



# SANDBOX BOOKS & PRINT

Exploring the digital opportunity

"We suffer for lack of utopian ideas around which to organize competing images of possible futures."

*Alvin Toffler – Future Shock 1970*



The Publishing sector is undergoing seismic changes, with digital technologies fundamentally altering supply chain processes, from production through distribution to marketing and sales. But within those challenges this transformation is also generating commercial, and creative, opportunity.

-2%

In 2011, print sales fell as digital rose leading to an overall decline in the market of 2% to £3.2bn.

+4%

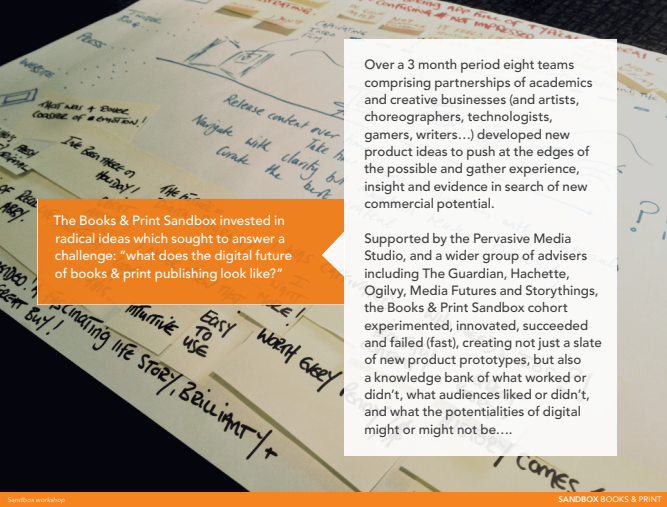
In 2012, physical book sales were down by 1%, but digital success meant the book market grew by 4% overall, reaching a record-breaking £3.3bn.

Guardian report on Publishers Association 2012 statistics

A close-up photograph of a smartphone and a fountain pen. The smartphone screen shows a text document with some lines of text visible, including "At the weekend I was with Doka near the...". A silver fountain pen with a ribbed grip is positioned diagonally across the top right of the frame, resting on a book. The background is a wooden surface.

The Sandbox™ is a model of rapid collaborative prototyping and innovation developed by the Pervasive Media Studio in Bristol. Over the past 5 years this model has been used to catalyse a series of dynamic developments, making small investments into nearly 50 ideas which demonstrate the combination of creativity and technology to explore fundamental questions on future industry trends.

**“What does the digital future of books & print publishing look like?”**

The background image shows a workshop environment with various sticky notes and sketches. One sticky note reads "Release content over time". Another says "Navigate with clarity but create the best". A third note says "The best piece of holiday!". There are also sketches of a book and a diagram with boxes. The overall theme is creative and experimental.

The Books & Print Sandbox invested in radical ideas which sought to answer a challenge: "what does the digital future of books & print publishing look like?"

Over a 3 month period eight teams comprising partnerships of academics and creative businesses (and artists, choreographers, technologists, gamers, writers...) developed new product ideas to push at the edges of the possible and gather experience, insight and evidence in search of new commercial potential.

Supported by the Pervasive Media Studio, and a wider group of advisers including The Guardian, Hachette, Ogilvy, Media Futures and Storythings, the Books & Print Sandbox cohort experimented, innovated, succeeded and failed (fast), creating not just a slate of new product prototypes, but also a knowledge bank of what worked or didn't, what audiences liked or didn't, and what the potentialities of digital might or might not be....



## INSIGHT

Taking an overview of the actions and interactions generated by this intensive period of research and development, the Books & Print Sandbox identified **5 key insights**:



# 1

## DISRUPTIVE NOT DESTRUCTIVE

A digital publishing industry changes shape and process but not necessarily its core tasks – production and distribution for example continue, just radically altered. The fundamentals of an audience desiring a user experience which satisfies their immediate need, whether information or entertainment, remains.



