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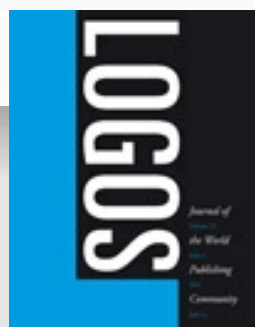
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Author: [Miha Kovac<sup>1</sup>](#)

Source: [Logos](#), Volume 19, Issue 3, pages 151 – 158 Publication

Year : 2008

DOI: [10.2959/logo.2008.19.3.151](#)

ISSN: 0957-9656 E-ISSN: 1878-4712

Document Type: Research Article

Subjects: [History](#)



[« Previous Article](#) | [Table of Contents](#) | [Next Article »](#)

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**"Never mind the Web.  
Here comes the book."**

**Continuity and discontinuity in the fate of reading**



## Miha Kovač

Miha Kovač lectures in the Department for Library and Information Science and Book Studies, School of Arts, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia, where he originally earned his PhD in 1999. Before returning to academia to teach, Kovač was editorial director of Mladinska Knjiga, one of the largest publishing houses in South-East Europe. Kovač has been a visiting scholar at Oxford Brookes Centre for Publishing Studies, and at the School of Information and Library Science at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. He also worked as a consultant for the World Bank and the Soros Foundation in various East European countries. In 2005, he became editor-in-chief of the Slovene edition of *National Geographic* magazine. The following article, adapted from a paper Kovač presented at the SHARP (Society for the History of Authorship, Reading & Publishing) conference in 2008, discusses topics found in the author's new book, *Here Comes the Book: Never Mind the Web*, Chandos Publishing ([www.chandospublishing.com](http://www.chandospublishing.com)), 2008.

Email: [miha.kovac@siol.net](mailto:miha.kovac@siol.net)

At the end of the 1990s, there was a fear that printed books would soon be replaced by reading devices. However, Steven King's 2000 attempt to bypass publishers, printers and bookstores by publishing his novel *The Plant* on his website, direct downloading by readers, failed. The author sold far fewer copies than he had of his previous books published in print. Furthermore, Arthur A. Hays Sulzberger's prediction of the rapid rise of e-books from the 1990s on, and Forester Research's prediction of the fast development of e-textbooks starting in the late 1990s both proved wrong. In the first years of the new millennium, producers of e-book reading devices started to disappear from the halls of the Frankfurt Book Fair, and the second biggest World Book Fair, Barnes & Noble ([www.bn.com](http://www.bn.com)) stopped selling e-books in 2002. In short, the much anticipated expansion of e-books just didn't gain any momentum till the end of 2007, when the Amazon Kindle appeared. At the time this article was written, it was too early to predict whether the Kindle will be as successful as its predecessors.

Most critics of e-books blamed this slow adoption on low screen resolution, bad batteries, and the technological conservatism of traditional publishers. However, when we look closer at the book publishing process, it becomes quite clear that the reasons run much deeper. Book publishers are far from being technologically conservative, as evidenced by their open embrace of new technologies in editing, production and marketing. As a matter of fact, in the whole process of producing and marketing a book, only the final product itself — the book printed on paper — remained analogue. On the one hand, viewed from this perspective, it is plausible to think that traditional publishers would embrace e-books too, if there was a business rationale in them, especially in the face of reading devices that were more state-of-the-art, such as the Kindle — successfully solved r

**Affiliations:** 1: Miha Kovač lectures in the Department for Library and Information Science and Book Studies, School of Arts, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia, where he originally earned his PhD in 1999. Before returning to academia to teach, Kovač was editorial director of Mladinska Knjiga, one of the largest publishing houses in South-East Europe. Kovač has been a visiting scholar at Oxford Brookes Centre for Publishing Studies, and at the School of Information and Library Science at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. He a

World Bank and the Soros Foundation in various East European countries. In 2005, he became editor-in-chief of the Geographic magazine. The following article, adapted from a paper Kovač presented at the SHARP (Society for the Publishing) conference in 2008, discusses topics found in the author's new book, Here Comes the Book: Never Min (www.chandospublishing.com), 2008., Email: miha.kovac@siol.net, URL: http://www.w3.org/1999/xlink



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