

Sundance film reads 'false God' lesson in Google Books

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"Google and the World Brain" director Ben Lewis poses for a portrait on January 22, 2013 in Park City, Utah. Google Books, the doomed project to build the world's biggest library online, provides a powerful lesson in the danger of "blind faith" in technology, according to Lewis.

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Presenting his new film "[Google](#) and the World Brain" in competition at the Sundance Film Festival, Lewis said the failure of the online giant's plan marks a victory over those who believe the Internet can encompass everything.

"Around four years ago, I began to think that there was a kind of blind faith in the Internet and the technology," he told AFP at America's biggest independent film festival, held in the snowy mountains of Utah.

"There was a kind of naive belief that technology would cure the world of many serious problems, and that it would make us more intelligent. And I just thought that was a kind of false God."

"And I decided that I wanted to make a film that stimulated or began to develop a sort of critical way of thinking the Internet, but still balanced. I wanted to present the dilemmas, the dreams and dangers."

He decided to base his film on Google Books, a project which was already well underway at the time to digitize every book in the world's top university and public libraries, to create a universal and free global library.



A picture taken on September 24, 2009 in Paris shows the screen of a computer featuring a Google Book search. One of the biggest question marks hanging over Google Books, fueling mistrust in the project, is the commercialization of digitized books, as opposed to the original free-for-all library model.

The film shows the enthusiasm generated by the project in its early stages, when prestigious institutions including Harvard University welcomed Google and its money-saving digital offer with open arms.

But fairly quickly it ran into problems, notably in Europe where the head of the French Bibliotheque Nationale, Jean-Noel Jeannenay, rebuffed the Californian upstarts, and backed a rival online cultural library, Europeana.

Google also rapidly ran into opposition when it began digitizing works not in the public domaine, as copyright holders cried foul. The film presents the crusade by a Chinese author, Mian Mian, against the search

giant.

Threatened with legal action, Google agreed negotiate a deal with American publishers and authors, but that was ruled unlawful and litigation is continuing.

Lewis said the setbacks for Google—which has nevertheless used the books it has already digitized to improve its search engine, according to experts—have reshaped the future of the Internet.

"Google Books in its old form is dead. They actually got stopped by quite a conventional international alliance of institutions, individuals and governments," he said.

"That shows that it's not inevitable that the net goes in a certain way. It's not like we don't have any control over these giant Internet corporations and we just have to sort of go along with it. We can change it, if we want to."

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"We all associate libraries with the community, with sharing things, something that shouldn't cost money, that everyone should have access to," said Lewis. "And in our hyper-capitalist globalized world, it's a big issue.

"How much of our public space has been taken over by private corporations? A library constantly reminds you that there are these sort of secret spaces that we don't think should be privatized."

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