



Hannes Blum moved from his native Germany to Victoria to head up Abebooks.com, the world's largest online marketplace for books. "I see it as both a challenge and an honour to take this position," he says. *Ray Smith/Times Colonist*

A CHALLENGING CHAPTER

In the competitive world of bookselling, Abebooks' Hannes Blum is always on the lookout for new opportunities. No wonder the little Island company has become an international force.

BY ANDREW A. DUFFY
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Maybe it was the whales sighted from a ferry during the first summer visit, the incredible weather of 2002, or the dynamism of the young, dot-com company he was trying on for size.

Maybe it was the combination of factors, coupled with a pregnant wife who fell for the place too, that places Hannes Blum in Victoria two years later, enjoying a late afternoon coffee in the heat of the day.

It's sweltering, but Blum, the 35-year-old president and CEO of Victoria-based Abebooks.com, the world's largest online

marketplace for books, looks remarkably comfortable.

Relaxed and confident in his own skin, his company and his surroundings, Blum has found a balance in his adopted home that he knows will be hard to beat.

"This is pretty amazing isn't it?" he asks, casting his eyes around the scene outside Abebooks' Victoria offices.

He could be talking about the weather, the city or the company.

It's all coming together for the German-born and -bred Blum and the company he helped grow into an international force that is taking on the "big guys" in the e-commerce game.

But competition and being the "little guy" has never phased Blum. It drives

him. "I regularly check the number of sales done in a day and that always gets me," he said with a widening smile, noting every day the site sells between 15,000 and 20,000 books. "It always affects me ... knowing we can compete and realizing we are a serious competitor out of Victoria with a fairly small team.

"The dedication of the team here and in Germany (Abebooks' European office) is amazing, the team believes in the company so much."

The team has good reason.

The site — and its family of sites in Germany, France, the United Kingdom, Spanish language site and Australia-New Zealand site — boasts more than 55 mil-

lion books listed by more than 12,000 booksellers around the world.

Gross annual sales in 2003 were estimated at \$100 million US, with 35 per cent growth projected for 2004.

Blum is charged with ensuring that growth continues. A task he clearly cherishes.

Like his team and the company's employees — all of whom are option holders — he has taken ownership.

"The main part of coming here was Abebooks is a great company with a lot of potential, and I see it as both a challenge and an honour to take this position," he said, noting he's always driven to ensure the company is moving forward.

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