ebooks into which each of you has poured your creativity and originality. And I'm eager to exchange views with you through such books, and to deepen my own thinking. It's because they embody these kinds of possibilities that ebooks have the power to enrich our society with their light.

I wrote earlier about how each advance in hardware made our ebooks obsolete, and it began to make me think, "What's so great about electronic publishing anyway?" Above all else, ebooks must be lasting. But we have learned from our mistakes that there are also a number of other qualities we must not forget, which I will summarize here using the mnemonic of "EBOOKS":

Eternity: Ebooks must be capable of being stored, recorded, and displayed in perpetuity.

Borderless: Ebooks must be accessible globally, both in terms of marketplace and in terms of the devices on which they can be viewed.

Open: The technology and format must make use of an open standard.

Originality: The system must foster publication of new and original content.

Knowledge: Ebooks should be filled with knowledge and experiences worth preserving.

Social: Ebooks should build on and encourage connections between authors and readers.

We have media as an extension of our own native powers of communication, and we have books as a medium that anyone can use. In the final analysis, a book is in effect a container, and an ebook is no different. Only a few short years ago, we did not yet have convenient portable display devices such as smartphones. Reading required special equipment. It really wasn't possible to say ebooks were the same as print books. But things are different now. Handheld devices that connect to the Internet can be had for as little as a few thousand yen.

If you want to produce a print book, you will always have to calculate costs. But with electronic books, you can make the leap and take

up the challenge without worrying about such things. Publishing is most fundamentally about expressing yourself. Organize your thoughts around an issue you'd like to raise, shape them into a book, and put it out there for the world to read. The greatest attraction of ebooks is that any of us can do this, acting on a purely individual level, turning our own personal memories and experiences into something that has lasting shape.

That is, *if* we will voice our views in writing, and upload them. In the Internet age, each of us is no longer merely a consumer of information. We must not be satisfied as mere consumers. We all have a responsibility to inform one another, by setting down what we have witnessed and dispatching what we know to the world.

What any single one of us can dispatch is small. But to my mind, that's precisely what makes ebooks, which we can produce entirely on our own, a tool I can use. It's the perfect means of expressing those things we personally want to understand and communicate to others—for saying those things we feel most need to be said.

*1 We were only familiar with the iPod Touch at the time because the iPhone was not released in Japan until the App Store opened.

*2 ¥1000 is roughly \$10.

*3 English books can be submitted in .docx format, but KDP does not currently support .docx format for vertical Japanese text.



Junko Kamata

Born in 1957. She worked at Pioneer LDC, where she was involved in bringing the LaserDisc to market as well as the production of multimedia content, before helping found Voyager Japan, Inc., in 1992. She produces CD-ROMs and web content, and has also been engaged in the development and sale of electronic publishing tools. She was named president of Voyager Japan in October, 2013.

Book, Internet and Romancer

Freelance Technology Writer

Kazutoshi Otani

❖ Spread of Media; the Key is its Immediacy and Interactivity

It is very interesting to see the long years of evolution of book from the viewpoint of Alan Kay's analogy with the relationship between media and people.

As you know, Alan Kay was called as the father of the idea of personal computer. His capacity as a "prodigy" is described in the section of "The Computer Revolution Begins From Now On" in *Hagino Masaaki no Funbare Digital!* (Masaaki Hagino's Keep On, Digital!) (http://r.binb.jp/epm/e1_2707_03052014040622; this book is in Japanese) published by Mr. Masaaki Hagino of Voyager Japan, Inc. on *Kikan Hon to Computer* (Quarterly Magazine Book and Computer) and only recently digitized by Romancer for everyone to read easily. I really recommend you to read.



Hagino Masaaki no Funbare Digital!
(Masaaki Hagino's Keep On, Digital!)
By Masaaki Hagino

In the relationship between media and people, what this Alan Kay gave attention is the balance between the amount of visual information, and the immediacy, and the interactivity. He took up play, film, TV drama and computer game as

media for people to enjoy a story, analyzed differences between each of these media according to the three axes and discussed why people were devoted to computer game.

According to him, a play performed live has the most amount of information because players and audiences share the same place, and the play is performed in front of the audiences. The realism of a play overwhelms those of others.

On the other hand, in order to watch a play, audiences have to go to the only theater where specific players perform. In addition, as the timetable is fixed, the play is not necessarily available in the time and place convenience for audiences. In that sense, play lacks immediacy. Furthermore, it is not interactive because the story goes on independently of audiences.

In contrast, a film secures certain amounts of information thanks to being projected on a large screen, though its realism is not up to those of a play. In order to watch a film, it is necessary to go to a cinema at a certain time but theaters are located in various places so that audiences can select one according to their convenience. In comparison with a play, a film compromises with audiences on immediacy, although it is still not interactive in terms of the progress of the story.

In addition, a TV drama (including video tape etc.) has far less realism than a film and has limited amount of information. However, its immediacy is much higher because audiences can watch it by setting a channel in their house without going to somewhere. Also, it has a little interactive essence in the sense that although timetable is fixed, audiences can record a drama by recording device to play it when they want to

watch after broadcast and can fast-forward, fast-reverse and pose the story as necessary.

As for computer game, particularly in the early years, resolution was so low that the amount of visual information was really limited. However, it surpassed every other past media by immediacy to play whenever you want to play and wherever there is a game console and by high interactivity for audience (player) to commit the progress of the story.

In his time, computer game software itself was still distributed in the shape of cartridge etc. However, now download via the Internet became the mainstream to increase immediacy.

From this analysis, Kay concluded that people were attracted to media with high immediacy and interactivity even if the amount of information would decrease. Of course, it has no connection with superiority or inferiority of each media. For example, play and film is still supported because audiences find out other attractiveness such as its high realism and eventness for which they go to specific place at fixed time and share experiences with other people.

