

E-Commerce: A Study on Selected Indian Online Bookstores*

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Abstract: *The paper explains about e-commerce with special reference to (selected) Indian online bookstores. It introduces five popular online bookstores viz. crossword.in, www.granth.com, bookadda.com, flipkart.com, indiabookstore.net. By discussing the recent trends in online book industry, the paper also attempts to create awareness about the utilities of online bookstores.*

Keywords: *E-commerce, Online bookstores, Online shopping, India*

Content is NOT king – seeding and promotion tactics of said content is king.

~ Brian Chappell

1. Introduction

We are living in the age of Web 2.0 where online medium has become more interactive than ever before. This interactive online medium has opened wide range of avenues for e-business. The Times of India reported recently that the people turned to the Internet to buy everything from diapers to books, houses and even groceries this year, pushing e-commerce revenues in the country to \$14 billion with the possibility of even higher earnings in 2013. Factors like spiraling inflation and slower economic growth failed to dampen the online shopping frenzy as more and more companies opted for selling wares through the internet route, offering innumerable options and discounts to buyers (PTI, 2012).

The online bookstore industry is one of the fastest growing e-business industries in India. The book industry has been observing great changes in publishing and marketing tasks. There are many national and international players to take the published books to the customers' door steps. Such is the mechanism of online bookstores. As the above quote specifies, the promotion tactics (marketing) has become mantra of e-commerce now.

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When we observe the trends in online shopping, the related statistics are quite impressive. Google India's report says 90% of online shoppers are planning to buy more products online. In terms of top product categories ever purchased online, apparels and accessories was among the top category (84%), followed by electronics (71%), beauty and personal care (64%), books (62%) and household products (61%). The research also highlighted that baby products (39%), health and nutrition (43%) product category were also becoming popular with online buyers. The frequency of purchase was also higher for categories like apparels and accessories (34%), beauty and personal care (33%) products in comparison to electronics (28%) (TOI Tech, 2013).

This research study specifically introduces five Indian online bookstores which have been very popular and successful in putting the best collection of books and e-information sources on web that too with the attractive discount rates.

2. Concepts

- a) *E-Commerce*: “It is enabling or achieving your business objectives by using information technology to enhance or transform your business processes” (Kami, 2012).
- b) *Bookstores*: “A shop where books are sold” (Dictionary, 2012)
- c) *Online Bookstore*: An online interface which allows customers to search, find and buy the books online.

3. Objectives

The objectives of the study are to:

- a) understand the e-commerce of online book industry;
- b) know the utilities of online bookstores and
- c) introduce the prominent Indian online bookstores and their features.

4. Scope and limitations

The present study introduces five Indian online bookstores viz. crossword.in, www.granth.com, bookadda.com, flipkart.com, indiabookstore.net. The study gives brief information about the firm, services provided by the online bookstores but not the technical details about building the bookstore and online transactions. The observations of the online shopping portal of the said bookstores and findings of the same have been enumerated under the heads of each online bookstore (see point number 6).

5. Methodology

The search engines and metasearch engines have been used effectively to trace the popular online bookstores. After collecting the URL of the online bookstores, the bookstores have been logged on individually to know about the store and the features, services they offer for the customers. The research study is based on the information available on the Internet. Most of the information collected for the samples has been collected and referred from the official websites of the Indian online bookstores. Five online bookstores have been considered for this study as Samples. The convenience sampling method has been used for the study.

6. Discussion

6.1. Selected online Indian bookstores

The following (Table-1) are the selected Indian online bookstores with the necessary details.

Table-1: Selected online Indian bookstores

<i>Sr. No.</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>URL of the Bookstore</i>	<i>Products on Sale</i>	<i>Features</i>
1	Crossword	http://www.crossword.in	Books, E-books, CD, DVDs	New Releases, Best Seller Books, Best of 2011, Shop by Popular Authors, Crossword Book Awards, 100 Best Books
2	Bookadda	www.bookadda.com	Books, CD, DVDs	Top Authors, New Releases, Best Sellers, Award Winners, Book Trailers, Box Collection Books
3	Flipkart	www.flipkart.com	Books, CD, DVDs, Electronic Devices (Hardwares), Mobiles, Games, Stationery, Cameras	Top New Books, Best Selling Books, Pre-order books, Trending books

4	Granth	www.granth.com	Books, CD, DVDs,	GranthRecommended, Best Sellers, Granth Top Rated, Bargain Books, Buyer's top Rated
5	IndiaBookStore	www.indiabookstore.net	Books	It acts as Search Engine for online bookstores. It gives the comparative rates of the books offered by different online bookstores.

The details about the above mentioned bookstores have been discussed under the following heads.

- a) **Crossword:** It aims to be a point of cultural and social interaction where authors and poets hold court, where children are regaled, where people gravitate to be informed, to be entertained, even enlightened. The name embodies the vision of Crossword as a place and space for people who seek information, knowledge or just the pleasure of reading. Crossword stocks the widest range of Books – Movies- Music- Toys- Stationery- Magazines and CD ROM's.

