

Reading Material for the Youngest Book Worms

Surprisingly, the market for children's books is largely stable. In German-speaking countries and throughout Europe, new publishing houses are even being established and forward-formats developed. Books today light up, flash and make sounds at the touch of a button – reason enough to take a closer look at the role played by children's books in the digital media environment.



► Some studies on children's media use paint a rather negative picture at first glance. However, fears that television, the Internet or computer games could edge out books, both in terms of their function and position, need to be put into perspective. Children's books are, after all, of particular importance when it comes to orienting children in the growing media landscape. They open the door for children to a color-

ful and diverse media world. Books are indispensable to the intellectual and cultural development of children. No other medium does as much to promote language development in young children as the tried-and-tested picture book.

Competition for Children's Attention

Nevertheless, other media are increasingly taking the place of children's books. Ac-

cording to a study by the media researchers Sabine Feierabend and Walter Klingler, books have further slipped in the list of media leisure pursuits of children in recent years, with just 11 percent of children reading books daily and 38 percent doing so weekly.

Reading books is increasingly associated with acquiring information and ever less with relaxation. Yet, it is precisely the

1 Acoustic stimuli, such as ting and tiptoi books with sounds and texts for interactive reading and learning fun, make children's books even more attractive.

2 With touch and feel books, babies and toddlers can "grasp" concepts in the true sense of the word.



overload of information online that is leading to a return to classic books that have a beginning and end and present topics incisively and comprehensively.

The Market Is Stable, But ...

The number of new children's books published annually is seeing considerable growth. In Germany alone, the number of publications has increased from just under 5,000 titles in 2002 to 7,857 within ten years – a rise of over 50 percent.

"The German children's book market with a share of 16 percent is stable. That is reassuring in one sense, but it should also give us pause for thought if a market is no longer growing and diverse entertainment media are competing for the same target group," said the president of the German Working Group of Children's Books Publishers, Renate Reichstein, at a children's book fair in the Italian city of Bologna. Communication channels and accessibility are different for young people today. According to a study conducted by the German youth magazine Bravo, some 90 percent of teens have a smartphone.

China: 240,000 New Children's Books a Year

In 2012, China saw a 16 percent rise in new publications to some 240,000 titles. Even in the USA, the home of the smartphone, the turnover in children's and young adult books rose by 9 percent to a volume of USD 3.3 billion in 2012. However, that was primarily down to the bestseller *The Hunger Games*. In 2013, turnover returned to roughly the same level as previously, ac-

ording to estimates of the US market research institute Nielsen Market Research.

Such success stories have prompted numerous publishing houses to enter the market or to engage more heavily in the children's and young adult segment. In France, for instance, a number of publishing houses have been established in recent years, and in the Spain the Ediciones B publishing house has entered the children's and young adult segment. In Germany, the Berlin-based Jacoby & Stuart publishing house launched its own children's book series in 2008, and the Tulipan publishing house in Munich has been publishing children's books since 2006. "There's a sufficient market for good content," says Herwig Bitsche, Managing Director of the NordSüd publishing house in Zurich (Switzerland). Non-fiction books and long-sellers are dominant among picture books, says Bitsche.

E-Books for Children: USA 16%, Germany 1%

The USA is the trailblazer when it comes to the sale of digital content. According to Nielsen Market Research, e-books accounted for 16 percent of all children's book sales in the USA in 2013. One in five children who read e-books report reading more since switching to the digital format, according to the Scholastic Kids and Family Reading Report 2012. Children value, in particular, the possibility to change the font size when reading digital books, and, further, are not put off by the thickness of the book.

In Germany, just 2 percent of children's and young adult books were purchased as

audio books in 2012, while e-books accounted for just 1 percent. "Nevertheless, almost all publishers are producing e-books in parallel with their printed range," says Reichstein. While it is not a money-making exercise, publishers don't want to miss the boat, she explains.