❖ Evolution of the Form of Book and the Relationship with People

Now, looking back on the evolution of book, it was Italian monks in the beginning of 6th century who created the original form of the concept of modern book. They made copies of lectionary with a quill on a large parchment. They covered the bundle of pages bound by leather strap with a piece of leather to make a jacket and added it high decorativeness by decorating it with metal fittings and gems on the surface. Written characters themselves had detail like an ornamental design focusing on medieval sense of beauty rather than readability for which they spent from half a year to a year to produce a few pages.

As a result, not only the contents but also all information included the books such as the touch of parchment, the majestic binding and calligraphy of handwriting with various kind of

ink became the value of the books that taught religious values to readers and leaved the values in history.

At the same time, these books which were as valuable as jewelry were available for only limited few people. In addition, they have to go to the place where the books were kept in order to read them. In other words, the books had no immediacy and were unrelated to interactivity for readers and writers to communicate.

The Name of the Rose written by Umberto Eco and adapted to a movie describes a scene in which an important manuscript is burnt to the ground together with the building keeping it as the climax, which means not mere destruction of a book by fire, but killing of a culture or a history.

By the way, it is interesting that regardless of its high value, in some medieval manuscripts there are complaints written by monks who were in charge of production of the copy to tell their hardships (<http://tinyurl.com/7p663n4>). According to this website, there are the following words which tell that the monks were also human: “Thank God, it will soon be dark (after sunset).” (Note by author: Copying was done in daytime), “The parchment is hairy” (The parchment is too rough to write.), “Now I’ve written the whole thing: for Christ’s sake give me a drink” (release from a hard work), “Writing is excessive drudgery. It crooks your back, it dims your sight, it twists your stomach and your sides” (I’m worn out.) and “Let the reader’s voice honor the writer’s pen” (let the readers know this



The handwritten manuscript bound to the desk with chains not to be brought out (Cesena, Italy)



(Left) Gutenberg Bible (colored ornamental characters and ornamental line were handwritten)
 (Right) Incunabula = printed book in the 15th century (see the metal ornamental protection parts and binding parts)

hardness).

After such a situation continued for a long time, Gutenberg's printing method in the middle of the 15th century caused popularization of paper books which are easier to use than parchment. However, early printed books known as incunabula were very few; although the number of the places where the books of the same content were available increased, those who knew the existence of them were very few at all. The books were for the limited privileged classes.

The transition from copied manuscripts to printed books caused the information of handwritten letters' nuance lost, while the books were still unrelated to the interactivity, though its immediacy had improved a little in the early years.

It is only in recent times that mass printing era has come and bookstores have opened here and there so that paper books became popular as treasure trove of knowledge close to readers. A deluxe edition can be considered as a successor of the past incunabula but popular magazines, hardcovers and paperbacks have undergone an evolution according to different goals.

For example, magazines try to be interesting for readers by including a lot of photos and illustrations and using attractive layouts and colors. On the other hand, hardcovers and paperbacks aim to reduce costs by standardization

and simplification of binding and to improve readability by simple fonts. However, the common thing for both types is a trend to focus on the content itself.

As mentioned above, a book originally had a value not only in the contents written but also in the part of container of information. It can be said that spending many centuries, and supported by development of technologies, a book has reached to the phase where it aims to communicate the essential parts of the information to the reader.

Besides, the immediacy for which you can get a book as you like by going to nearby bookstore or library, or by ordering by mail order to get it in one or two days can be located between the film and the TV drama in the example of media above.

❖ Realization of the Immediate Communication by the Internet

The development of book distribution system has reduced the limit of time and space for readers to obtain contents and has improved the immediacy to some extent. However, as for the interactivity, there were few improvements.

As for the communication between the sender and the receiver of the information, the reader could only send a fan letter using the existing postal system, and the editor could only insert a questionnaire postcard to get a feedback of popular articles or to receive an opinion or comment to the contents.

By the way, few people know what the British Empire dealt with after establishing the modern production system by the Industrial Revolution. In fact, the people of British Empire who possessed the colonies all over the world and the vast territory called as the empire on which the sun never sets tried to develop a worldwide communication network as fast as possible to connect all of them.

Also, in the Civil War in the United States, it was a great factor for the army of the North to win at the end that the headquarters could grasp the condition of the front by its communication

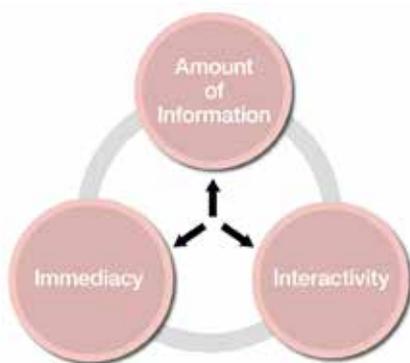
network so that they could send arms and bullets appropriately.

Although its function and users were far more limited than those of the present, realization of high-speed communication by the communication network to connect major cities on the earth enabled people to obtain necessary information quickly to utilize it for their life and work as well as national strategy.

However, the information which can be handled on the communication network was basically limited to texts and the exchange of the information was limited for 1 to 1 or 1 to many. In addition, it was necessary to go to limited base station to send or receive the information.

In contrast, the progress of the technologies gave birth to the information infrastructure to send and receive multimedia data including image, sound and movie for many to many at your home and office. This is the Internet which has gradually got popularized since the middle of 1990's and has become established as a nearly essential existence now.

In particular the WWW (World Wide Web) designed by Sir Timothy John Berners-Lee et al. created a system for everyone to have electrical information pages (websites) on the net. In addition, it popularized web log in short blog for individuals to leave diary-like records in a standardized form and SNS (Social Networking Service) to create virtual community where registered users exchange their latest news and comments to them.



Alan Kay considered the relationship between media and people from the three axes

Website, blog and SNS reflect the result of writing immediately and enable the sender and the receiver of the information to exchange messages between each other on a comment section. Now human acquired a completely immediate and interactive communication method to express them freely.

