

Google Book Search OpEd #1
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Google is Giving Authors, Poets and Publishers Their Dream: To Be Found and Read.

By Marie Harris

As a poet and author, I have but one dream: To touch and inspire people through my writing. It is a passion that fuels my personal efforts and the efforts of virtually all of my professional colleagues. My books and poems were not created to sit on a shelf, collecting dust. They were penned to be read, enjoyed, and loved. They were written to inspire, teach, and delight.

But far too many authors never realize this dream. Too many wonderful works get set aside in the extremely competitive publishing world and die slow, sad deaths in library basements or print shop warehouses. I imagine the same could be said for much that is written for the worlds of technology, medicine and science.

For this reason alone, every publisher, writer, poet and author in the world should be warmly embracing the current efforts of Google. Their latest project, called Google Book Search, entails an almost unimaginable undertaking to create electronic copies of the entire collection of books found in the libraries of Harvard, Stanford, Oxford, Michigan State University and the New York Public Library. This enormous amount of data is being organized, indexed and made available to the world through www.books.google.com and www.google.com.

Searchers can query keywords and instantly find books that contain relevant references to that keyword. They can see the cover of the book and read a sentence or two. In some cases where the book is out of print, they can even peruse the entire volume. If they like what they read they can instantly order the book from one of several online suppliers or get information on the nearest library that has their book of interest.

For years now, online publishers and companies have enjoyed the power of free marketing and expansive exposure that Google type search engines afford. But as an old style "print" author, my works have largely gone un-promoted and un-noticed in the search engine world. The Google Book Search project radically changes the playing field as it gives print publishers and authors an equal opportunity to harness the Internet in putting their works into readers and researchers hands.

Unfortunately, because of an apparent lack of understanding, or sadly, greed in some cases, several publishers are a bit disgruntled about the project. They believe that it is an

infringement on copyrighting laws and have sought a resolution in filing a lawsuit against Google.

Copyrights are a very serious thing to me as an author. These laws protect my work and my good name. It is copyrights that allow me to confidently write and trust that I will be credited for my work and, if it is good enough, financially rewarded. The Google Book Search project does exactly that. It is true that Google is copying the entire text of each book, but not in an effort to resell the book for direct financial gain or in an effort to steal ideas, concepts or revenues.

Indeed the exact opposite is true. Google is making these works freely available in small snippets – a sentence or two – just enough to “wet the appetite”, as it were. In some cases, with publisher and author permissions, a page or two might be available to the searcher. In sales I believe they call that the “puppy dog close”. In either case, the original work is being closely safeguarded from piracy and illegal reproduction and the author and publisher is always credited for their work.

With increased exposure and limited content access, combined with effective presentation and instant purchasing options, Google has handed a free cornucopia of opportunity to authors and publishers. The end result could be a significant boost in authors being read and in readers being inspired, entertained, enlightened and educated.

For most of the authors and publishers that I have spoken with, it is a dream come true.