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A Look at Half, Part 2: Booksellers talk about where they will (and will not) go next

By Mark Lewis

[AuctionBytes.com](http://www.auctionbytes.com)

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Part 1 of "A Look at Half" can be found online at <http://www.auctionbytes.com/cab/abn/y04/m08/i11/s03>

In June, eBay delayed the closing date of Half.com from July 13 to October 14, saying in a letter that it would give sellers "additional time to transition your business to eBay." But are sellers moving business to eBay or simply finding other outlets?

Mary Anne Dorman has about 2000 titles on Half.com and like many booksellers, she uses multiple sites. She is planning to move much of her inventory to Alibris.com when Half.com closes. She currently has about 3000 titles there.

Alibris has "done very well for me," she says. "They only charge 20% (upon item sale), which is a bit steep, but shipping is fixed with a \$2.30 shipping allowance/order."

Bookseller Kathleen has already left Half.com saying, "there were so few sales there" and that "the inventory system is horrible with no way to mass edit or even see all of your books at once; I think the cut off was 500 books, so if you had 1000 books listed you could only view 500 of them, with no way to sort them. It was too frustrating."

Kathleen currently uses Alibris and, "I also list on Amazon but mostly my higher priced, ISBN books. The fees there do not make it worth my while to sell a book under \$20."

One bookseller described her perspective on both of those sites. "What makes Alibris and Amazon better is that they cost less to list up front. Once a listing is made on Alibris or Amazon, it's there until it's sold or removed; no relists or revamping or whatever."

That bookseller also stressed the importance of these sites' focus on books. "The people who are looking on Alibris and Amazon are looking for books; that's the majority of what is sold there so the audience is already focused."

Another site that focuses on books specifically is Abebooks.com which started out dealing mostly in rare and unusual books. The site now has 55 million books listed. Marci Crossan, spokesperson for Abebooks says that a lot of the site's appeal is in the simplicity of the inventory management, which saves time,



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and the low upfront-costs.

I asked bookseller Chris Hendricks about opening an eBay store or auction to sell books. He currently has 80% of his thousands of books of inventory on Amazon, 12% on Half.com and the rest are shared between Abebooks.com and his own sites. "eBay has it all backwards," he said. "It's just not for the book industry," he says. He describes the amount of money (almost \$1500) he would have to spend upfront on store fees and listing fees and even then, he notes "your title does not show up at the top of the search." (Auctions show up, but Store inventory does not generally show up in eBay.com search results.)

Kathleen agreed, saying, "I have always loved eBay's auction format. Unfortunately they have screwed up the book categories so badly that I refuse to list until they fix it. Even their current fix has screwed things up."

Mary Anne Dorman took advantage of one of eBay's free offers and opened a Store last May, moving a large part of her inventory there. The result? "Sales were miserable," she said. "If I had to pay, I would have barely broken even," she said. She closed the Store.

Said one bookseller, "I sell on eBay when they have a special offer of reduced fees, in my store and I sell many other items besides books." But she sounded a note of caution as well. "Overall since last fall, eBay's book section has been in a constant state of change... And generally, eBay is not responsive to the sellers needs." It is clear to her, she says, "that booksellers are unhappy and leaving in droves."

So where else are some of these booksellers going?

Bookseller Chris Hendricks will be launching his own site called MyRemainders.com for books, and once again the focus will be ease of moving inventory and low upfront costs. With this site he aims to give wholesalers a place to manage their inventory while connecting directly to the bigger dealers such as Amazon.com. He has 30 wholesalers and 500 bookstores worldwide signed up. He plans to launch the site soon.

And Mary Anne Dorman is looking at Choosebooks.com, another book specialist that allows for free listing and bulk up-loading that she says saves her time moving inventory and cost upfront - the common denominators seem so important to online booksellers.

In Part 3, readers voice their opinions.

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