❖ What is the Difference between Website, Blog and SNS and Book?

However, website, blog and SNS were not “a book”.

I wrote simply that “was not ‘a book’” but I think you readers began to wonder “what is ‘a book’?”

I examined a dictionary *Daijirin* to find “a book” is “a volume or publications”. Then what is “a volume”? It means “a book or publications”; also, “publications” are “a book or a volume”. It’s just wasting of time.

On the other hand, a dictionary *Koujien* defines “a book (publications)” as “written or printed letters and figures bound in a volume”; a dictionary *Meikyo Kokugo Jiten* says “edited and printed texts, figures, photos etc. bound in a volume”.

Also, the standard expediently adopted by UNESCO in 1964 to collect statistics describes a book as “a non-periodical printed publication of at least 49 pages, exclusive of the cover pages.”

In addition, *Shuppan Jiten* (Publication Encyclopedia) released by Shuppan News Co., Ltd. in 1971 defines book (publications) as “1. Letters, figures, photos etc. are included as contents expressed for communication”, “2. The contents are printed on pages”, “3. The pages are bound not to break up and have both contents and covers” and “4. It has a certain amount of contents (non-routine publications including more than 50 pages excluding covers).”

As you notice, these definitions have become old because it is assumed that books are “printed” and “bound” thing. Besides, it seems meaningless to prescribe page number precisely.

However, we can pick up the essence according to the actual circumstances: It includes “letters, figures, photos etc. edited and brought together”.

A dictionary *Shinmeikai Kokugo Jiten* seems to have captured these definitions from the time of paper books, or have reached to a universal definition. It defines a book as “written (printed) things brought together for people to read”. Though there is no mention to figures and photos here, it is natural that they include elements other than letters which help to understand because they are “things for people to read”.

Also, () in a part of “printed” means that it is not necessary to be printed; if only written, it can be a book. Printing is not a necessary condition.

In contrast, the part of “brought together” is essential. In other words, it is necessary that “the contents are carefully considered with an intent” and to “have a composition to communicate the information the writer wants the reader to read in the most effective way”, not to simply write down ideas. This point is consistent with the essence of other dictionaries’ definitions: “edited and brought together”.

In the light of these points, let’s answer to the question again: “what is a book?” The answer is “a thing for people to read written with letters, figures and photos, edited to communicate the intent effectively and bound together.” One topic may be developed in several pages. It may take a few hours to read the whole of the theme.

Kevin Kelly, the past editor of legendary *Whole Earth Catalog* and *WIRED*, said: “‘A book’ means not a substitute, but a topic or a narrative (narration/story) continuously developed” (<http://wired.jp/2012/01/28/future-of-reading-kevin-kelly/>).

At the same time, he added that so far as he experienced, the duration of the reader’s interest is several minutes for an ordinary webpage; however, nearly 10 hours is not unusual for a book.

On the basis of this, an ordinary website often

contains about 1,000 letters per a page, 1 topic on a page and 1 theme for several pages. Also, the sender of the contents sometimes develops a topic in a quick tempo considering the reader may read from the middle or read only a part. In other words, as for website, contents are usually created to give the information fast rather than let the reader read thoroughly.

On the other hand, as for blog, in particular a blog based on a hobby, it is not rare case that long texts are contained in a page and the content is rich. However, due to the layout, there are some cases it is not suit to read a long text, or even worse, reading is painful.

Needless to say, both of them are based on lateral text. Even though the writer wants to provide vertical texts according to the contents, it requires some know-how, or it is impossible for some systems.

However, even these contents can be reconstructed from the viewpoint of an editor, have a readable layout and be released as a book to actually achieve success. From this point, we can understand the importance of “edit” and how to “bring” the contents “together” in “a book”.

How about SNS? It is a place to send/note ideas on each occasion, notable information or happenings occurring in front of the writer now and then, so it lacks continuous development or nature of story; it is different from “a book” at all.

Due to popularization of the Internet, the time has come when everyone can release information easily to express themselves. However, it does not give complete satisfaction as a platform to read/let the reader read.

❖ Romancer Fills the Gap between “Net” and “Book”

This insufficiency has been filled with hardware and software of so-called eBook readers. Such a special device or viewer app enables to instantly download and read a necessary book (if it is on the selling list), utilizing the immediacy realized

by the Internet. The item sold there is the content worthy of reading for a long time which has a format of “a book” mentioned in this article.

In contrast, it lacks the freedom for the sender of the content to upload information on their own and release it in real time on a popular browser, like freedom of website, blog and SNS. Also, the reader has to make a registration to a certain service and provide some personal information even if they want to read free contents.

That is inevitable for enclosure strategy of business, or for provision with highly advanced technologies but incompatible with the needs to release/read a book freely regardless of business or non-business.

Romancer can be regarded as an eBook publication tool to fill the gap and give the author and the reader the best immediacy and freedom. I have published a short work *Concep-tou Tuushin Tokubetsu-gou* (Concep-tou Report Special Edition) (http://r.binb.jp/epm/e1_2808_12052014071742; this book is in Japanese) by Romancer and I was moved by its easiness for which the author only have to set captions etc. on familiar Word file and to provide images of a cover and figures to read it as “a book” on major web browsers after a few minutes.



Concep-tou Tuushin Tokubetsu-gou (Concep-tou Report Special Edition)
By Kazutoshi Otani

The author can control everything; so they tend to devote themselves to detailed adjustments. This is inevitable, but from the viewpoint of the author it is really attractive that they can adjust their works

until just before its release and can do revision after the release; it is even possible to change the status of the book to non-released.

Besides, if I may mention a personal wish for Romancer, I'd like to say its interactivity should be more enriched since it is a web service. Concretely, even now the author and the reader can share a book with comment for a book but it is ideal that they can do that in more detail for a paragraph like CommentPress (<http://futureofthebook.org/commentpress/>). If this were realized, it is sure that the meaning of reading utilizing eBook will reach an unprecedented level.

