



## **New-generation independent booksellers open a new chapter in bookselling**

Independent Booksellers Week

June 14<sup>th</sup> - 21<sup>st</sup> 2010

Bookshops all over the country are hosting hundreds of promotional events this week during Independent Booksellers Week (June 14<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup>), a major marketing drive championing the energy and fun to be found amongst the long-established and new-generation booksellers operating on Britain's high streets.

Customer-focused, commercially-savvy and digitally-aware, booksellers are carving an invaluable niche for themselves in their local communities, despite difficult trading conditions. Consumer spending on books is down by 5% in value year on year to £2208m and by 1% in volume in 2008/9. The independent sector, however, held up with an increase of 1% in volume over the same period.\*<sup>1</sup>

There are around 1,200 independent bookshops in the UK, with over 100 opening their doors for the first time in the last two years.

Taking their place alongside some very savvy and incredibly creative existing booksellers, this new breed of book entrepreneurs have several things in common: well-honed business skills, often from previous careers; highly-creative marketing campaigns and excellent relationships with customers.

This week 250 shops are taking part in Independent Booksellers Week (IBW), and hosting visits from dozens of authors such as Katie Fforde, Lynda La Plante, Robert Muchamore, Justin Lee Collins and Vogue editor Alexandra Shulman. Community-based events range from Where's Wally fancy dress competitions at several locations to guided meditation led by a Buddhist monk (Jaffe & Neale, Chipping Norton).

Regular customer events, with activities for schools, community groups and local residents are commonplace for many indies. The Chepstow Bookshop is one that runs frequent author events - more than 80 last year - attracting high profile names such as Clarissa Dickson-Wright, Andy McNab, Simon King and Sir David Attenborough.

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Some, like Jaffe & Neale of Chipping Norton, Oxon, are the base for regular book clubs. This award-winning indie also hosts a creative writing course with publisher Faber and Faber, authors' evenings and non-book events including an environmental movement and art exhibitions.

Others take part in local festivals. The Book Hive, Norwich is linking up with the Norfolk Food Festival this summer, inviting customers to enjoy some sake while the chef from a nearby Japanese restaurant prepares sushi.

Food and drink have become an important part of the booksellers' offering, with in-store cafes now commonplace. Some indies have gone one step further: SilverDell Books, in Kirkham Lancs, has an ice cream parlour and creates recipes in honour of visiting authors. Cox's Special (named for Josephine Cox) and Tasty Terry (for Terry Wogan) are just two popular varieties dreamt up by proprietor Elaine Silverwood.

Independents, being close to their customers and at the heart of their communities, offer a bookstock tailored to their market and customer base. They also understand the need to be 'multi-channel' booksellers; many sell online as well as on the high street, find books for customers online and even order through Amazon to track down books or for people who don't want to do it themselves. Booksellers increasingly go where the customers are, and, in common with many other independent retailers, no longer run their business from behind the till, but from the midst of the community they serve.

Increasingly the indies are digitally-savvy, using e-marketing to reach their market. Nic Bottomley from Mr B's Emporium of Reading Delights, Bath, is an expert internet user with a blog, and regularly both sources, and sells, books online. Retailers are now using e-newsletters, Facebook and Twitter on a regular basis to keep in touch with their customers.

The indies also design store layouts to cater for their customers' interests and lifestyles, and to include space for complementary activities. The Kemptown Bookshop, a well-known south-coast independent, has an events space for lectures, art classes, film screenings and writing groups. The Book Hive (Norwich) features a trompe l'oeil bookshelf, complete with parents' peep-hole, a striking design which adorns the wall and partitions a secure children's area.

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Many of the newer booksellers have changed career to open a bookshop, bringing with them business skills acquired in other industries. Nic Bottomley of Mr B's Emporium of Reading Delights, Bath, was a lawyer, Sue Lake of White Rose Books, Thirsk, worked in advertising, while Henry Layte of The Book Hive, Norwich, was an olive oil importer - and all are now run thriving 'indies'. Patrick Jaffe of Jaffe & Neale is one of many who worked elsewhere in the book industry - in his case 16 years at Waterstone's.

Meryl Halls, from the industry trade body The Bookseller Association said:

"Successful independent booksellers like these are bucking the trends on the high street by offering their local communities the sort of service that sets these shops apart, and making their position in their local village, town, city or suburb integral to that community. Independents are close to their market, they know their customers, they know what is going on locally - they can make a real difference. We count some of the most creative, entrepreneurial retailers on the high street today amongst our members and Independent Booksellers Week is an excellent showcase for the great work they do".

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**Notes to editors:**

1. INDEPENDENT BOOKSELLERS WEEK: This is the third year of IBW, in which hundreds of events and promotions take place at bookshops around the country. For more details: [www.independentbooksellersweek.org.uk](http://www.independentbooksellersweek.org.uk)
2. Meryl Halls of the Booksellers Association is available for interview.
3. Independent bookshops around the country are available as case studies. They include:  
The Chepstow Bookshop, Monmouthshire, Wales  
Silverdell Books, Kirkham, Lancashire  
White Rose Books, Thirsk, Yorkshire  
The Kemptown Bookshop, Brighton, W Sussex  
Linlithgow Bookshop, West Lothian, Scotland  
Mostly Books, Abingdon, Oxon  
Much Ado, Alfriston, E Sussex  
The Book Nook, Hove, E Sussex  
The Book Hive, Norfolk
4. Data source\*<sup>1</sup> Nielsen Bookscan data/BML 2010). Independent Bookselling in the GB Consumer Book Market

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