Books Featuring Animation

E-books play a less important role in terms of children's books. The black-and-white display, which is typical at present, does not live up to colorful children's books. E-books also separate text and images, so they are unsuitable for illustrated books. In

Children's Books in Figures

- ▶ In Germany, the number of publications has risen by over 50 percent in the past ten years.
- ▶ Some 240,000 new titles came to market in China in 2012 – a 16 percent increase on the prior year.
- ▶ In the USA, children's and young adult books generated turnover of some USD 3.3 billion in 2012.
- ▶ In 2013, e-books accounted for 16 percent of all children's book sales in the USA,
- ▶ whereas a mere 1 percent of children's books was sold as e-books in Germany in 2012.
- ▶ The media giant Disney is the world's largest publisher of children's books with 200 million copies sold annually and a growth rate of 10 percent.



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The DreamWorks animation studio is now following Disney's example, and is establishing its own children's book division. With DreamWorks Press, which will publish books in printed and digital form, the animation studio intends to diversify beyond the risky film business. "Society continues to value reading together with children," said Jeffrey Katzenberg, CEO of DreamWorks Animation and head of the Walt Disney Studios between 1984 and 1994, in a recent interview.

order to capture children's imagination with digital books, there is a need for pictures, animation and sounds.

The latest trend, therefore, are children's book apps – book versions with an added narrator, music and interactive animations that children can engage with on their iPad.

Children's Books and Media Convergence

Children associate very strongly with particular figures and have a preference for media products of every kind and gift items featuring their given idol. Print runs of international bestsellers can reach astronomical levels. With Harry Potter, who also works his magic on the big screen and adorns accessories from pens to mugs, Joanne K. Rowling is the most successful children's book author since

1997 with 500 million copies sold, putting all others in the shade.

If there is already a TV series, film or soft toy that goes with the book, books can establish themselves much more easily in the minds of children. In addition, the media convergence animates even those children to read who otherwise would not pick up a book or would rarely do so.

"Reading Together with Children Is Valued"

The best known representative of this concept is the US media giant Disney. The group is the world's largest publisher of children's books with 200 million copies sold annually. Six of the 100 best-selling titles on Amazon's current bestseller list are based on the animated Disney film Frozen. The 10 percent annual growth rate of Disney's children's books is also impressive.

Babies and Toddlers as Target Readership

Many publishers have discovered the baby and toddler segment (for ages from 0 to 36 months). The industry is currently focusing on the idea of stimulating several senses of young readers simultaneously. Touch and feel books, buggy books, instructions for play activities and the use of acoustic stimuli, such as ting and tiptoi books with sounds and texts for interactive reading and learning fun, are dominant trends in the international market.

The interactive combination of sensory impressions is designed to facilitate the learning process in an exciting way, based on the principle that all the impressions are then experienced more intensively by the child. Babies and toddlers can "grasp" new concepts in the true sense of the word. Ravensburger, the leader in the German-speaking market, for instance, is highly successful with its range of touch and feel books.

Trend for Bath Time Books and Touch and Feel Books

In addition, more and more publishers are lending added value to children's books. Bath books, whose publishers include the international Dorling Kindersley publishing house, are particularly popular. Materials with waterproof coating are designed to make even bath time an exciting and educational experience for children.

Such innovations are paradigmatic of the increasingly sophisticated features of publications in the children's book sector. Such books are highly popular with babies and toddlers, since they regard them as toys rather than as books. Flaps are no



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longer sufficient – there needs to be plenty to touch and feel and that glitters. Different features are combined: flaps, slides, jigsaw pieces, fabric and other touch and feel elements are all present in a single title.

