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Jenny's Digital Book Nook: A Prediction Disguised as a Story

Marshall Masters

November, 2003

Stranger than Fiction

This fictional account set in the future is based on present-day fact. Although I invented the term *On Time Publishing*, a system like the one described in the story is now operational.

It's a retail POD-type system invented by InstaBook founder Victor Celorio. The first InstaBook brick-and-mortar retail outlet is now open for business in Ontario, Canada, and you can learn more about this futuristic publishing technology by visiting www.instabook.net or writing to Victor Celorio at celorio@instabook.net.

Jenny had just finished cleaning the breakfast table when her brother, Tom, pulled into her driveway in his brand-new 2008 electric SUV. "Boys and their toys," she sighed with a smile.

She reached for a light jacket as she mentally reviewed her plans to open the first On Time Printing (OTP) store in her small town, *Jenny's Digital Book Nook*. This morning, she'd draw on Tom's experience as the owner of the town's only theater to fine-tune her plans.

Tom sipped his coffee as she plopped down in the passenger seat of the SUV. "OK, off to Main Street," he said, yawning.

"So have you been thinking about it?" Jenny asked.

"You betcha! Our town is too small for a regular bookstore, and I think folks would like to see something a bit more inviting than a UPS delivery truck." He glanced at her with a reassuring smile.

"Hey! I'm proud of you, Sis. Starting your own business is a big step, and I'm glad to help. Since I'm new to this, I'd like to focus on the customer experience first, and then on how all this works with authors and distributors."

"Sounds like a plan to me," she said as she held up a set of store keys. "Andrew Wyker is the broker, and he gave me the keys to the store so I could show it to you today. That's where we're going. It is about 1,200 square feet, and it's perfect."

Tom scratched his ear for moment. "Oh, yeah, the old flooring store on Main. By the way, I remember Andrew. He had a real thing for you back in high school, as I recall."

"And he's still as shrewd as ever," she added with a grin. "Now drive on, Hunkmaster."

Hunkmaster had been Tom's high-school nickname, and he chuckled all the way to the vacant store as fond memories flooded back.

"We're here," he finally announced as the SUV parked itself.

It took a while for Jenny to work the old-fashioned lock, but soon they were standing in the middle of the old flooring store. Although the walls were bare and drab, the entire showroom was still covered with beautifully patterned exotic wood. "The floor stays!" she exclaimed.

Tom eyed the floor. "All it needs is a refinish and it will be *mucho primo*, but what about these bare walls? Gosh, but they're ugly!"

She jabbed him in the side and winked. "You know all those hardbound editions Mom collected over the years?"

"Yeah, I've been waiting for the foundation of the house to collapse because of them."

"Check this out. I'm going to line the walls with solid oak bookcases and use Mom's collection for ambiance. My customers will sit and read while sipping lattés and espressos. But we're not going to be a

public library. Those books stay here."

"And speaking of the library, does it figure in your grand scheme?"

"Definitely," Jenny said. "I cut them a sweetheart deal that will give them books for less, and with custom superstrong library bindings at that. Another thing the librarians really love is that I can deliver books to them that have been out of print for a long time. All in all, the net on my library business in the first year will pay for my bindery equipment and then some."

"Nice." Tom nodded. "But hey, pretend I'm a customer and here to buy. What's it going to be like for me?"

"OK, sure. Surrounding us will be nice comfortable recliners with 21-inch plasma touch e-book readers. Folks can use them to preview any book in our distribution library, and they can purchase the book from their chairs for a one-time wireless download to their laptops, or they can order an On Time Publishing copy and pick it up at my counter in less than an hour."

"Sounds good, but expensive."

"Nope. The cost is between the old style print-on-demand and offset print books, but the big difference is getting what you want!" Jenny gestured for Tom to follow her to the row of glassed-in offices at the back of the store, two on each side of a small hallway. "There," she said, pointing to the corner office, "will be the machine room with the On Time Printing equipment. The one to the right will be the binding room. On the other side I'll have an office and combination storeroom and lunch room."

"You need a whole room for binding?"

"For what I want to do—yes! Close your eyes and imagine along with me. We're sitting in your movie theater watching a film. The opening scene is set in the library of a large mansion, and the camera pans across shelves of books all bound in perfect sets that just ooze with class and dignity. Now open your eyes."

Tom blinked. "I never thought of books as part of the décor, especially when you consider that my own bookshelves are a miserable mix of garish-colored books in all different sizes."

"Time to think décor, Bro. Now that average stiff can own a library

in bindings fit for a Rockefeller. On top of that, I'll represent specialized binderies for those with a very specific need."

"I'm sold on the bindings," Tom declared, "but what are you going to do to get people in here?"

"I'm going to have author readings every night of the week if I can, and I'm most definitely going to use publicity and my own lists to invite everyone within driving distance."

"OK, so we've got the customer thing wrapped. What about flak from authors, publishers, and distributors about how they're giving you a license to steal with this OTP stuff, if you get my meaning?"

Jenny cocked her head. "Not so. First, let me say there are no foolproof systems. But think about it. With all the money I'm going to sink into setting up this store, would I risk getting my content providers mad at me by letting people pirate their books?"

"I don't think you would," Tom shot back, "but you know what they say about the human body. It's made of 90 percent water and 10 percent greed."

"You've got a point there, and that, I suppose, is why the On Time Publishing open standard carries such a tight Digital Rights Management schema. For starters, it requires an encryption dongle from each distributor."

Tom laughed. "A dongle? Oh, this has got to be good. Tell me more."

"A dongle, you jerk, is an adapter you connect between your OTP computer and your OTP printer. When you go to print a book, the file won't work without the distributor's encrypted dongle. If a dongle is stolen, the distributor just invalidates the code, and it becomes worthless. On top of that, the distributors know exactly how many books you're printing, the number of words you're downloading, the number of pages you're printing."

Tom grinned. "And whether or not your dongle is where it should be."

Jenny sighed with resignation. "You're incorrigible. Let's move this along, shall we?"

"Fine. So now that we've covered the distributors and publishers, what about the authors of these books you're creating on the spot?"

"That's the best part. OTP royalties are almost twice as high as royalties on sales through traditional channels. As a matter of fact, more top-selling authors are publishing their first editions in e-book formats and with OTP every day to enjoy the extra income. They're no dummies.

"With OTP," Jenny hurried on, "we can publish anything anybody wants—not just the big-name authors but books by local writers, high-school yearbooks, garden club recipe books, anything you can think of—and then distribute through our OTP channel partners."

Tom shook his head in disbelief. "Jenny, you could be talking about God knows how many gazillion new titles each year."

"Not to worry," Jenny said. "One of the OTP reps told me that Yahoo and Google are rolling out their new online book catalog search engines this year. They've captured all the metadata, and—"

"Metadata?"

"I thought you were savvy," she teased. "Metadata means data that describe other data, and publishers have been creating these huge metadata databases about their book titles for years and years. It was only a matter of time before someone figured out that they now have a whole new load of information to sell—and people are buying."

"So how do you use it?"

"The same way you use an Internet search engine to find things on the World Wide Web. You don't search by the numbers of books sold or glitzy marketing hype. You search for what you want. So, in essence, it helps level the playing field for unknown authors."

Tom nudged her in the direction of the front door. "Hot damn, I'm sold. Let's go."

"Why so fast?"

"I've got an idea for my first book—*Immortal Tales of the Buckaroo Hunkmaster*."

Marshall Masters publishes under the Your Own World Books

yowbooks.com imprint. This story is based on his 23 years of experience in the computer industry as a technology adoption facilitator. For info on his current project, visit epublishingstrategies.com.

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