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New Indie Bookselling Model: Publish Own Handselling Favorites

By Judith Rosen
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Four years ago this month Susan Novotny, owner of the Book House of Stuyvesant Plaza in Albany, N.Y., looked to print-on-demand to bolster lagging store sales. With Eric Wilska, owner of the Bookloft in Great Barrington, Mass., she opened the Troy Book Makers in Troy, N.Y., in a storefront adjacent to her other bookstore, Market Block Books. Novotny and Wilska not only print books for others on the store's InstaBook machine or via offset, but bring back into print regional titles to sell in their stores—over 300 titles to date. Now, in what Novotny calls her “35th anniversary present to the Book House,” she is going beyond just printing and is launching a publishing house out of the store, Staff Picks Press.

“We have to do what we have to do after taking it on the chin for 24 months,” said Novotny, alluding to the impact of the economic collapse on independent businesses as well as publisher policies. The name of the press, and the concept behind it, is to print books by local authors with national potential, that her stores and other independents can handsell. “The books we handsell, the books we recommend, sell three or four times faster than the books on the *New York Times* bestsellers list,” said Novotny. “Now some of those books will come directly from us. Our business model still works. This time it will be me picking the books.”

Novotny is planning to keep costs down by offering small advances, or in the case of the press' first book, Peter Golden's September novel, *Comeback Love*, no advance. She will release paperback editions, which will be printed at Troy Book Makers. Sales will be handled by commission reps and will focus on independent bookstores. Novotny believes that Golden's tale of a man's search for the woman he loved and lost in the 1960s will resonate just as much with customers at Northshire Bookstore in Manchester Center, Vt., and the Tattered Cover in Denver, as her customers at Book House and Market Block.

In addition, Novotny would like to see other independents bring books by their local authors to Staff Picks Press. The press will collaborate with other stores on printing and distribution. In anticipation, she has already purchased the domain name independentbooksellerspress.com. The staffpickspress.com Web site will go live soon.

To test the concept, Novotny is planning to distribute 450 copies of an upcoming title from Troy Book Makers by local authors Judith Barnes and Erick James, *Change: A Love Story for All Ages* (July), with illustrations by Jeff Grader, in the next ABA White Box. If the book hadn't already been in the works at Troy, said Novotny, this is exactly the kind of work that she would like to be part of Staff Picks Press. Book House children's buyer Rachel King compares Barnes and James's story of a young desert snake that doesn't want to change to “Neil Gaiman meets *The Little Prince*.”

“Booksellers have a lot of challenges out there,” said Novotny. “All of us have to envision new ways to doing business to keep things percolating. Staff Picks Press is one. We'd like to become the triple A farm team for some authors. It's a great stepping stone for an author to get picked up by a larger publishing house.” She's also hoping that it will be a great vehicle for her store and other independents to sell more books that they can really get behind.

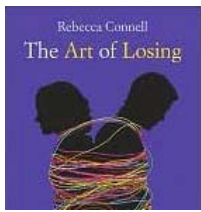
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Rodale Refocuses on Original Mission

In its most fundamental way, Rodale, which was founded in 1930 by J.I. Rodale to teach people how to improve their lives by improving their health, hasn't changed. If anything the company, which went through reorganizations and executive shifts the past two years, is reasserting itself as very much the kind of publishing house it started as.

Converting Mindshare to Market Share

Optimism greeted a presentation by former Perseus Books CEO-turned-bookseller Jack McKeown at last month's BEA. He was discussing a survey that looked at how independent booksellers can recapture what McKeown calculates is \$260 million a year in “leakage” (missed business) as well as examining the impact of e-books on an independent's business.

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ShelfTalker

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Genreville

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The Overton Window	Hardcover Fiction
Sh*t My Dad Says	Hardcover Nonfiction
The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo	Mass Market Paper
The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo	Trade Paper
The Red Pyramid	Children's Fiction
Star Wars: 11 Iconic Scenes from a Galaxy Far, Far Away...	Children's Picture Book
Percy Jackson and the Olympians	Children's Series & Tie-ins
The Lion (unabr.)	Audio Fiction
The Secret	Audio Nonfiction

PICK OF THE WEEK



[Becoming Animal: An Earthly Cosmology](#)

Drawing from and expanding on spiritual themes and environmental concerns addressed in his 1995 book *The Spell of the Sensuous*, ecologist and philosopher (and practicing magician) Abram decries mankind's treatment of, and callous disregard for, the world.

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