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FASTCOMPANY



Follow along with the winners for a year, and trace an *inspirational* chronicle of *creativity*, *struggle*, and *triumph*.

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Empowering The Little Guy

Here's a way for David to beat Goliath: Team up with 12,007 other Davids. Back in 1996, it looked as if tiny, independent bookshops were doomed. Then, a small group of independent sellers of used, rare, and out-of-print books started to pool their offerings on the Advanced Book Exchange, an online database. On November 19, Abebooks.com listed its 50 millionth book.

2004 FAST 50 WINNER

12,008 Independent Booksellers

Abebooks.com
Victoria - BC CA

From their original entry:

Tell us what you do and the specific challenge you faced.

An industry was dying: independent used book sellers were closing shop thanks to big-box retailers and an inability to compete online with the Amazons of the world. A small team of "webheads, techies, and bibliophiles" in Victoria BC, saw the need and created www.abebooks.com to list books for this forgotten market. In six years the site grew from four booksellers to over twelve thousand booksellers in 45 countries, purely by word of mouth.

What was your moment of truth?

Soon the major online book players (Barnes & Noble, Amazon, Half.com, eBay) noticed and wanted access to Abebooks database of 50 million used, rare and out-of-print books. Did Abebooks sell? No! Did they sell out? No. Instead, Abebooks offered the option to their twelve thousand "little guy" booksellers to list their books on these major sites through Abebooks technology, turning Abe into the first online listing service for booksellers who sell on multiple marketplaces.

What were the results?

Abebooks is now the world's largest marketplace for books of any kind in the world, and is considered the best source for hard to find books. The small company was named as "Best of the Web for Books" by Forbes and "the best e-business worldwide" by the United Nations World Summit in Geneva, 2003. Each day over 15,000 books change hands between buyers and sellers on Abebooks four sites (Abebooks.com, Abebooks.co.uk, Abebooks.de, Abebooks.fr) More important is the fact that people still love Abe. They feel the company never let down the "little guys"---those smalltown, dusty-shop, book fanatics who supported Abebooks from the beginning and made it the largest network of independent book sellers in the world. Abebooks was called "the saviour of used book sellers" by the Guardian newspaper and "an actual Internet success story" by the NY Times.

What's your parting tip?

Don't be afraid to sleep with the enemy. Abebooks is perfect proof that it's possible to sleep with the enemy and still feel good about your self--and your website--in the morning.

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