

New Island Community for Readers Like 'You'

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First, let me offer my belated congratulations to *You* for being named [Time magazine's Person of the Year](#). *You* deserve it. *You* outdid yourself online in 2006, turning remote islands like [YouTube](#), [MySpace](#) and [Wikipedia](#) into virtual continents. *You* even went literal with the island metaphor by moving to [Second Life](#) and recreating *Yourself* in *Your* own image.

Second person singular is always in caps in *YourWorld*, and 2007 looks even brighter for *You*. One small question remains for us, however: Will the publishing industry survive the age of *You*? As booksellers, our (lower case) heads can't help but spin. Dare we "close the books" on 2006? Will anyone open them again?

Book communities continue to develop online in any number of interesting ways, but the odds of building a book-focused Web site that becomes a YouTube or MySpace are probably equivalent to those of buying a lottery ticket with your morning coffee and winning \$20 million (disclaimer: all estimates calculated by former English major and thus subject to professional derision).

If we build it, will *You* come?

If we don't, will *You* even notice?

As I read the hype about *Time* magazine's Year of *You*, I was also having an extended e-mail conversation with Charlotte Cook, president of [Komenar Publishing](#), a small house whose second title, *My Half of the Sky* by Jana McBurney-Lin, garnered a Book Sense Pick last year from Keri Holmes of the [Kaleidoscope](#) bookstore in Hampton, Iowa.

We discussed at length the online as well as offline world of books, and the word "community" kept surfacing in various contexts. I'll share some of her thoughts with you in the next two columns here, but we are also joining Charlotte for the soft launch this week of the [Habitual Reader](#), a new online community.

"Our idealism strikes again!" Charlotte says. "Nick Ponticello, our manager of operations, has pointed out that the hottest Web sites are those that create community. We want the Habitual Reader Web site to give voice to those among us who spend \$\$\$\$ every month

on books and then actually read those books. The centerpiece of the site will be Profiles of Habitual Readers with suggested reading lists; a Jeff Foxworthy-like contest about who is a Habitual Reader; Homegrown Reviews; Survivor: Book Island; a list of Once Was Enough titles; and even a 'nominate your favorite bookseller' option."

Charlotte came to publishing after working in a variety of fields, including "libraries, bookstores, large retail operations (worker bee to management) and high tech (small and large companies)." She can expound upon the wonders of literary fiction as well as the lures and pitfalls of technophilia: "When I was in high tech, I learned two things: 1) There's bleeding edge, leading edge and ridiculous. Ridiculous was being high on the technology but forgetting what your business was. We also called it 'rapture of the deep'; 2) Every technology takes several introductions to find its true value in the marketplace."

Her husband, Richard, owns Sunrise Bookshop & Metaphysical Center in Berkeley, Calif. "We started Sunrise more than 30 years ago," Charlotte says, "and have been part of the independent booksellers' world this whole time. We have supported all things for indies and are longtime members of NCIBA."

Sunrise does not have a Web site. According to Richard, "We have on several occasions begun a Web site for the bookstore, but it requires a good deal of work, ongoing attention and commitment, and so far little evidence that it would repay such effort. My thoughts are subject to change on this issue."

Despite her interest in online experimentation and community building, Charlotte concurs with her husband's resistance to online retailing. Komenar Publishing does not sell books on its Web site: "We staunchly believe in community bookstores. I buy on the Web only when I know exactly what I want and can't find it locally. What the Web does is provide us with a much cheaper venue for realizing marketing and publicity needs."

The Habitual Reader goes live this week as a work in progress with limited content but unlimited hopes.

Will *You* join this particular book community? Anything is possible, but everything is worth a shot.

Check in next week for an update as well as some of Charlotte's thoughts about living the life of a small publisher in a world where the stakes are anything but virtual.

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