

Networking: Picking the next Dickens

Charles Dickens serialized his novels -- "Oliver Twist, David Copperfield," amongst others -- in weekly newspapers and monthly magazines before they were published as books. Today, would-be novelists are publishing their fictional creations online on literary blogs dubbed "blooks" by the publishing industry, experts tell UPI's Networking. A new Dickens has yet to emerge, but, like so many things on the Internet these days, there is already an award for the best blooks, the so-called Booker Prize, a pun on the name of the Booker Prize, the award for outstanding literary contributions in the United Kingdom, somewhat akin to the U.S. Pulitzer Prize.

One book, which began as a blogging item last September and is now emerging as a full-fledged book from DotHill press, is called "Hackoff.com: an Historic Murder Mystery Set in the Internet Bubble and Rubble." The book is by Tom Evslin, a former AT&T executive and founder of the Internet telephony firm, ITXC Corp.

"Lots of folks got killed by the Internet bubble, but nothing like this," said Andy Kessler, author of a number of books, including "Wall Street Meat" and "Running Money," and a former columnist for Forbes ASAP, the bimonthly Forbes supplement that chronicled the rise and fall of the dot-com era, who describes the book as a "ring-side seat to the fast-paced battles and intrigue when entrepreneurs cross Wall Street. Like a chart of NASDAQ, it's a wild ride."

Evslin is said, by blogger and critic Jeff Jarvis, to be on the "short list" of people who made the Internet, well, the Internet, since he led the project to introduce flat-rate pricing for Internet service providers.

Some distributors are picking up the book by Evslin just because he apparently penetrates the mystery surrounding some of the dot-com crash -- albeit in a fictionalized way. "The book satisfied a lot of my curiosity about what an IPO (initial public offering) is like," said Jack Covert, chief executive officer of 800ceoread.com, an online bookseller.

There are other, semi-famous "blooks" on the market now too. One tome, "My War: Killing Time in Iraq," by Colby Buzzell, is based on his blog, filed during his down time, while on a tour of duty with the U.S. Army in Iraq. The project garnered reviews from Rolling Stone and Esquire. Other publishers are eyeing the trend. Putnam, and Little, Brown & Co. are releasing books based on blogs. One Little, Brown project, called "Julie & Julia," a tale of a woman trying to make all 524 dishes from Julia Child's, "Mastering the Art of French Cooking," sold 100,000 copies. New firms that are publishing just blog-based books, like Blogbasedbooks.com, have appeared in recent months online.

Experts tell Networking that there are 36 million blogs today -- with 75,000 new ones posted every day.

The "blook" trend hasn't just emerged from nowhere, however. For years, publishers have tried to sell "e-books," but the problem was that not many people wanted to read a full-length book in electronic format. The experimentation with serialization, online, however, seems to stimulate enough interest to take the risky book deals by otherwise unknown authors to the print production stage.

Another trend that has helped power "blook" authoring is online training. Companies around the world are paying for their employees to take courses online, and learn new skills on the Internet too. QuarkXPress is launching its QuarkXPress 7 software with an online training curriculum and an interactive blog for Web designers to visit if they have questions about the tutorials. "This is the first time in the history of Quark where the training team has created online learning that is aligned with how Quark product managers envision the use of QuarkXPress features," said Robert Calhoun, manager of training and development at Quark.

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