

# DESIGN WEEK

## The original PowerBook

- Source: Magazine
- Publication date: 14 November 2007
- Byline: Jim Davies

[Email to a friend](#)

[Comment on this article](#)

A decade ago, the book was - apparently - on its last, musty old legs. US 'grunge' designer David Carson's End of Print compendium prophesied its demise - though not before a sequel had been published. New media evangelist Malcolm Garrett gave us precisely punctuated talks and articles entitled 'The Book is Dead?' or 'The Book is Dead!', depending how firmly his tongue was in his cheek.



1



2

OK, they were both being deliberately provocative. But, as it turns out, they couldn't be further from the mark. The book is in rude health – not in spite of, but because of, the progress of electronic media. For a start, Amazon and its ilk have made the process of book buying temptingly cheap, simple and convenient. There may still be nothing quite like spending hours rooting around in curious-smelling secondhand bookshops for longforgotten gems, but, really, who can afford the time? Now, all it takes is a few keywords and couple of clicks, and, before you know it, your cherished slim (or fat) volumes are waiting on your doorstep.

If you're after something more obscure, AbeBooks can help. It specialises in used, rare and out-of-print books through a network of more than 13 000 independent booksellers around the world, so,

no matter how esoteric your tastes – from the mating habits of the mongoose to Peruvian nose flutes – chances are that good old Abe can satisfy them.

More recently, e-books have been hailed as the next big publishing phenomenon. We've come to accept buying our music on-line, so why not download our reading material, too? Simply because the traditional book is a supreme piece of design which has proved its worth – more or less unchanged – for more than 600 years. We're weaned on the paper book format, so we're not only totally comfortable with it, but actually take comfort in it. We instinctively relish a book's smell, feel and design, embrace the simple-yet-satisfying union of paper, ink, thread and glue.

In the 1930s, the advent of the paperback gave the book a significant shot in the arm. Portable and inexpensive, the new form was the perfect medium for reading anywhere. Can you imagine lying on a sunlounger reading from a mobile phone or hand-held computer, as the reflection burns holes in your eyes? Or, nodding off in bed, clutching your e-book reader? It's curious that many such devices sell themselves on their screen's 'paper-like' quality – like flying budget airline when you have your own private jet.

What about blogs? They're accessible, democratic, eclectic and experimental, but they're also responsible for some of the worst excesses of navel-gazing. There are some awful books out there, too, but they are, at least, subject to market forces and have troubled editors and proofreaders before being foisted on an unsuspecting public. Blogs have no such quality control, and it's telling that a blog is only deemed to have been a real success when it's been repackaged as a book.

There's no getting away from the fact that digital books are more ecologically friendly than paper ones. But publishers are starting to address issues of paper sustainability, and looking at inks and recycling.

We may live in an age where digital is encroaching on every aspect of our lives, but surely that's a reason to appreciate the opportunity to free ourselves from the computer screen every so often. A good, old-fashioned book provides the perfect invitation.

