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In An Interesting Twist, B&N to Sell Self-Published Books In Stores



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By **Thad McIlroy**

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The big news about Barnes & Noble is that after twenty years of battling with Amazon they have finally made a competitive move that Amazon cannot match. Barnes & Noble, with 640 bookstores in 50 states, is giving self-published authors a chance to get access to their hallowed bookshelves. Meanwhile, Amazon runs one bookstore in Seattle (albeit with 3 more slated). Barnes & Noble wins this contest hands down.

The news reads best at a quick glance: "...authors have the opportunity to sell their print books at Barnes & Noble stores across the country... participate at in-store events including book signings and discussions, where they will be able to sell their print books and meet fans."

But the devil's in the details: the program is for "eligible" NOOK Press authors, defined as "those print book authors whose eBook sales [of a single title] have reached 1,000 units in the past year." The in-store promotion is for "those print book

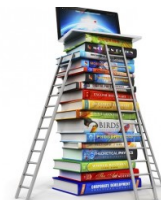
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The Book New

To try for bookstore access eligible authors must then submit their print books “for review by Barnes & Noble’s Small Press Department and one of the company’s corporate category buyers”. To participate at in-store events authors need a “review from a Barnes & Noble store manager.” But how many copies might the chain order? How long will they keep those precious books in inventory? Where will they be displayed? What about returns of unsold copies? So far there are lots of unanswered questions. It’s not a slam-dunk.

Related story: [If You Were Amazon, Would You Open Stores in Dying American Malls?](#)

In my coverage of last fall’s NINC conference I noted [some remarks from publishing expert Lou Aronica](#). Lou provided a forceful reminder that self-published authors can’t afford to ignore print: it still accounts for some two-thirds of book sales overall. The larger problem is getting retail access for print. Independent booksellers have always been more open to dealing with self-published authors than the chains. But trying to get into the [2,311 outlets operated by the 1,775 American Booksellers Association](#) (ABA) members is a logistical impossibility. Barnes & Noble has fewer total outlets than the ABA, but a lot more floor space. And just one buying office. [At least one report shows](#) bookstore chains with two-and-a-half times the marketshare of independents. Further, getting self-published books into non-bookstore outlets like drug stores and supermarkets is just a dream. And so access to Barnes & Noble should be a big deal.

So far there’s been only modest reaction online. [Self Publishing Advisor](#) calls it “big news.” [Good E-Reader](#) is [cautious](#). “Too Little, Too Late” is the theme both [from Nate Hoffelder](#) and [the Passive Voice](#) (where 63 comments will give you an additional sense of the reaction from the field). [Author Katie Cross](#) writes that it’s “nice to see them doing something. Following with interest,” while [author Jim Cross](#) thinks it “could be huge.”

The program will take months to implement. Obviously nothing is going to change quickly. The takeaway for me is the question of hope, whether [the new regime at Barnes & Noble](#) might start to claw back some of the territory they have so determinedly ceded to Amazon. That would be good news for authors of every stripe and for publishers everywhere.

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