Six-Phase Animation

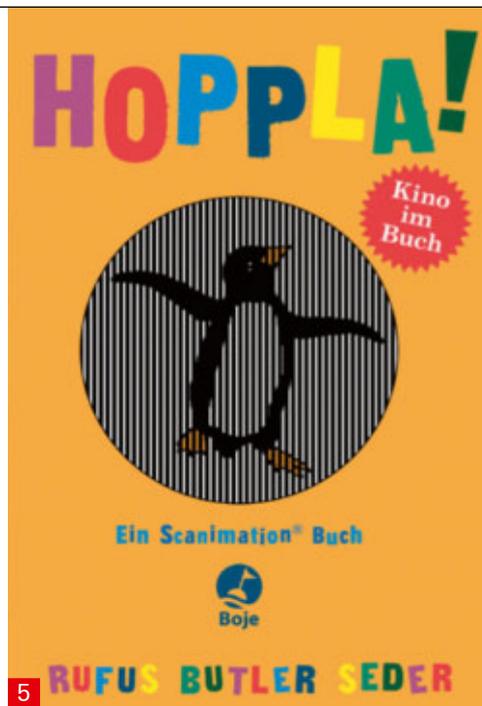
However, that is far from all. Scanimation books are a fascinating example of the great innovation potential that lies in children's books. Moving pictures of animals are created by graphical means alone. When the page is flipped open, the animals start moving, slowly or quickly, over and over again. In scanimation, Rufus Butler Seder has created a six-phase animation where motion is almost as smooth as in reality. Lenticular images or holograms have just two-phase animation.

Digital printing techniques are now increasingly being used to personalize children's books. The Oetinger publishing house has created a platform at www.family.de where ten titles can be personalized. The personalized books from family go beyond the mere insertion of the child's name. The personalized elements are woven into the story in an entirely natural way that differs from book to book. In addition, the beginning of the book features a photo of the child and their family together with a personal dedication, and optionally a photo of the person giving the gift.

Production Specialists

Stephan Born, who is in charge of production and procurement at the Oetinger publishing group, sums up the criteria for selecting partners as follows: "We've worked with many partners for a very long time, so we have a very clear impression of the quality that they can deliver, how reliable they are and what it's like dealing with them. In addition to price, the sustainable use of materials and resources is another criteria. We're careful to use certified paper to rule out tropical wood, and we give preference to short delivery routes."

The vast majority of the books are produced in the three German-speaking countries of Germany, Austria and Switzerland, since the Oetinger publishing group is convinced of the price-performance ratio that its stable partnerships provide and is also



keen to avoid long delivery distances and times, Born explains.

Increasingly Short Processing Times

One specialist in the production of children's books in Europe is the Proost printing plant in Belgium. According to the company, publishers today seek to attract attention at the point of sale by using special substrates or unusual sizes and finishing techniques. In addition, the market is demanding increasingly short processing times. According to Proost, a maximum of two weeks are available for production, which is only possible with an efficient and well-rehearsed production sequence. Against that background, continuing to reduce the set-up times of the machines is vital, he says.

One well-known international producer of children's books is the Leo Paper group in Hong Kong. With ten booklines, 15 book sewing machines and two perfect binders, the company a long-standing partner of Muller Martini when it comes to hardcover and softcover systems. Publishing companies across the world hold this business in high regard, especially for its pop-up books, where an element integrated using a folding mechanism pops up when the page is opened and appears in 3D, as well as its touch and feel books and die-cut books with a high proportion of manual production steps. ◀

3 Flip books feature moving figures and animals.

4 The Oetinger publishing house has created a platform at www.family.de where ten children's book titles can be personalized.

5 Scanimation books are a fascinating example of the great innovation potential that lies in children's books.

Books to Hold, Touch and Feel

In order to encourage children to become lifelong readers, committed publishing houses put on attractive events ranging from meetings with authors to global reading challenges. Children's books, and in particular picture books, are still something sensory that needs to be held, touched and felt before buying, making them less suitable for alternative sales channels like the Internet.

Increasing emphasis is being placed on cooperation with other industries, such as the toy industry and software production, as well as links with similar children's literature, such as magazines, since that is the only way to achieve lasting integration with other media.