Of course, Romancer is provided like a web app based on cloud service; even if such an upgrade were carried out, users can utilize new functions instantly and seamlessly without an operation such as upgrading. This is a great merit.

By the way, as for the publication environment in the near future, Kevin Kelly mentioned above expected appearance of a new format and says: Longer than an article on a magazine and shorter than a book; there will be a business chance. Romancer is of course capable to publication of eBook of every length. In addition, it enables to release a book in real time at ease and to make a revision easily. From these characteristics, I think Romancer is the technology nearest to the platform for such a new article.



Kazutoshi Otani

Born in 1958. He has written on various media as a technology writer. He has interviewed Steve Jobs, Bill Gates and Steve Wozniak. The director of AssistOn in Harajuku and vice-manager of NPO entity MOSA. The author of *Apple no Mirai* (The Future of Apple), *Seikou Suru Kaisha ha Naze “Shashin” o Daiji ni Suru Noka* (Why Does Successful Company Take Good Care of “Photo”) etc.

American Book Publishing Industry: What is possible and what has changed

Editor: BookJam Books

Takashi Hata

Almost every morning, I go to one of three cafes I like and drink the first cup of java and read the news of the day. I check my “Things To Do” list and start working. I am an expatriate of Japan living in New York. Most of the time my work involves interviewing editors and writers, and writing articles. I write about the American literary world, and as I have been doing this for a long time, I have accumulated some knowledge of the U.S. publishing industry, which is facing new challenges and new technologies. Where will these changes bring the industry? I’ll explore this in this article.

❖ One answer provided by OR Books

6th Avenue runs through Greenwich Village in New York. Crossing the avenue and going south into the maze of small streets of the Village, you will come upon Varick Street, which later becomes 7th Avenue as it heads north towards midtown. The offices of OR Books are on this street.

OR Books was founded by two veteran editors. John Oakes, who worked for Grove Press, co-founded Four Walls Eight Windows, and was the publisher of Thunder’s Mouth. His partner, Colin Robinson, is a former senior editor at Scribner and a publisher of New Press. The “OR” of OR Books comes from the first initials of their last names.

I was lucky enough to interview both of them. I met them on separate occasions, and each of the interviews was memorable. Their personalities and resumes are impressive, but their fresh approach to the publishing industry made the greatest impression on me.

OR Books publishes its books using the Internet only. This publishing company doesn’t use any traditional distribution channels - OR Books publishes digital on demand books and EBooks exclusively.

My interviews with them can be read here in full in Japanese (John Oakes: <http://bit.ly/johnoakes>; Colin Robinson: <http://bit.ly/colinrobinson>). My first thought going into these interviews was: Is it possible for a company to survive only by publishing books on the Internet?

John and Colin share the same mindset about this point. To their thinking, the traditional publishing method of printing, distributing, and selling books is coming to the end. They say publishing as we’ve known it is either ending or radically changing. They believe they have set up OR Books in the best way possible to go forward and publish books that they value.

John Oakes



Colin Robinson

They both have extensive experience in the American publishing world and Colin is knowledgeable about the industry in the UK too. Both of them know the traditional publishing process very well: a book idea is proposed, the book goes through the editing process, and approximately a year later the book is actually published. Copies are sent out to booksellers, as many copies as possible are sold, and then the unsold copies come back and the publisher is stuck with the remainders.

“It was a very frustrating, sad and wasteful process,” said John. In so many cases, even the best titles suffered this fate.

They started this new style of publishing house, OR Books, because they felt there is need for a new way to do things.

“Colin and I, we’d never worked together before, but we had an idea to set up a company together. As we were talking, we realized we had to find a new way to publish, a way to start fresh, stripping away the traditional methods and find a new approach to managing the publishing process and producing books.”

That’s how they came up with the idea to start OR Books.

“In my view, one of the exciting things happening right now, and also one of the frightening things, is that there are a million paths to success for publishers. Five or ten years ago there was one way to publish. A fuller spectrum of possibilities is available to us now.” said John.

Is American publishing truly changing? And if so, how? This is very interesting question for me as well.

❖ **The challenge for publishers isn’t digital**

Seven Stories Press is a mid-size publisher that publishes Kurt Vonnegut and Noam Chomsky. I became friends with the publisher, Dan Simon, because our sons attend the same elementary

school in Manhattan.

One day, I brought my tape recorder to his Tribeca apartment and interviewed him.

The full text of this interview can be read here in Japanese (<http://bit.ly/dansimon>). The impression I got from this interview was similar to the impression I had after meeting with Gary Fisketjon, the American editor of Haruki Murakami.



Gary Fisketjon

I remember Fisketjon’s words when I asked him whether book sales in the US are in a state of decline. He referred to the bestseller “Cold Mountain” and said, ““Cold Mountain’ won the National Book Award and sold 1.2 million copies. But this figure represents only 0.5 percent of the American population. I believe there are more people reading fiction out there.”

He said there should be a continued emphasis on selling books, publishing good books and making an effort to publicize and let people know of the existence of these books.

Fisketjon’s words echo the current sentiment in the book industry among American editors: they do not feel much of a sense of crisis regarding the future of book sales. Unlike the situation in Japan, the American book industry is not in “recession”. According to figures released by BookStats, the Association of American Publishers/Book Industry Study Group statistics program, trade book sales rose 6.9% to \$15.05 billion in 2012. And total book sales rose 1.0% in 2013 over 2012, to \$15.05 billion, according to

the 1,211 publishers who report results to the Association of American Publishers' StatShot program.*1

The American book industry may not in recession, however, the commodity composition and the sales methods are changing greatly.

