

Byliner, a new website for readers and writers

June 22 2011, by Chris Lefkow



File photo of a statue of US writer Ernest Hemingway in Pamplona, northern Spain. Byliner.com features long-form work by current scribes such as Christopher Hitchens, Jon Krakauer and Michael Lewis but also articles by literary legends such as Ernest Hemingway, Norman Mailer and F. Scott Fitzgerald.

Print magazines may be struggling but the founders of Byliner, a new website, believe there is an audience and a business opportunity online for long-form journalism.

Byliner.com, which launched in beta, or test, mode on Tuesday, is building a social network for readers and [writers](#) -- and a publishing business -- around magazine articles.

The website offers links to more than 32,000 magazine stories from around 750 publications and nearly 3,000 writers, including some of the best known names of the past 100 years.

It features long-form work by current scribes such as Christopher Hitchens, Jon Krakauer and Michael Lewis but also articles by literary legends such as Ernest Hemingway, Norman Mailer and F. Scott Fitzgerald.

Browsing the site by writer's name, topic or publication, a Byliner user can find stories penned by Ernest Hemingway for The Toronto Star in 1918 or an article written by Norman Mailer for Life magazine in 1971 on the Muhammad Ali-Joe Frazier bout.

Byliner, however, is aspiring to be much more than just an index for [digital copies](#) of old magazine articles.

The site is also publishing original works from current writers, offering curated reading lists and tools that allow users to submit and share stories.

"What we want to do is to give readers the opportunity to discover and read stories that they wouldn't necessarily have found," Byliner founder and chief executive John Tayman told AFP.

Byliner focuses on what Tayman calls narrative feature nonfiction, stories of between 10,000 and 35,000 words that "fall between what a conventional magazine piece is and what a conventional book is."

"That's really the genesis of the company," said Tayman, a former editor and writer at Outside and Life who also authored "The Colony."

"I began thinking about the hole in the market between magazines and

books."

The vast majority of Byliner's articles are free but the San Francisco-based startup is also commissioning stories and publishing them as "Byliner Originals."

The site created a buzz earlier this year with a piece written by Krakauer, the author of "Into Thin Air" and "Into the Wild," about Greg Mortenson, the author of the best-selling "Three Cups of Tea."

Krakauer's expose, which was offered for free for 72 hours ahead of Byliner's official launch, revealed mismanagement at Mortenson's nonprofit charity, the Central Asia Institute, and that a number of the incidents depicted in his book never happened.



File photo of author Jon Krakauer who writes for Byliner.com, a website that offers links to more than 32,000 magazine stories from around 750 publications and nearly 3,000 writers, including some of the best known names of the past 100 years.

Krakauer's story, "Three Cups of Deceit," is available on the Byliner

website for \$2.99, along with other "Byliner Originals" such as a story by William Vollmann about visiting Japan's nuclear evacuation zone, also for \$2.99.

"We develop ideas and then put these great stories in the hands of great writers," Tayman said. "We pay an assignment fee to the writer and then we do a simple, very transparent 50-50 revenue share."

Visitors to Byliner can click on links at the bottom of a writer's page to buy their books directly from Amazon and the Byliner CEO said he will eventually be adding magazine subscriptions.

"There'll be one-click easy access to subscribe to a publication if it has an iPad app," Tayman said.

He said he expects the majority of Byliner's revenue to come from sales of "Byliner Originals" but the site is also counting on affiliate revenue and "some very careful sponsored advertising."

Byliner is also taking a page from Pandora, the Internet radio that creates personalized radio stations for users based upon their favorite artists or songs.

"They do a very good job of helping listeners discover new songs and new artists," Tayman said of Pandora. "We want to do something very similar. We want to help readers discover new writers and new great writing.

"We're building a recommendation system so that you can use your affinity, your like of a particular writer or a particular article, to have new writers and new articles discovered for you and placed in front of you," he said.

Writers themselves will contribute to the recommendation engine.

If a [reader](#) has indicated, for example, that they like the work of Mark Bowden, author of "Blackhawk Down," new articles by Bowden will appear in a user's "activity stream," Tayman said.

"And if Mark Bowden shares or submits an article he's discovered his discovery will appear in your stream," he said.

"You can use your favorite authors, their tastes and their reading habits to discover new writing... And you can do a similar thing with your fellow readers."

So as not to fall afoul of publishers and copyright law, Byliner does not publish the full text of an article on its own site but only a small taste, "enough for people to see that this is a great article," Tayman said.

"We point readers to the magazine website itself," he continued. "As our traffic grows, Byliner's going to be driving a lot of traffic to the source publications."

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Citation: Byliner, a new website for readers and writers (2011, June 22) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2011-06-byliner-website-readers-writers.html>

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