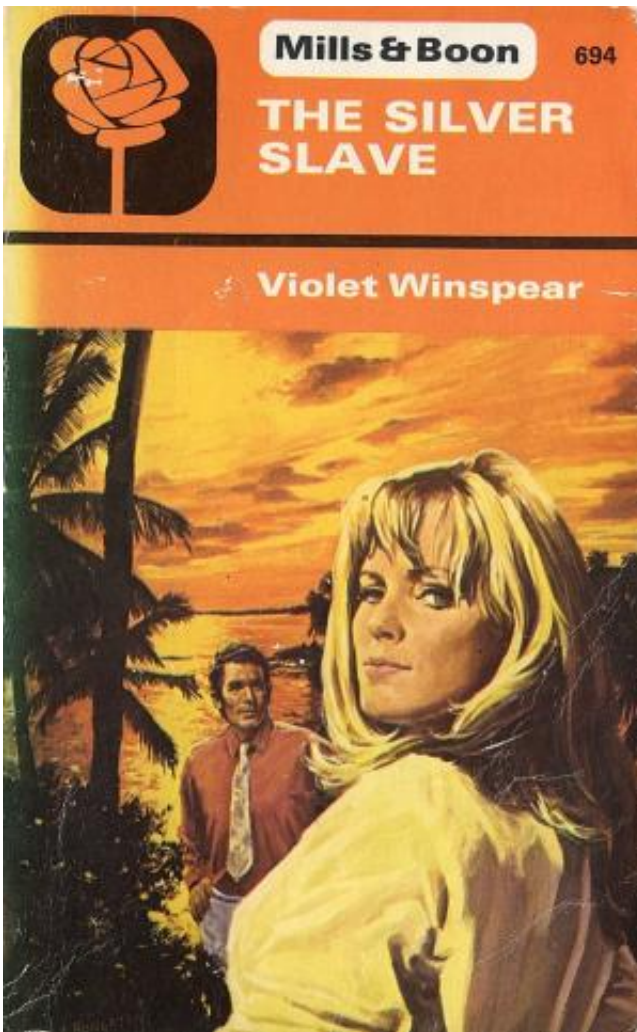


With just a smartphone up your petticoat, you can now read Mills & Boon anywhere

May 1 2014, by Ana Isabel Domingos Canhoto



A classic M&B title. Credit: Jim Barker, CC BY-NC-SA

Mills & Boon, the guilty pleasure of many a reader over the decades, is shunning the Kindle in favour of launching its [own app](#).

You can now download your favourite bodice ripper and read it discreetly on your phone. Mills & Boon is certainly taking a gamble here but the payoff could be much bigger than just selling a few novels.

Digital publishing has revolutionised books and reading in a number of ways over the past few years. First technology changed the way we bought books, as Amazon and other online stores emerged, taking custom from traditional high-street bookstores. Then technology changed how we read books as we switched from paper format to ebooks, e-readers and applications for tablets and mobile devices.

And then technology even changed the way we published books. The digital format means that it is cheaper, faster and easier to produce a book and the associated ecosystem of online distributors like Amazon, e-readers and other mobile devices and, later, social media, make it easier to make it a success.

In the meantime, new market leaders emerged, while old ones faded away or disappeared all together. Most have tried to adapt to the changing consumer behaviour and expectations. That's exactly what Mills & Boon is doing now.

Mills & Boon is a publisher specialising in romance and known for its escapist novels. Titles such as *The Billionaire's Pregnant Mistress*, *The Spanish Groom* and *Count Giovanni's Virgin*, come with varying levels of explicitness but the happy ending is an omni-present theme.



Weighing up the move to an app.

The company says it is simply responding to customer behaviour and demand in launching the app. "We just want our readers to find the books in the places that they want to buy them," [said](#) Joanna Kite, Mills & Boon's marketing manager, in a recent interview with the BBC, adding that the app allows readers to "discover, shop, share and read".

The app is also a logical progression for the company's digital strategy. The company has already embraced digital technology, not only selling books online but also publishing its titles in electronic format. Indeed, e-book purchases quickly [surpassed](#) physical sales once the service was offered. This is in part because e-readers allow for discretion. Mills and Boon fans can read the books anywhere, no matter how explicit, using an e-reader without anyone knowing what they were up to. But it is also

because the format allows for quick access to a new title as soon as the last is finished. Mills and Boon has long been known for quickly producing new titles and for providing books that can be read speedily.

Still, as Michael Tamblyn, president of e-reader company Kobo, has [noted](#), it is very difficult to keep up with the rate of change of technology in this field. That's why he recommends sticking to what you know.

Mills & Boon certainly faces technical challenges, as noted by Tamblyn. It costs money to maintain and update an app, for example. But most importantly, we have to wonder if having your own app, as opposed to using Amazon's kindle app, is the best way to reach customers.

While the internet helps companies reach customers all over the world, this potential only materialises if customers find the website. Amazon is a widely known online retailer, and Kindle is practically synonymous with e-reader.

Then, there is Amazon's famous algorithm, which is used to present product recommendations to users based on their previous purchase and browsing history. That makes the Kindle app the perfect environment for new authors and works to be discovered.

Of course Mills & Boon doesn't need that. It is one of the most established names in publishing, has a powerful resonance with readers of the romance genre in particular and its customers are loyal. It might be difficult for other publishers to survive in a market too heavily dominated by Amazon, but Mills and Boon is well placed to strike out.

And an app is not just a way to sell books. It is a way to strengthen ties with customers. A distribution channel is an information channel between the firm and the customer. The app can be used to push

information to customers about products, customers reviews or upcoming launches and even for broadcasting interviews with authors. And they can collect information from customers, such as download patterns or reading behaviours, which they can use to inform new product development.

So while an app is a bold move and a potential burden, an [app](#) is an enticing option for a big company like Mills & Boon, even if it isn't an option for smaller names. Innovating in this way should help ensure we continue to delve into romance novels for many years to come, even when we've long forgotten what a love letter written on paper looks like.

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