"New Public" published figures for net revenues for U.S. trade books. According to their findings, the net revenue of hard covers fell \$5.2 billion to \$5.1 billion from 2008 to 2012. Paperback net revenue also fell from \$5 billion to \$4.9 billion in the same period. On the other hand, the net revenue for eBooks in the same period increased by \$64 million to \$3.1 billion.*2

Tom Weldon, UK chief executive of Penguin Random House, says "Some commentators say the publishing industry is in enormous trouble today. They are completely wrong, and I don't understand that view at all."*3

After the mega-merger of Penguin and Random House last year, Penguin Random House now has 15,000 writers. Weldon says book publishers have managed the digital transition better than any other media or entertainment industry.

"In the last four years, Penguin and Random House had the best years in their financial history" says Weldon.

Penguin UK has 700,000 followers on Twitter, and every month 2,500 customers open an email from Penguin UK.

Weldon says, "The challenge isn't digital: It is, how do you tell people about the next great book."

Amazon uses customers search history to create "recommendations". Weldon thinks publishers have to do something more personal.

"Where do they (our readers) hang out, what do they like, how do we talk to them?" Weldon thinks publishers have to know much more about their readers. The company is still looking for

HOW DO CONSUMERS LEARN ABOUT BOOKS?

Print:	1. In-store display / on-shelf / spinning rack 2. Friend / relative recommendation 3. Bestseller list 4. Online: author's site
eBook:	1. Friend / relative recommendation 2. Online: read excerpt / sample 3. Online: retailer recommendation 4. Bestseller list 5. Online: email from retailer

Source: Bowker Market Research

this "direct relationship" magic formula, and he intends to find it.

This is the issue of "Discoverability", and the difference in how people find out information about print book vs eBooks. Bowker Market Research has published some interesting data.*4

❖ The formula that "sells" eBooks

In the last few years eBooks have produced skyrocketing sales figures. For example in February 2011, eBook total sales were up 202% compared to the same month a year earlier, but by 2013 sales had slowed down. eBooks now account for about 30% of all adult trade book sales. However, this figure does not include self-published eBooks, an important segment of the American publishing industry that is expected to continue growing.

Most traditional publishing houses don't list eBooks that are priced under \$4 for fear that the cheaper eBook prices will affect print book prices. These publishers seem to have given over the eBook market for titles below the \$4 price point to self-publishers and independent publishers.

It is also likely that self-published titles by famous authors will increase. The reason for this is the increase in royalties that authors can enjoy. The going standard royalty rate for eBooks at traditional publishers is 25% of the list price and this is unlikely to change in the future. However, if an author self-publishes a book, he or she could

potentially realize a return of up to 70% of the sales price (although rates will vary by site).

So if an author has a large established base of readers already, self-publishing may provide him or her with a real financial advantage. On the other hand, self-publishing has its own challenges. An author may not be able to develop the strong marketing resources provided by large publishing houses, such as Penguin UK. Another issue is that an author may not have the good editing support and name recognition associated with major publishers. Therefore, not every author will be jumping on the self-publishing bandwagon right away, but some authors will be tempted for sure. This may enhance the relatively poor image of self-publishing in the near future.

But this changing landscape is not all bad news for publishers. As the annual growth of eBooks sales settles down to around 30% for the next few years, publishing houses will have an easier time planning their sales strategies. Only a few years ago publishing houses were in panic mode, wondering openly “What is going to happen?” “What can we do?” in the new digital environment that they faced. But now things are much calmer, and the panic phase is over.

Then where do readers buy their books, and what genres of eBooks sell well?

According to a Bowker survey of readers over 13 years old in 2012 and the first quarter of 2013, paperbacks accounted for 45% of all book sales, and hardcovers accounted for 27%. eBook’s themselves figured in at 22% of sales and audiobooks claimed only 2%.

If you take a look further into these hard data, 42% of readers buy books from internet sites, and 15% of them buy from chain bookstores. Independent bookstores account for 6% and mass merchandisers account for 6% also. As for the sales of eBooks, you will see romance novels sell well, as well as young adult and children’s books, according to The New York Times.*⁵

As ownership of both tablet computers and eBook

reading devices increases, the number of eBook readers is likely to grow. However, most people who read eBooks also read print books, and only 4% of them read eBook exclusively, according to Pew Research.*⁶ This figure suggests that owners of digital devices read both eBooks and print books and both will co-exist in the market.

❖ Publishers find new ways to publish books

I have looked at the present and the future of the American publishing industry by looking at hard data to discern possible trends. Overall trends suggest that the price of a “book” will continue to decline, while on the other hand, as digital technology progresses more people will be reading “books” in various formats.

One of editors who is experiencing this new publishing environment is John Oakes.

“When I was working at traditional publishers, all the actions happened in the first 6 weeks. Put a book out into the stores, and you know very quickly that you are going to be stuck with a lot of unsold copies.” said John.

But at his new publishing venture, OR Books, the selling pattern is different.

“I would call it ‘Slow Burn’. You can put a book out into the stores, and you will know very quickly if you’re going to be stuck with a lot of unsold copies. But this, you can put a book out and it can be a gradual build up. We end up netting maybe after a year or two, I think we do much better than we would have been than traditionally. It’s hard to compare the two, because obviously if I had a book now I can’t say how the exact same book would have done. It’s something already occurred, so I cannot be scientific about it, but this is my strong sense after 25 years of publishing experience.”

OR Books’ basic strategy is to sell their books directly to readers. OR Books has little involvement with bookstores, nor do they sell books at a discount, unlike other publishers in the

United States. OR Books doesn't allow returns or remainders either.

However, OR Books has its own sales problem. Because OR Books was not set up to publish blockbuster books, but to publish smaller books that fit with the publishers values and vision, OR Books sometimes experiences insufficient book sales.

On the other hand, because OR Books has no returns, the publishing house doesn't experience cash flow issues. When OR Books acquires books, it also acquires the foreign sub rights. The sales of translation/publishing sub rights to foreign and domestic publishing house accounts for about 1/3 of OR Books total sales.

