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Jun. 3, 2004. 01:00 AM

Rare move to cut out the bookstores

Niche Web site to add new titles Forte has been old, uncommon works ABEbooks.com adds new titles to rare-book sales

Writ

JUDY STOFFMAN

ENTERTAINMENT REPORTER

A hugely popular Canadian Web site that links buyers looking for rare books to 12,000 antiquarian booksellers worldwide, will announce tomorrow at Book Expo in Chicago that it is opening its Internet platform to authors, publishers and bookstores selling new books. About 20,000 books sell daily through ABEbooks.com, which also has English, French and German sites.

"We did a survey last year of our customers and found that most of them, 97 per cent, said they also bought new books," says Boris Wertz, ABE Books' (the initials stand for Accelerated Book Exchange) chief operating officer. "The new and used book markets are merging into one — it's very exciting."

He spoke on the phone from Chicago where he is attending Book Expo, the annual trade show of the U.S. book industry.

Customers can access over 50 million titles on ABEbooks.com and the company projects that a third of its business will be in new books within three years, offering strong competition to Chapters/Indigo and Amazon.ca. An ad campaign for the expanded service will be appearing in the *New Yorker*, *Harper's*, the *New York Review of Books* and other periodicals in the U.S. and Canada.

Suzanne Brooks, president of the Canadian Booksellers Association and owner of Gulliver's Books in North Bay, says she will not sign up with ABE. "We don't have the resources to do both bricks-and-mortar and Internet bookselling."

Founded eight years ago by Cathy Waters, a secondhand-book seller in Victoria, B.C., and her husband Keith Waters, ABEbooks.com (now

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employee owned) is the world's largest marketplace for used, rare and out-of-print books. But its 100 employees never handle a book — that is done by the member bookstores, who pay a monthly fee, depending on the numbers of books they want listed, and a commission on each book sold.

Wertz, estimates that 10 per cent of the books sold on ABEbooks.com are, in fact, new books, and says that 50 small presses are already members, selling directly to customers.

Paul McNally, co-owner of McNally Robinson Booksellers in Winnipeg, says his store's Web site does a "a small but interesting amount" of business, mostly within Manitoba, and may not benefit from linking to the global marketplace.

"Regional publishers direct their traffic to us. Customers tend to be from the region," he says.

A bookseller's worst nightmare is publishers selling directly to the public. "I think independents will make strong representation to publishers that they should support their dealer network," says McNally. "The dealer network is very important to writers, publishers and Canadian culture."

"I don't see the larger publishers going that way," says Wertz, "but there are hundred of small independent presses in the U.S., who have major distribution problems because if you don't get listed by a wholesaler there such as Ingram's, you have no chance to reach the stores."

One Canadian press who will sign on is Trafford Publishing, also based in Victoria, which publishes books for a fee. "They (ABE) have a huge volume of traffic on their site so it will give our authors greater exposure," says Kingstone Reed, vice-president of the firm which puts out software manuals and 2,500 books yearly that regular bookstores are reluctant to carry.

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