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Apr 21st, 2017 · by Olivia Q Davila, Special to the Independent · Comments: 0

A small online bookstore is focusing less on its Internet sales and more on community involvement and promoting local authors.

The act of leisurely reading a book is becoming more and more rare. For students at every level, textbooks are being converted into digital copies that are easily accessible on laptops, libraries are utilizing online archives that can be reached without having to leave a house and bookstores are closing due to low store visits and not keeping a strong enough online presence. However, one small company has maintained its love for the book and is trying to rekindle the community's interest in them.

Bonny Books was started as an online bookstore that was dedicated to the grandmother of two sisters. According to Patience Fones, her grandmother "loved to write," and was frequently seen jotting down short poems as a way of cataloging their family history. She said that growing up seeing her grandmother constantly writing really peaked her overall interest in continuing the practice herself.

However, with only a couple hundred dollars of revenue coming in a month at best, Ms. Fones decided to change the store's focus to be less about online transactions and pushed to make Bonny Books more active in participating and working in local communities.

Knowing that she "always wanted to own a bookshop," Bonny Books was launched in October 2014 as a side project to Ms. Fones' current full-time job. Since then, she said that Bonny Books has gained a local following of about 250 to 500 individuals, though she is unsure what the exact number is. The business is a member of the Mesa Chamber of Commerce, according to <http://bonnybooks.com/about-us.html>. It is on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/bonnybookstore>.

Unfortunately, even with its online following, Ms. Fones says that Bonny Books "really can't" compete with larger retailers because of their ability to buy books in bulk and offer people a variety of shipping options.

In an effort to be more competitive against such businesses, Bonny Books decided to concentrate on supporting local authors and participate in community engagement.

Phoenix-based author Gini Koch says that smaller "indie" bookstores, such as Bonny Books, really help lesser-known authors get their work out in front of the public. She says that smaller sellers show excitement when working with authors and seem to take a more active role in promoting local work.

"With an indie bookstore, they're much more likely to hand sell your books," she said. "They're much more likely to direct people toward authors they know and like."

Additionally, Bonny Books believes in encouraging curiosity and creativity throughout the community. One such example of this is shown through Bonny Books being a vendor for the **Tempe Book Festival**.

According to Jill Brenner, adult programming librarian at the Tempe Public Library and event coordinator for the 2017 Tempe Book Festival, vendors pay the tax license fees needed to sell books in certain locations and then local authors who don't have the license but want their books sold go through a vendor. Mrs. Brenner believes that having vendors like Bonny Books gives authors who might otherwise have difficulty being seen a chance to promote themselves to the community.

"We can help a lot of small, local authors in the community be able to get out there," she said. "So not only is it beneficial to them as community members but then the people who are attending the event and come ... they have authors that they may never have found otherwise that they can see and buy their books."



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