OR Books has embraced one method for publishing books in this new environment, but there are other companies approaching publishing using different models.

One such publishing house is Rosenfeld Media Books in Brooklyn. Their approach is to use books as a gateway to the total UX (User Experience). They publish books written by experts in specific fields, then actively work to "brand" the authors. They develop seminars, offer consulting, and organize classes and special events from there. Their approach is to generate a ripple effect from the initial publishing activity.

Another approach is to offer unlimited access to books on the Internet. Companies such as Scribd and Oyster charge members around \$10 a month for the access rights to their book library. Oyster has signed on a few major publishing houses, such as HarperCollins and Disney, but how to expand collaboration with other major publishing houses is a challenge for this business model. But this so-called "Netflix model" of books sales is a definite player in the current American book industry scene.

We've taken a look at various aspects of American publishing. Digital devices that allow a reader to read a "book" on a screen continue to sell, and eBooks have become an important

segment of the books sales market. The American book industry is changing for sure.

John Oakes says, "I'm not anti-print, or not even pro-digital. It seems to me that our business as publishers is to get the contents to the readers efficiently and as the readers would like it. In a way we are sort of servants to the readers and to authors."

Authors, editors, and publishing houses have new ways to deliver books to readers in their hands now. As the publishing world adapts to and adopts new digital technology that is changing rapidly, it is exciting to think about what the future holds for publishers, readers, and authors.

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Takashi Hata

Born in Tokyo. After working as a reporter and editor, he started "American Book Jam", a literary magazine, in New York introducing the American literary scene to a Japanese audience. He has published several books. His articles have appeared in Japanese media such as Asahi Shimbun, Aera Magazine, Pen Magazine. He lives in New York.

Let Us Seize the Medium

Founder, Voyager Japan, Inc.

Masaaki Hagino

❖ The Loneliness of the Isolated Voice

There are a variety of mass media in our possession that can be used for communicating ideas or advocating causes to large audiences. But the powers that control dissemination rest within the realm of established big media. You could even say we are at their mercy. If we wish to depend on no one, and to bring dissemination of our ideas closer to home, we quickly discover that our powers are severely limited.

No matter how large of a crowd a politician may draw when he parks his sound truck in front of a station to give his stump speech, there are obvious limits to how many people his voice can reach. I often used to come upon the leader of a well-known right-wing political group shouting over loudspeakers at the Sukiyabashi intersection near Ginza or in front of Shinbashi Station. With his sun-darkened pate and flashing eyes, he ranted on and on about the Red Menace, waving his arm, gesturing frequently toward a large cloth banner behind him showing a map of the world with broad swatches of countries splashed in red. But for all the intensity of his performance, he drew little attention from pedestrians as they streamed by to left and right. Any actual dissemination of message must have been minuscule compared to the amount of energy expended.

My long-time friend and colleague Bob Stein was a Maoist. He distributed political fliers at the gates of Columbia University every day. The vast majority of the fliers were destined to be dropped into trash bins without being read. He nevertheless continued passing them out in the hope that a phrase here or there might catch someone's eye and kindle interest, but the almost complete lack of response was disheartening.

Although they stand at opposite ends of the political spectrum, these two examples testify to the frustrations

of the isolated voice standing up to be heard. You can raise your voice, you can shout at the top of your lungs, but good luck getting any response. Every such person experiences the deep loneliness of having something to say and trying to be heard. And yet as if driven by some innate force, they feel compelled to speak out, to try to connect with others. To me, this archetypal image holds the key to what publishing needs to become.

Media coverage is often triggered not by the content of what is being said but by images of the size of the crowd that can be placed in the newspaper or on video screens. This fosters a tendency to simply grasp things as a whole, to take the gross view instead of delving into the meat of the argument, and to determine the narrative by superficial likes and dislikes. Driving this trend is the big lie of media “neutrality.” Every statement has a point of view—no communication can take place without one. Furthermore, points of view cannot easily be unified, tending instead toward pluralism. Yet, the media try to gloss this over and seek the safety of numbers—as if to say they are only doing their proper job when they use sheer overwhelming volume as proof that they are reflecting the broader public opinion. That is the nature of the age we live in. Still, I wish to be one of those voices standing up to be heard.

❖ When the Book Was Our Best Friend

German literary scholar and media critic Friedrich A. Kittler noted that “the book became both film and record around 1800—not as a media technological reality, but in the imaginary of the readers’ souls.”¹ The book originally came to power and glory as a medium through which bodies of data far too vast for any individual to remember could flow. With the subsequent invention of film and the phonograph, our visual and aural senses came to be serviced by these new forms of media, which took their place alongside paper as separate avenues for

expression. Meanwhile, even with the invention of the typewriter as a new means of writing, the written word remained bound to the medium of paper.

For those who wished to “speak out” about something, the book was long our best friend. It wasn’t flashy, but it provided us with a modest medium for earnestly expressing our thoughts and views. That is what the business of publishing has facilitated. Miraisha, Shōbunsha, Misuzu Shobō, and a host of other small publishers have over the years brought out many superb books. But I can discern no sign of growth in their operations. I suspect it has something to do with the destiny of the medium itself—the medium has its own message. But it’s also clear that this traditional paper medium no longer provides the platform for activism it once did. Why? I have yet to find a satisfactory answer. But as an identifiable phenomenon, it appears to be real.

Bringing a completed movie script to the big screen is no easy feat, requiring a massive investment in production staff, equipment, know-how, and other costs. The scale may be somewhat reduced when producing for television, but there is the added burden that broadcasting over the airwaves requires a special license. Neither of these is something that just anyone can decide to do on his own.

By contrast, the book has been more of an equal opportunity medium that supports a broad range of free expression. But the medium has been transfigured by an explosion in the number of titles being published during the latter decades of the 20th century, and by the attendant rise of a bottom-line mentality. The consensus has become that a good book is a book that sells, and the guiding principle in selecting works for publication has become prospective sales figures rather than freedom of expression. The primary agent in the act of speaking out has shifted from writer to publisher.

