

Monday, January 31, 2011

The French (Digital) Revolution: My Week in Paris – Part One

I was recently invited by the [French-American Federation of Publishers](#) to spend a week in Paris along with fellow American publishing pros Evan Schnittman of Bloomsbury, Mitzi Angel of FSG, and Ira Silverberg of Sterling Lord Literistic.

The intent was for our group to meet with several of the top publishers like [Gallimard](#), [Flammarion](#), and [La Martiniere](#) and booksellers like [La Procure](#) and [Fnac](#) in France to discuss the burning topic of eBooks, Enhanced eBooks, Apps, and the various challenges currently facing our industry when it comes to all things digital. Needless to say, it was a great privilege and the business trip of a lifetime that provided me with a new perspective and plenty of food for thought (and I'm not just referring to all the amazing cheeses or baguettes!).

We first met with the [Ministry of Culture and Communications](#) where we learned, among other things, about how the government supports the local independent bookshops by not allowing price reductions on any books published in France, which prevents an indie or chain store from being undersold by a competitor, such as [Amazon.fr](#). Instead, stores are expected to sink or swim based on the shopping experience they provide to their customers. And if a store struggles to live up to expectations, then pointers are given to an owner on how to create a good shopping environment. In other words, every effort is made to prevent a store from shutting its doors. This may seem incredible, but it's just one reflection of how committed the French are to preserving the written word and their culture at large. And it must be working because from what I could see, it seemed like there were independent bookstores, large and small, around every street corner.

But much of what was discussed centered around the issue of eBooks and whether or not they would be welcomed or disdained by French readers. Everyone seemed to acknowledge the growth of eBooks as inevitable, but no-one felt confident one way or the other predicting at what pace they would be accepted or impact the sales of print books. To date, books published in France are not available from Amazon.fr, which means they are not available on Kindle. The few times I did see a [Kindle](#) being used on a bus or the metro, the person using it was reading in English. Were they French, British, American, or none of the above? There was no way of telling and confess I wish I'd taken the opportunity to ask.

There are a few e-Readers available online in France, most notably from [Sony](#), [iRiver](#), and [Bookeen](#). And while there I visited a [Virgin Megastore](#) at The Louvre to give them a try and must say each had their pros and cons. One other device released this past November is the [FnacBook](#), an e-Ink Reader launched by Fnac, the largest bookstore chain in France, the equivalent of our Barnes & Noble or Best Buy. This device is just OK and we were told that a new, improved model will be coming in the spring. Since eBooks currently represent a little less than 1% of the total market, it was no surprise that the only place I saw one of these eReaders was at the Fnac headquarters. One thing everyone seemed to agree on, is that when the Kindle becomes available with French titles for download, the eBook market will significantly increase.

The *other* major player that concerns the French is [Google France](#) and the eventual purchase of eBooks from their cloud-based store. Ads for [iPads](#) were everywhere in the streets of Paris and it won't be long before the other tablets begin to catch on as well, which means lots of access to both Google Editions and the iBookstore. The one portable device I did see in the hands of practically everyone, everywhere was the [iPhone](#)! But will the French want to read on such a small screen? Only time will tell.

Regardless of how consumers in France feel about reading digitally, one thing is pretty certain, eBooks are coming on strong later this year and many of the industry people I had the pleasure to meet, both young and old, are excited and anxious to be part of this French revolution.

More on that later...

Posted by Peter Costanzo at 11:15 PM

Labels: [Apps](#), [eBooks](#), [Evan Schnittman](#), [Flammarion](#), [FnacBook](#), [France](#), [French-American Federation of Publishers](#), [Gallimard](#), [Google Editions](#), [iBookstore](#), [iPad](#), [Ira Silverberg](#), [Kindle](#), [La Martiniere](#), [Sony Reader](#)

Subscribe to Bookcurrents

Posts

Comments

Search

Loading...

Blog Archive

- ▶ 2013 (2)
- ▶ 2012 (9)
- ▼ 2011 (10)
 - ▶ October (1)
 - ▶ September (1)
 - ▶ August (1)
 - ▶ July (1)
 - ▶ June (1)
 - ▶ May (1)
 - ▶ April (1)
 - ▶ March (1)
 - ▶ February (1)
 - ▼ January (1)
 - [The French \(Digital\) Revolution: My Week in Paris ...](#)
- ▶ 2010 (19)

About Peter Costanzo



[View my complete profile](#)