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Writing Today 2000

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Electronic Publishing Today

By **Glynn Wilson and Robert Hess**
Of [The Southerner](#) magazine online.

Electronic publishing is taking off. The most dramatic proof that people will buy good writing in an electronic format was demonstrated on the Ides of March this year. That's the day Simon & Schuster released Steven King's latest novella, *Riding the Bullet*. The traditional media covered the event like every other story in the Internet frenzy of the past couple of years. A good place to turn for news anytime, especially about books, is the [The New York Times](#).

An amazing **400,000** people logged on and ordered the *e-equivalent* of a 66 page book. That's one every 1.5 seconds. Some publishers offered the book free for the first day or more, but many were asking and getting \$2.50 a copy. A print version would have cost about \$25. This *Times* story focuses on whether or not the event signaled a *revolution*. I hate to point it out to a newspaper with the prestige of the *New York Times*, but the revolution had already begun long before this media event. Simon & Schuster's president, Jack Romanos, recognizes this. He said the new, evolving electronic market calls for a redefinition of what constitutes a book.

Steven King himself said:

"While I think that the Internet and various computer applications for stories have great promise . . . I don't think anything will replace the printed word and the bound book. Not in my lifetime, at least."

That may be true, or it may be wishful thinking. It's probably a safe statement, considering Steven King is 53 years old. (How did I find this out? No, I didn't drive over to the library and look it up. I searched the Web and the first link was a [Lycos celebrity page](#) with his birthdate at the top. Took me a few seconds, and I didn't have to leave home. It's now a link here for your convenience). Anyway, if King lives to the average life expectancy of an average American male, that would mean traditional publishing has at least 20 more years of life. I hope that's true, especially for books. I like the feel of a good book too.

But I'm not so sure about other areas of publishing, and that's what I want to focus this talk on, the areas of publishing I'm most interested in, magazines and newspapers. Although I will return to e-books in the end.

Philosophies of Web Design

