

## From The Editor

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### ***Amazon needs a Sampson***

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**A**s the leading dot.com e-tailer both financial analysts and consumers look to Amazon to obtain an appreciation for the next innovation in electronic commerce and its effect upon our global community. While Amazon certainly deserves credit for making the Web into a serious shopping experience, not everything they do is positive, at least in this author's opinion. One of the more recent Amazon pronouncements that deserves both attention and criticism is their plan to charge publishers for reviewing books. Let me explain.

Until recently, most e-tailers involved in selling books reviewed hot off the press products on their merits. This meant that regardless of the amount of money a publisher spent to advertise a product viewers were, at least in theory and in most cases, in fact, independent of financial arrangements between publisher and e-tailer. Unfortunately, this so-called 'Chinese Wall' was breached in February 2001 when Amazon announced they would begin to enable publishers to pay for book reviews that would be distributed via email to their millions of current and previous customers.

This new Amazon policy is both highly questionable and provides the potential to be highly unethical. For example, while not forcing publishers to pay for a book review, Amazon will allow a publisher to suggest a title for review and pay \$10,000 to have the review distributed. If you were the publisher, do you think you would dig into your pocket and pull out \$10,000 to pay for a bad review? If you are the Amazon reviewer and realize your unprofitable company needs every dime it can get, would you discourage further paid-for reviews by having a publisher pay for the distribution of emails that tell customers to pass this one up?

To be quite blunt, the new Amazon policy has an odor about it that results in a stench that crosses the line between a believable review and paid advertising. As an author I would like to think my books are reviewed on their merits. As a book purchaser I would like to think that the reviews I see are kosher and not tainted by a business policy that is very close to a bribe. While we may not necessarily agree with many reviews, at least in the past they were hopefully unbiased and the reviewer was not forced to consider a hidden agenda. Under the new Amazon policy it is going to become difficult to separate fact from fiction. What Amazon needs is a Sampson to straighten up the potential mess they are creating through a flawed review policy. As my Macon TV announcer would say, 'That's my opinion —what's yours?'

—Gilbert Held