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InstaBook Adds Sites, Publishers in Canada

Of the handful of companies developing machines for in-store production of single copies of books, InstaBook is only one to actually have a machine running in a bookstore (Book Express, in Cambridge, Ontario, Canada). It has announced plans for two more Canadian installations, both in the Toronto area (one in a bookstore and one in a library).

Concurrently, InstaBook Canada announced that eight publishers have committed to putting titles into the InstaBook system. (Until now, InstaBook has been limited to a library of public-domain titles, plus book manuscripts that are ready for printing.) The participating publishers include ECW Press, Dundurn Group, Scholastic Canada, Penguin Books Canada, Raincoast Books, HarperCollins Canada, and Key Porter books. These companies will be providing InstaBook with titles over the next few months. None of them are in the InstaBook repository yet.

Dave DiMarcantonio, president of InstaBook Canada, tells us that the installation at Book Express (now more than 100 stores) is sufficiently promising to justify this broader rollout. It has provided a lot of useful information about how the InstaBook machine works. The volume of books printed has ranged from 20 to 300, and a majority have been books from local authors who brought their own manuscripts for printing. These have included family histories, manuals and novels. DiMarcantonio is pleased that InstaBook has yet to do any marketing and that no books from commercial publishers have been available due to the machine's limited capacity.

Our take. Successful in-store production of single books has been an elusive goal for many years. The technical challenges are the biggest hurdle. Bringing publishers onboard and working out the royalty and document-security issues have been the biggest challenges. Progress in Canada indicates that the situation may finally be improving. Bookstores may be encouraged to try InstaBook, which has found that printing books from local authors represents a new line of business made possible by the InstaBook machine.

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