

The bookshop and the tweet

A local bookshop, which failed to sell a single book in a day for the first time in its 100-year history, has been 'completely overwhelmed' with orders after its Twitter post went viral. Robert Sansom, who has worked at the Petersfield Bookshop in Hampshire for 13 years, posted a tweet about their slow day, saying: 'Not a single book sold today. £0.00.' The shop assistant shared a link to the store's website and begged its customers to take advantage of the bookshop's 25 per cent discounts.

The message was retweeted by thousands of book lovers, including science-fiction author Neil Gaiman, who shared the post with his 2.8 million followers. Following Neil's tweet, messages came in from around the world accompanied, in many cases, by an order request. The bookshop's social media account gained 1,100 new followers in just 15 hours, and attracted over £1,000 worth of online orders. Robert, who runs the shop's social media account, said: 'Somebody we have a connection with at the bookshop has a vague connection with Neil Gaiman, and sent it to him, and then everything started'.

'I couldn't believe it,' said Robert. 'It's been a real 'kindness of strangers' story. The number of likes and retweets started going up right before my eyes; it was as if it was animated. I had messages and one order request after another coming in from all over the world, and eventually I had to stop replying to messages at two o'clock this morning.' In a further tweet the next day, he described how a man who'd spent his whole life in Petersfield came into the shop for the first time ever after a friend in California, USA suggested he do so right away.

None of the staff could remember a single day when they hadn't sold a book before. Robert said: 'We're used to having slow days, especially in January and February, which are always notoriously bad. But yesterday was very strange. It was very stormy, so most people were staying in.' He went on: 'We had a few come in and browse, but nobody was really in the buying mood. It got to about an hour before closing time and we realised we hadn't taken a single penny all day.' Even so, they weren't too concerned. Naturally, they would have preferred to make a sale, but essentially their attitude was 'these things happen'.

Figures released recently by the Booksellers Association indicate that the number of independent bookshops in the UK and Ireland has grown steadily over the last three years, from 868 to 890. At a time when so many famous names are disappearing from the high street, it would seem that bookshops are bucking the trend.

Petersfield Managing Director John Westwood said: 'I believe in this industry, but online ordering has hit us hard. I've had to sell my flat to keep the store in business, and most evenings sleep on a camp bed in the shop. We have lots of big plans for the future, on how to expand and grow, we just need to get there first.' Westwood added that the response has been 'overwhelming, astonishing; a very emotional experience'. '... everyone has been so supportive,' he said. 'Books are special things and nothing beats going into a bookstore. Seeing them, touching them, smelling them – it is a special place.'

- Why did Sansom send the tweet about the bookshop?
 - to tell customers how long ago the shop was founded
 - to let customers know that they are unable to take any more orders
 - to encourage people to purchase books at reduced prices
 - to show that nowadays most people buy books online
- What does 'it' in line 16 refer to?
 - an order for a book
 - the bookshop's social media account
 - a message from an author
 - a tweet from Sansom
- What does Sansom say about Gaiman retweeting his message?
 - He had difficulty coping with the massive international response to it.
 - He was amazed that a customer came all the way from the US after reading it.
 - He was surprised to see an online animation of what had happened on social media.
 - He noticed that it only created interest in the bookshop abroad.
- What was the staff's reaction to the day without any sales?
 - They were angry with people who treated the shop like a library.
 - They were disappointed but they accepted the situation.
 - They weren't bothered because they had expected it.
 - They were surprised because sales generally had improved.
- What does 'bucking' mean in line 38?
 - working out
 - going against
 - keeping up with
 - turning down
- How does Westwood describe his feelings in the final paragraph?
 - amazed to realise he's just a small part of a huge community
 - confident the bookshop's new owners will make it successful again
 - worried that the number of book readers is declining so quickly
 - sad that the bookshop may soon have to close down