



Will the Internet and Kindle Ever Replace Books?

This is not the only reason why the Internet will never replace books, for books provide the in-depth knowledge of a subject that sitting in front of a computer screen cannot provide. We can download text from an Internet source, but the aesthetic quality of sheets of downloaded text leaves much to be desired. A well-designed book enhances the reading experience through the visual and tactile senses.



The book is still the most compact and inexpensive means of conveying a dense amount of knowledge in a convenient package. The easy portability of the book is what makes it the most user-friendly format for knowledge ever devised. Kindle, of course, is also quite portable, but you can't make notes on the book you are reading. Kindle is a portable library, very convenient when traveling, but not the fuzzy book you can curl up with on a cold winter night.

Also, you can personalize the books you own by the notations you make in them. The idea that one can carry in one's pocket a play by Shakespeare, a novel by Charles Dickens or Tom Clancy, Plato's *Dialogues*, or the Bible in a small paperback edition is still mind-boggling. We take such uncommon convenience for granted, not realizing that the book itself has undergone quite an evolution since the production of the Gutenberg Bible in 1455 and Shakespeare's First Folio in 1623, just three years after the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth to colonize the New World.

Not only has the art and craft of printing and book manufacturing been greatly improved over the centuries, but the great variety of subject matter now available in books is astounding, to say the least. In fact, the Internet requires the constant input of authors and their books to provide it with the information that makes it a useful tool for exploration and learning.

Another important reason why the Internet will never replace books is because those who wish to become writers want to see their works permanently published as books — something you can hold, see, feel, skim through, and read at one's leisure without the need for an electric current apart from a lamp. The writer may use a word processor instead of a typewriter or a pen and pad, but the finished product must eventually end up as a book if it is to have value to the reading public. The writer may use the Internet in the course of researching a subject just as he may use a library for that purpose, but the end product, even if digitally printed, will still be a book.

What really imperils book reading is not the Internet, but the general decline in literacy among Americans. Falling SAT scores indicate that schools are failing to produce a new generation of young people who love to read books. And that is why many parents are now teaching their children to read at



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home. Also, today's young people are less inclined to curl up alone with a book than hang out with friends. Social life has become more important than the solitary life of the book reader. Yet, book reading will persist among those who have become addicted to its pleasures.

The Internet, rather than replacing books, is now being used by distributors like Amazon and Barnes & Noble to sell more and more books to consumers on a global scale. And even though the Internet provides consumers with a much larger selection of books than is available in any one bookstore, it will never replace the bookstore where the reader can browse to his heart's content and now even settle down in an easy chair and read a book until closing time. The big new super bookstores now serve coffee and pastries, present live readings by authors, and stay open late. They are becoming cultural hubs in their communities. The computer screen is therefore no match for a friendly bookstore.

Nor will the Internet ever replace the sheer enjoyment of browsing in an antiquarian book store or going to an antiquarian book fair and actually holding a book and leafing through pages printed over a hundred years ago. Books provide a bridge to the past, to all of those who have gone before us and have left us the wisdom accumulated by their life experiences. Books have that magical ability to bring the past to life through the words of those who lived in years gone by. If you want to truly know history, you must read the actual words of those who lived it, unabridged and unrevised by today's proponents of political correctness.

But, of course, you can get antiquarian, out-of-print books on the Internet. Abebooks is a very good source of out-of-print books. If there is a copy available somewhere on planet Earth, they can usually find it. You pay for the book by credit card, but in the end a real book is delivered to you by mail or FedEx. Also, there are collectors of first editions of famous books that increase in value the older they get. That's another way of enjoying books.

Books are also companions in a way that the Internet can never be. The author speaks to us directly through the pages. We hear his or her voice. If the story is compelling, it will become part of our own mentalities and provide us with an experience that we will have had through the author. We will have known what it was like to survive a concentration camp, or live the life of a great actress or statesman or musician, or suffer climbing Mount Everest, or rejoice in making a great scientific discovery. Each of us has only one life to live, but we can vicariously live a great many other lives through books written by other human beings. That is why the power of the book can never be replaced by the Internet.

That is not to say the Internet is any less than it is. The Internet, as it continues to grow, is certainly one of the most remarkable technological developments in the history of mankind. Its ability to connect us all with the entire world is what makes it so extraordinary. For example, you can read the morning's headlines or weather reports in Australian newspapers, explore the subway system in Buenos Aires, or locate a long-lost friend in the United States if he or she has a telephone. Through e-mail you can communicate with anyone anywhere who also has an e-mail address. You can even discuss the latest book you've read.

And then there is YouTube, one of the great inventions of the 20th century. The number of videos now posted on YouTube is beyond counting. Even yours truly is on YouTube. The other day I came across a video that had been made of a lecture I gave in California in 1985. There it was, complete on YouTube! How long it will be there I don't know. So I am quite aware of the tremendous utility the Internet has become.

Yet, publishers keep publishing more books, with beautifully designed dust jackets, well-illustrated



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biographies, travel books, histories, and cookbooks. Novels continue to pour into the bookstores. Everyone likes a story, and storytelling is a great way to make a living. Most publishers bring out new writers in the hope that they will become tomorrow's best sellers. And there is always a chance that a good story will be made into a movie, making both the author and publisher rich. The Harry Potter books made the author, J. K. Rowling, the richest woman in Britain. She had previously been on welfare. And so, as long as there are writers and readers, there will be books. Today, in the United States, the conservative movement is nourished by a veritable flood of conservative books by many new politically incorrect authors. Several of the big liberal publishers have even established conservative imprints to serve that market. And I have not even mentioned the vibrant Christian book publishing industry that is selling millions of books to evangelical readers. To see the impact of all of this, all one has to do is attend any homeschool convention where books by the ton are on display.

So, the Internet has its place in our hectic lives. But it will never replace books. It will make getting books easier, but never replace them.



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