

# Bookstore Of The Future

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By Rick Banerjee

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Let's go a few years ahead into time and try and imagine the scene around us. How much will remain familiar, even retrograde? How much will change so quickly, that we'd immediately say - FutureShock!?

Whatever does or does not change, we now know, that the future bookstore will no longer look familiar. The huge piles of books, magazines and atlases is set to join the non-digital cameras and the VCR's into a long walk to obscurity.

The future of the bookstore is being prepared by many ambitious publishing companies, but none are as adroit as InstaBook. InstaBook is based in <<?>> and has come out with an instant book publishing solution that is set to revolutionize the way the entire book business is run.

Let's imagine you are going to buy a book in Strand Book Stall [no they haven't paid me to put their name here].

You arrive and after browsing through the collection of retro-classics, decide to buy Anthony Burgess's masterpiece, The Clockwork Orange.

You take the book to the cashier and strangely, she takes the book from you and asks you to pay up and please wait a minute. Then she clatters away at the keyboard and the screen says, Printing Book...Please Wait.

After exactly sixty seconds, the newly printed and bound book is handed over to you and the petite cashier reminds you to come back again. Book buying complete!

Let's just step behind the scene to relive these extraordinary sixty seconds.

## Front Desk

Customer [you, in this case] arrives at the desk and buys the book, i.e. he tells the cashier that he wants to buy The ClockWork Orange, printed by, Penguin. She types in the ISBN code and bills the customer. Meanwhile, she also starts of a series of operations that we shall now walk through.

## Back Office

The request for "The Clockwork Orange, by Penguin" is sent from the front desk to this transaction processing server located in the store back office. It begins communicating with the worldwide website that belongs to Penguin. The request is sent.

Penguin Publishers have themselves installed a gigantic server housing every single book that they have published [not conventionally published! Only paid the author and acquired the copyright to the work]. The server looks up the price of the book and charges Strand Book Stall India a sum of \$3.50. The money is immediately transferred. Now, the Penguin server initiates an Upload process and within seconds, the book, in an electronic format is at Strand.

### **Press**

Now that we have the manuscript in electronic format, we use the InstaBook machine. Making sure enough of gum, paper and ink are available, the printing is initiated. The whole process is automated and needs no human intervention. In a few seconds, the book is printed, bound and ready. Send it to the front desk where the customer is just beginning to get impatient.

Surprised? Or are you saying this is just wishful thinking? InstaBook has already sold a few dozen machines and their future looks pretty bright right now.

Meanwhile, the big publishing houses, the Bertelsmann groups, the Penguin's are all sitting up and trying to figure out what will happen to the business that is central to their existence.

Let's look at what the three major stake holder's have to gain or lose if indeed the instant book publishing paradigm becomes the norm.

First, the publishers. They can forget about upgrading their printing presses and worrying about union strikes. All they have to do is make some major investments in buying huge servers, and requesting their writers to submit the manuscripts to them in electronic form. Then they can spend larger amounts of money on royalties and rope in better and better authors.

Then, come the bookshop owners. Really, you can see now, the whole focus shifts to the book shop owners. They have to invest a few thousand dollars in buying the InstaBook machine. Then they have to setup the whole communication system, so they can contact the publisher and acquire the manuscript when needed. However, it's not all pain and no gain. They need not have a warehouse. They need not employ people to manage their inventory. They need not buy cans of insect repellents and spray them in their warehouses. They will also, not need to give clearance sales. Sigh! mainly because, they will have no sales to clear!

However, by saving on all these costs, they will begin to offer to the buyer better prices [read books will get cheaper.].

Is this all a good idea? I don't know and neither does anybody else. But the InstaBook system has started off a tempest in the publishing world, and only time will tell which way the wind will blow.

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**References:**

The Seybold Report