

BOOKGLUTTON HISTORY

Taking its place in the pantheon of improbable brainstorm, BookGlutton.com got its start on a napkin in a bar in Champaign, IL. Founders Travis Alber and Aaron Miller struck up a conversation about books they'd read, and, not having read the same ones, wished they knew more locals. Since both Alber and Miller come from technical backgrounds, the conversation turned to reading and book discussions on-line – how it's a natural extension of the rise of social networking, but hadn't really been tried. Everyone in the coffee shop across the street had a laptop (some bar patrons did too). If anyone was reading, it was most likely limited to an unwieldy 300 page PDF. And if they were chatting on-line, it was probably divorced from the content. A cocktail napkin and ten-minutes later the initial sketches for BookGlutton's Unbound Reader were on the table.

The Unbound Reader is built for a laptop (although phones and PDAs are in the works). It uses web standards and browser technology so it can build on technology people already have. But the most intriguing part of BookGlutton's Reader is the interface, and what Travis Alber calls "social reading." Obviously the Unbound Reader has a book at its center, with pages and a table of contents. But the social aspect comes from two panels that straddle the text. If the user wants to share her thoughts, she can slide open a panel to talk about the book with others. The "Talk Panel" lets users type comments back and forth - discuss the book in real time – right next to the text. Discussions can be limited to other people in the same chapter, or open to the whole book. For other kinds of conversations - like margin notes (that people can read and respond to later), there's a "Mark Panel." "Since you can create groups and invite people to come read with you, it's like having a book group right inside your computer," says Aaron Miller, the man responsible for engineering the new kind of reading. "We see a lot of groups that could benefit from the Unbound Reader." he continues "Schools studying literature on-line, writing students who want feedback on their work, libraries looking for additional digital texts, and people who just want to read with friends scattered all over the world have all expressed interest in BookGlutton."

It took about a year from concept to completion, and BookGlutton plans to open to the general public Jan 18th, 2008. Although they have yet to sign a deal with a publisher, Travis Alber isn't worried. "We can import 20,000 texts from the public domain, and BookGlutton has an upload tool, so people can upload their own work. Ultimately we'd like to offer paid content through the site, so that people can purchase access to a book, perhaps in combination with the paper version they have, but that's version 2.0." BookGlutton doesn't charge for the public domain works it offers, relying on advertising to support the company's overhead for now. "We like to read, and we're always on our computers, so it just seemed like a good thing to build." says Miller.

Travis Alber Biography

Travis Alber has eleven years of on-line experience and a penchant for big ideas. She's worked in web design, advertising, online training and education and has a Masters Degree in Interactive Multimedia. Her project roles run the gamut, from interactive designer and information architect to project manager and creative director. Her client history includes: Cisco, Sprint, Playstation, Wells Fargo, Macys, Midway Games and

Dodge. In addition, Travis had won a number of awards for her interactive art, and has been recognized by Drunken Boat, The Flash Forward Film Festival, and the Electronic Literature Organization. Her work as a digital artist focuses on experimental narrative forms, photography, time, and the search for a sense of place. Travis is a Book Glutton co-founder; her most important role has been as Chief Creative Officer, creating the look and feel for the web site and the Reader, and managing marketing and communications.

Aaron Miller Biography

Aaron Miller is a writer and web developer with more than eleven years experience online, and that's not even counting his 1986 BBS endeavors. His first love has always been writing, but the designer and typographer in him have always led him toward the more technical aspects of screen presentation. Professionally he's worked on both the creative and technical sides of projects—working at times as a writer and designer and at others a developer in San Francisco and LA. His clients include Wells Fargo, Organic, and Driving Media. In addition, Aaron has a Master's Degree in Interactive Multimedia and an MFA in Creative Writing from UC Irvine. Aaron's a Book Glutton co-founder; his most important role has been as CTO, managing the architecture and development of the entire project.