

eCatalogs to Launch via Edelweiss for Fall Season

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eCatalogs will soon be a reality that booksellers can't ignore.

This week, HarperCollins announced that it would be dropping its paper catalogs for the fall 2009 season in favor of digital catalogs, available at www.harpercollinscatalogs.com. HarperCollins is also one of 13 publishers working with John Rubin, the founder and CEO of [Above the Treeline](#), on Edelweiss, an online, interactive catalog system that will work across participating publishers so that booksellers need learn only one system. Edelweiss, too, is being rolled out to interested booksellers for the fall season; reps at participating publishing houses can add their accounts in the system.

Edelweiss is available at no charge to book buyers, regardless of their current Above the Treeline affiliation, as well as to other industry catalog users such as publicists, bloggers, and agents.

Publishers currently participating in Edelweiss beta tests are Chronicle Books, Hachette Book Group, HarperCollins, Ingram Publisher Services, John Wiley & Sons, Penguin Group (USA), Random House, Simon & Schuster, Thomas Nelson, and Tyndale House Publishers. Publishers set to join Edelweiss for the fall season include Cambridge University Press, Columbia University Press, and Workman.

For this first in a series of *BTW* articles on eCatalogs, Rubin spoke, via e-mail, with Mark Nichols, ABA's senior director of publisher initiatives, about where the development of Edelweiss currently stands, how changes and updates have been implemented, and when booksellers can expect to begin using the product.

Mark Nichols: How did the idea for Edelweiss come about?

John Rubin: The initial concern from the bookselling community was that eCatalogs were going to be developed more with an eye towards cost cutting than providing a good experience for buyers. HarperCollins was not taking this approach, but it was feared that others would. We looked at the eCatalog trend as a great opportunity to build an industry-wide new title buying module that provided booksellers, librarians, publicists, and other users of the catalogs a whole host of new capabilities, from dynamically combining, sorting, and filtering catalogs to the ability to edit bibliographic information and order quantities and load them right into point-of-sale systems.

The catch is that the more viable eCatalogs become as replacements for hard-copy catalogs the more sophisticated they need to be. And, once they become more sophisticated, the more the issue of "100 different eCatalogs for 100 different publishers" comes into play. Many booksellers stated their concerns about the prospect of having to learn many different online systems. So, in our position as a provider of 'eServices' to both booksellers and publishers, it made a lot of sense

for us to develop an interactive catalog where a buyer only needs to learn one system to do all the cool things you can do with an interactive catalog.

MN: How has the program grown and developed from your initial vision? Were there any surprises?

JR: The product's growth has been remarkably in line with the initial vision, although the practical user interface and points of emphasis within the site have evolved greatly from the beginning. The basic concept of reps being able to mark-up catalogs for accounts, and accounts being able to slice and dice the catalogs and order through the system have been the constants.

Some of the evolution has been in the exploration of the optimal ways to replicate the 'quick browse' capability of a hardcopy catalog online, to create and manage orders, and to give users a flexible workbench to manage the library of catalogs a buyer is looking at. I think we've done a good job of listening to our users, have attended a good number of buying sessions, and have tried to implement changes on the fly as they made sense -- but we're always making improvements with an eye towards making the experience faster and more efficient for users.

MN: How is the Edelweiss program tied to Above the Treeline?

JR: The system is not tied to Above the Treeline -- and any retailer or librarian will be able to both receive mailings from publishers and view the catalogs on the site. Retailers using Above the Treeline have the ability to view their own sales and inventory history on comparable titles when using Edelweiss, which will help inform their buying decisions. All users will be able to add or remove publisher-generated 'comp' titles -- and can also see what other retailers have picked as good comp titles for individual NYP titles.

MN: Is Edelweiss hard to use?

JR: Our goal is to make it as simple as possible! If you've ever used an Internet commerce site to look at a product, then you should be able to navigate around Edelweiss pretty easily to review the information for each title. Filtering and sorting titles is a little more complicated, but the user's experience should be very similar to standard web conventions for this kind of thing. The most complex part of the system is in the ordering, where you can create P.O.s, input your category codes, edit the bibliographic information, and import the titles into your point-of-sale system. Some training is required for this, but we also have good documentation available. The good thing is that since this is a system that works across publishers, you only need to learn it once!

Our new system for managing the 'library' of catalogs uses a folder system very common today in e-mail programs such as Microsoft Outlook and in the basic file management functions in Windows and Mac environments -- so if you've used a system where you store files or emails in folders and sub-folders, you'll feel very at home managing your catalogs in this way.

MN: How will Edelweiss be rolled out to interested booksellers?

JR: Edelweiss is being rolled out right now to interested booksellers for the upcoming fall selling season. Reps at participating publishing houses can add their accounts in the system and send mailings, and stores can go in and look at the catalogs and mailings. If a bookseller is an Above the Treeline store, a click of a button will provide access to the system. If not, there is a brief form they will need to fill out to start seeing the catalogs... and it's all free!

MN: What training will be available?

JR: We will be at [BookExpo America](#) this May and at all of the fall regional shows to give demonstrations and answer questions. In addition, we are offering twice a week WebEx demonstrations of the product for any interested retailers. To find out the times and sign up, booksellers should contact us at edelweiss@abovethetreeline.com.