

The CARAVAN Project

A partnership of six non-profit publishers, the nation's largest book wholesaler, and a group of independent and chain bookstores is today announcing **The Caravan Project**. Just as consumers of music, film and television now can choose how to receive those media, the **Caravan Project** will offer buyers of serious non-fiction books a "menu" of formats, both print and digital, from which to choose how they read a book.

Caravan, funded by a grant from the MacArthur Foundation, will use all the emerging digital and time-tested technologies for the manufacture of books with a goal of making their distribution in the marketplace significantly more efficient by placing them when and where they are needed.

In a demonstration phase of the project, scheduled to launch in early 2007, books will be available in traditional hardcover or paperback editions along with e-books and audio books, both available for download, in their entirety or in chapters. A large-print POD (print-on-demand) version is also under consideration as an additional format.

The Caravan Project is based at the University of North Carolina Press. Other participating publishers include Beacon Press, the New Press, the University of California Press, Yale University Press, and the Council on Foreign Relations Press. The Ingram Book Group and Lightning Source Inc—all part of Nashville-based Ingram Industries Inc. will provide content management, fulfillment and other services on the project.

Caravan has the support of the American Booksellers Association and a number of its members including R.J. Julia of Madison, Ct., Politics and Prose of Washington, D.C., and Books & Books of Coral Gables, Florida, among others will participate in the demonstration.

A selection of Borders stores nationwide will also join the project in line with the company's long standing commitment to the support of university presses and other non-profit publishers. Finally, **Caravan** has the endorsement of the Board of Directors of the Association of American University Presses.

Caravan's executive director is Peter Osnos, founder and editor-at-large of PublicAffairs Books. The chair of the **Caravan** Board of Publishers is Kate Douglas Torrey, director of UNC Press. Della Mancuso, a former Random House production executive, and Carie Freimuth, a former marketing executive at both Random House and HarperCollins are consultants.

For the demonstration phase, **Caravan** funding has been provided by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation and, for Osnos, by the Century Foundation, where he is a senior fellow for media.

A prototype for each of the five formats will be completed by the summer. In the demonstration phase, about 24 books from the participating publishers will be ready for sale in these simultaneous formats in the spring of 2007. **The Caravan Project** is also in discussions with the New York Public Library to make the multiple formats available in test locations.

The Caravan Project's participating publishers intend to use existing and emerging technologies to increase the availability and variety of format of serious non-fiction books across all channels for sales and distribution, in stores and on-line. In particular, **Caravan** is working with bricks-and-mortar bookstores which usually stock only traditional hardcover and paperback editions. Similarly, offering books for sale by chapters (in "granular" form) will be of interest to students, travelers, and others who want only part of a book.

The multiple frustrations of readers, unable to find the books they want, and of publishers, with too few or too many books in stock, should be substantially reduced in the **Caravan Project**, even as a greater variety of formats are available. With use of print-on-demand manufacturing, publishers can more closely match supply-and-demand, reducing the likelihood of unsold inventory and returns.

As for downloadable audio books, few of the kind of serious non-fiction books that will comprise the **Caravan Project** are currently available in this format because of the high cost of studio recording and editing. Advances in audio technology, however, now make possible the conversion of digital text files, lowering the major expenses for audio publishing.

The Caravan Project is intended to serve the interests of all who have a stake in the reading experience—authors, publishers, wholesalers, retailers, and readers. Many of the ways in which books are now delivered leave out one or another part of this chain, which can mean that readers are denied the opportunity to purchase and read books when and how they want. With its multiple alliances, the **Caravan Project** represents a significant step towards finding solutions to the technical, marketing, and distribution challenges of the digital age.

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