There was always more to publishing than the mere packaging of a book in the form of sheets of paper stacked between two covers. Manufacturing a physical product and stocking it for sale means arrangements must be made for storage and distribution. The distribution side involves both addition and subtraction—not just sales, but also returns. When the complex dynamic of distribution tilted from an era of booming sales to one in which returns eclipsed sales, publishers had to face up to the realities of negative

cash flow. We lost the book as our best friend among media.

As time went on, I became convinced that the Web could free us from this impasse. Although it was obvious that no medium was on our side anymore, had I not been witness over the last twenty years to a cadre of people who had decamped to the digital world and were eagerly exploring the possibilities of that medium under their own power?

❖ A Medium That Replaces the Traditional Book

If you have to worry about the long-term viability of the medium you are using, your argument is likely to suffer. People should be able to select the medium that fits their needs quickly and intelligently, without fear.

For the last 22 years, Voyager Japan has been striving to create digital publishing tools that people can rely on. None of our efforts was satisfactory. No matter what we tried, we could not improve on the paper-based book. One of the fundamental difficulties was the fact that the ability to publish was dependent on and governed by constantly shifting system and hardware requirements. The ideal of truly free and independent publication remained a distant dream.

Something had to change. Finally it hit us that we needed to free ourselves from all the preconceived notions we were bringing over from the paper-based book. We had to stop trying to compete on the aesthetic level of appearance. If we set aside aesthetics, what are the other necessary elements of a book? As a package, the traditional book printed on paper represents a certain kind of perfection. On the one hand, its marvelous functionality derives in large part from its fixed shape. No alteration of form or content is possible. But on the other, the fixed nature of the package places limits on the metadata that can be attached, such as notes and cross references the reader may wish to add in the margins as he digests and assimilates the content. It is here that electronic publishers need to focus in pondering the future of the book.

Further, if the electronic book could be extricated from its dependence on specific operating systems and hardware and rely instead on the power of the Internet, it would open up tremendous new horizons. From this

perspective, it can be considered only natural that efforts to build a better digital publishing platform turned to the Web.

Since October, 2010, a series of Books in Browsers (BiB) conferences have been held annually at the Internet Archive, headquartered in San Francisco, as a forum where those with concerns like ours can gather to discuss the future of the book. One of the driving forces behind the conference is the notion that the distinction between the Internet and books is a totally arbitrary one, destined to disappear in the not too distant future.

The business of ebooks today remains purely an extension of the business of paper-based books. Deliberate constraints are placed on the content so that it will function exactly (and only) the way the content of a paper book does. Describing this as ebooks tamed by and for publishing interests, Hugh McGuire, a leading speaker at the first BiB conference, went on to list some of the things that are a matter of course on the Internet but can't be done, at least not easily, with ebooks:

- copy/paste
- link to a specific chapter or page
- search for text on the Internet and land on the ebook
- leave a comment or feedback in a central place
- easily query an API about that ebook
- easily search and extract geographic data from an ebook
- etc!

McGuire subsequently co-edited a volume of essays by fellow participants in the conference, detailing their ideas about and experiments with digital books. The collection contains 27 instructive and stimulating accounts of their various activities. It was published by O'Reilly Media in 2012 as *Book: A Futurist's Manifesto*, and Voyager Japan brought out a Japanese edition the following year.^{*2} The process of creating this book was itself a bold experiment in digital publishing, and gave birth to the PressBooks tool, a system for making ebooks available on the Web whose development was spearheaded by McGuire. As a result, the English edition of the book can also be read on the Web at <http://book.pressbooks.com> .

We do not yet have a model that persuasively shows how the digital book can surpass the paper-based book, with its long and distinguished history. But if the

challenge remains before us, all we can do is continue our tireless efforts. Though every challenge comes with risks, we must not be daunted. Perish the thought! We are on a journey of discovery!

Tim O'Reilly, president of O'Reilly Media, has been one of the longstanding voices urging publishers to embrace the digital future. He once spoke about the value of new discoveries with a down-home example, showing a picture with a large number of berries on it. Noting that some of the berries were poisonous and some were good to eat, he asked how we know which ones we can eat and which ones we can't. His answer was that a long time ago, someone had the courage to figure it out and let the rest of us know.^{*3}

It is not possible to talk about digital publishing in Japan without mentioning the online library Aozora Bunko (lit. "Blue Sky Library") — a Japanese analogue to Project Gutenberg, founded by Michael S. Hart. Throughout its existence, the library has rested entirely on the shoulders of unpaid volunteers. An endeavor undertaken without the promise of monetary remuneration, on which we depend for sustenance, is among the riskiest of challenges, yet it is just such an effort that is making Japan's literary classics available to us in digital form. There can be little doubt that this library, now nearing 13,000 titles, was the spark that ignited other digital publishing efforts in Japan. One can only imagine who may have gotten the largest benefit from this remarkable resource.

The greater the challenge the greater the risk. Instead of making money, you may lose your shirt. Yet, to put it plainly, it is because we have something to say, to set down for posterity, without regard to what it may profit us, that we are able to grapple with the uncertainties inherent in our path of discovery. It is this desire that drives our efforts to determine what shape the brave new world of books will take. In our time, a tremendous variety of efforts have sprung up to make one thing or another accessible via the Web, and with each additional effort that arises in response, the circle continues to widen. The book must join that circle. The truth of something Hugh McGuire has long asserted is staring us in the face: without question, it would be more convenient to readers if books were accessible on the Web.