With its large children's section and its focus on making the store a friendly, safe, fun-filled place, Crossword attracts many families who normally don't think of visiting bookstores. Services like Dial-a-book, Fax-a-book and Email-a-book enable customers to shop from their homes; and when they come to the store, the unobtrusively helpful staffs assist them in finding the right book, the right CD or the right gift for the right occasion. Facilities like the Crossword Gift Vouchers, the friendly 'Return, Exchange & Refunds' policy, the Cafes within the stores and the unique store experience make it easy and enjoyable for customers to shop at Crossword. Over 2.5 lacs loyal customers are rewarded through the Crossword Book Rewards Program with points, discounts, exclusive discounts & offers and more. 'eWords', a monthly e-newsletter with reviews of new books, news about in store events and bestseller lists, is currently mailed to these Members.

Among the numerous writers who have visited the store are Sir V S Naipaul, Arundhati Roy, Vikram Chandra, Vikram Seth, KiranNagarkar, Kiran Desai, Amitav Ghosh, ShashiTharoor, Shobhaa De, Charles Handy, Ricardo Semler and Jack Canfield. Crossword bookstores also promote the reading habit among children with a weekly activity every Sunday morning across various stores. Promotional events include

Pictionary contests, quizzes, slide shows and the annual affair with Santa and his elves. Ian Anderson of Jethro Tull came for a signing, so did Macho Man Randy Savage, the WWF champion. Crossword also launched the Crossword Book Award in 1998 to recognise and reward the best of Indian writing. Since its inception in 15th October 1992, Crossword has received wide recognition for its achievements; articles on retailing in India invariably feature Crossword. It has been featured in Advertising Age International, USA, as one of the Marketing Superstars for 1994. The Bookseller, UK, has also described it as 'being on the cutting edge of retailing' in India (Crossword, 2012).

- b) **BookAdda:** It is an Indian online bookstore with collection of over 10 million books with more than 22,54,279 authors. We offer FREE delivery all over India and support multiple ways for safe, secure and easy online shopping. We sell only NEW books (Bookadda, 2012).
- c) **Flipkart:** Flipkart went live in 2007 with the objective of making books easily available to anyone who had internet access. Today, it is present across various categories including movies, music, games, mobiles, cameras, computers, healthcare and personal products, home appliances and electronics – and still counting! With over 11.5 million book titles, 11 different categories, more than 2 million registered users and sale of 30000 items a day, it is one of the leading e-commerce players in the country (Flipkart, 2012).
- d) **Granth.com:** The Granth.com is into book trade from last fifteen years. It has got collection around twenty thousand books. It represents various Indian and international publishers (Granth, 2012).
- e) **IndiaBooksStore:** It is a *fast* and *simple* search engine for books across all major Indian online book stores. It is meant to ease the process of finding the *best deals*, and/or checking the *stock status* and *availability* for the customer's books across all stores in one go. While many of the customers have their favorite book stores, it is often helpful to make a quick comparison with other stores. Not all book stores stock all books, and even if your favorite store has the book, others might have a different edition - some might have new versions, some might have cheaper ones, and so on (IndiaBookStore, 2012).

7. Findings and suggestions

- a) In the Indian context, these online bookstores are more popular in metropolitan cities and cities, so the huge rural market is yet to be covered. (But the reason could be the available IT infrastructure in the rural areas may be not of that standard or well-equipped).

- b) The online bookstores must do extensive and productive market research of rural areas in orders to attract the rural buyers to the online bookstores.
- c) The end user or the customer gets better service if he/she trusts the e-commerce mechanism since many are not comfortable in fully utilizing the services by online stores (bookstore).
- d) The online bookstores must reach the academic institutes and for the same they need to have different schemes to offer value added service.
- e) Marketing of the online bookstores and creating awareness about its utility to the rural people is greatly required as there is a big market in this geographic area in view of business and profit.
- f) The portals of online bookstore should utilize host of innovative apps (applications) to serve the netizens/online buyers.

8. Conclusion

To summarise, in what is clearly being seen as a boost to the online retail sector, a recent survey by ASSOCHAM has revealed that about 40 per cent among those surveyed across cities like the aforesaid cities like Delhi , Mumbai, Chennai, Bangalore , Kolkata, Ahmedabad, Chandigarh, Ludhiana, Lucknow and Jaipur said they prefer to shop online. In fact this inclination (among the youth) is going to help the online retail industry to reach Rs 7,000 crore mark by 2015, ASSOCHAM predicts(Chandra, 2011).However, the online bookstores are yet be more popular in terms of building confidence among the customers as many are skeptical about online payment against their selected books. The above suggestions will also be taken care by the prominent players in online bookstore industry. By doing so, the online retail industry may reach the above stated ASSOCHAM's mark by 2015.

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