

Communications

A Monthly Round-Up of Media and Communications

Issue 103 ♦ September 1994



Special Issue - Publishing

This issue of Communications Update looks at books.

It's an area we haven't examined in any detail before. Some would suggest we're just in time - they've seen the future and the book is not around.

We're not so sure.

Even those who argue most passionately about the durability of the printed book as a cultural and commercial artefact agree that some fundamental changes are going on. There's a battle out there for the business of communicating with audiences - a battle over the kinds of products to be made, who's

going to create them, how they're going to be distributed and who will make the money.

Booksellers who allowed home video to establish itself as a wholly new retail industry in the 1980s know that customers buying things they associate with computers might head to computer shops, not bookshops, to buy them.

Publishers know that last year, all the ten top-selling CD-ROM titles in the US were made by companies with names like Microsoft, Compton's New Media, Broderbund, Software Toolworks and

Knowledge Adventure. Not one was made by a book publisher (although Software Toolworks has since been acquired by Pearson).

Authors who write words are worried that reading - as a learning tool, a way of acquiring information and a pastime - is being replaced by watching, listening, pointing and clicking.

How profoundly this will affect books, the book industry and readers is hard to tell at this stage.

But we thought it was worth a look.

Jock Given
Guest Editor