❖ We Must Create a Medium of Our Own

Who, then, is our best friend? It is not readily apparent. Powers that make it difficult for us to speak out continue to hold sway. Any effort to give voice is liable to elicit the immediate response that we are just ordinary folk, mere readers or viewers, with no need to speak out about anything. Or if we do have that need, it's on the level of amateur hour. We should be satisfied venting our spleen in flamewars. That's about our speed. It's only in those terms that we are acknowledged as individuals. But I believe that's exactly where the path to becoming an individual who speaks out begins.

When we want to give voice to something, whether in writing or otherwise, I think we are in effect trying to record or convey the “facts” of life as they have become known to us in our own personal circumstances and experience. If saying “facts” seems too categorical, perhaps “perspectives” will do. They may not represent objective truth, but they are expressions that spring from the consciousness of a person on the spot, who experienced events first hand. At any rate, they are not a matter of strength in numbers. Rather they are a cacophony of countless individual voices that simply disappear into the distance without any response. It is difficult to conceive of any medium that could record them all. So should we simply discard them, or should we find ways to affirm their value? That was the crossroads at which we found ourselves standing.

But we discovered that we had a great deal to learn. As we groped our way through a variety of different initiatives, we gained valuable lessons. That is how Aozora Bunko has grown. The ongoing debates being advanced at the annual BiB conferences have been of much the same nature. As an extension of this conference came the papers collected in *Book: A Futurist's Manifesto*, and in the time since, additional work has been carried out in response to several of the experiments described. It has now become possible to publish in a form accessible to everyone exactly what kind of discussions took place, what kind of proposals emerged, and what specific endeavors were undertaken as a result.*4

All of these developments made use of digital technologies; none could have occurred without them.

The many different views expressed in these processes

have been picked up and relayed to ever broader audiences by others in their speeches, on websites, and in books and other publications. I believe what has begun to emerge, though we still see only faint beginnings, is a determination to work closely with writers in making digital technologies the means of publication.

We are in need of a medium of our own. A concerted effort will be required on our part to cultivate it and set it on a firm footing. The effort will be rather like the act of standing before a dark and empty square and shouting to an invisible crowd of supporters who may exist more in our imaginations than in reality—much like the right-wing political leader I used to see waving at his map on the street corner, or my left-wing friend passing out fliers in front of university gates. But the time has come when we, too, must start from that position. The time has come for us to make that stand and speak out in our own words.

As I have already noted, in spite of many twists and turns, Voyager Japan's efforts to develop an electronic publishing tool failed to produce an experience that equaled or exceeded a paper-based book. But we did not give up. We *refused* to give up. There was no other path for us to take. We continued to try different things, three times, four times. And now we have arrived at a new publishing tool that we have named “Romancer.”*5

Based on what we learned at the first BiB conference, Voyager Japan began by shifting its focus fully to the Web browser as the platform for reading ebooks. We introduced an ereader under the trade name of “BinB” on December 8, 2011. Because the browser itself is used for the reading environment, there is no need to download any special software. There is also no need to worry about this or that online bookseller objecting to some particular content and shutting a title out of its app. In this sense, BinB was a clear step forward in the freedom of ebook expression. Just open your preferred Web browser on your preferred device, and you can instantly view any content you wish to view. Thanks to its utterly intuitive design, BinB has been adopted by a number of major bookstores and publishers on their websites.

But that still left us short of one of our prime goals: supporting all the lone individuals who wish to speak out—all those people who have been ignored for

lacking the strength of numbers. Although BinB provides an easy, intuitive interface for reading ebooks in a Web browser, it also requires that a server system be maintained to make the books available to readers at all times. It is not realistic to expect individuals, or even small publishers, to maintain such a system.

We therefore developed Romancer as a tool that enables anybody to publish content on the Web, providing a structure that leaves sale of the content entirely under the writer's control. By hitching their wagon to the Romancer train, writers can transport their content to the desired destination—the Web. At the same time they receive a distributable version of their book in the open ebook standard EPUB 3 format. If they wish, they can arrange to sell copies of this EPUB through major bookstores, or they can establish their own private publishing operation in cooperation with Voyager Japan.

❖ Speak Out in a Clear Voice

The act of writing, of describing something in words, is a link between the present and the future. It opens up a path by which any of us can contribute to our chosen cause. Let our resistance to being brushed aside, and our innate desire to validate our existence, bear fruit in acts of writing. Let the professionals give up their conceit that only they can write, and stop impugning other people's writing as a lesser activity. After all, every one of them was once an unknown. Every one of them must have endured many a failure before garnering the spotlight.

This is not something anyone else can do for us. There are many fine people of power and authority all around us. But we must abandon our habit of simply accepting what other people hand out. We are quite capable of creating the things we need under our own power. At the very least, let us take full pride in the knowledge we have gained through our work and our diverse activities and relationships. After all, that is really all that we have. And let us express our deepest thoughts by means of our own medium. Let us speak out in a clear voice. The paramount mission of every one of us engaged in electronic publishing is to build a digital medium that supports and contributes to that kind of expression. A medium that emboldens those who would write. We must turn them into standard bearers of the age, resolute in the face of any challenge. This is not the time to

speak of profits. That will only confuse the issue, creating mixed motives. Total, unconditional commitment is our only option. Short of that, any digital publishing system we achieve will only be worthy of being swept into the dustbin.

For each of us, there are things we can and cannot do. We must each contribute what we can. The only way forward is by sharing, giving freely—technology has taught us that we must set this firmly in mind. In our 22 years of grappling with digital publishing at Voyager Japan, we have learned this all too well. That we each have different strengths to offer is clear. Only by joining hands to develop ever better prototypes together can we advance the future course of digital publishing.

*1 Gramophone, Film, Typewriter, Stanford, 1999.

*2 <http://shop.oreilly.com/product/0636920020325.do>; <http://tt2.me/15294>

*3 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HsTpwmCVPZ4>

*4 <http://dotplace.jp/archives/category/これからの本の話をしよう>. Site is in Japanese.

*5 Romancer: <https://romancer.voyager.co.jp>



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