# 2

## COHERENCE IS KEY

Just because digital allows you to add scale, content and interactivity, it doesn't mean you should. The essential element of a coherent "narrative" or path generated by an authorial or curatorial "voice" is not changed, interactivity in itself is not enough. You can afford users an immediacy of connection and discoverability, but people like structure.

yesterday this page was blank

# 3

ADOPT  
NOT ADAPT

The potential of digital to change modes of interaction with text or content, or experiment with form and marketing, is fundamentally a creative opportunity. Simply re-purposing work for a digital platform misses that potential entirely. Create new "native" works which incorporate the possibilities for extension.



# 4

## CONTEXT AND CONNECTION

Technology allows the creative adoption and interpretation of other inputs to add context, connection, relevance (and magic). This could be location, movement or even biometric feedback, changing interaction and driving an entirely new layer of audience immersion, producing compelling original experiences.



A person wearing a hat and a coat is walking away from the camera down a narrow, arched tunnel. The tunnel's walls and ceiling are made of dark, textured bricks or cobblestones. The light is bright at the far end of the tunnel, creating a silhouette effect on the person. A teal-colored graphic element is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing the number '5' and the text 'VALUE OF THE PHYSICAL'. A white text box is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing a paragraph of text.

# 5

## VALUE OF THE PHYSICAL

A digital future does not by necessity negate a physical product – in fact it may do the opposite. Physical publication still bestows a validation and embodies an expression of value, and the clever combination of both digital and physical – playing to the separate strengths of each medium – generates commercial and creative potential.

A digital future for publishing is not just one of e-books at decreasing marginal value. The innovative experiments within the Sandbox have explored new models of interpretation, interaction, creative expression, publication, distribution, purchase and commercial exploitation.

At their core these projects have remained entirely faithful to the value of narrative and text – from classic literature to specifically commissioned writing – yet they have exploded the potential. In doing so they have generated prototypes of entirely new product lines, not seeking to replace the physical but augmenting to suggest alternative routes to market, engage new audiences across an increasingly digital literate marketplace and ultimately create revenue.

## CONCLUSION

William Wordsworth  
dies, aged 80

## SANDBOX BOOKS & PRINT

Books & Print Sandbox was produced under the REACT programme

For more information on the Books & Print Sandbox see:  
<http://wshd.to/bpcommissions>

Short films highlighting each of the individual projects are available at:  
<http://wshd.to/bp>

There is a wealth of evidence behind the aggregated insight in this document. We'd be happy to discuss the findings, and how it affects your business, in more detail.

REACT is one of four Knowledge Exchange Hubs for the Creative Economy funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). A collaboration between the University of the West of England, Watershed, and the Universities of Bath, Bristol, Cardiff and Exeter, REACT funds collaborations between arts and humanities researchers and creative companies. These collaborations champion knowledge exchange, cultural experimentation and the development of innovative digital technologies in the creative economy.

[www.react-hub.org.uk](http://www.react-hub.org.uk)

## ABOUT

### Pervasive Media Studio

The Pervasive Media Studio is Watershed's digital action research lab specialising in multi-disciplinary innovation – bringing together talented people and businesses from across the creative and technology landscape to create a community of enquiry and experimentation.

Opened in 2008, the Pervasive Media Studio has hosted nearly 350 creatives, technologists and academics in residence, attracting funding and investment of £3 Million and generating over £4.5 Million of additional business for its community of innovators. It has won 5 awards, worked across 6 continents, launched 36 new businesses and presented research and thought leadership at numerous national and international events.

Along the way the Pervasive Media Studio has worked with everyone from recent graduates to multinational corporations in order to generate action, impact, insight and understanding.



pervasive media studio

"It is no exaggeration to say that in five months the Sandbox has delivered as much as some mainstream publishers have done in five years."

*George Walkley - Hachette*

## CONTACT

If you have a key strategic question which would benefit from exploration and open innovation in collaboration with people working at the cutting edge of our digital futures, we can design a programme to fit.

Please contact: Clare Reddington  
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**WATERSHED**

"Across all creative industries, digitisation requires an extended use of trial and error."

*Booz & Co, Digital Future of Creative UK report 2013*