

Amazon executive hopes for era of peace with publishers (Update)

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The overseer of Amazon.com's Kindle e-book and publishing divisions is preaching peace.

With a monthslong standoff between Amazon and Hachette Book Group over e-book revenues settled and a multiyear agreement in place, Amazon senior vice president Russ Grandinetti said Wednesday that he looks forward to an era of "focusing on growing the business."

He said such disputes, which led to Amazon removing "Pre-order" buttons from some Hachette books and reducing discounts, rarely become so public and the company's goal is to "keep it rare."

Grandinetti was interviewed on stage during Digital Book World, a three-day gathering in midtown Manhattan. Harsh words were exchanged last year between Amazon and Hachette officials, but Grandinetti said Wednesday that the interests of Amazon and publishers were "highly aligned."

Publishers, writers and editors have criticized Amazon, by far the country's biggest bookseller, for everything from setting e-book prices too low to publishing their own books and competing with its suppliers. Writers published by Amazon have complained that the Kindle Unlimited subscription program was costing them royalties.

During a roughly 30-minute conversation with two of Digital Book World's organizers—industry consultant Mike Shatzkin and Michael

Cader, founder of the industry newsletter Publishers Lunch—Grandinetti said Amazon was "super focused on happy authors" and treated them with the same dedication it treats customers, constantly seeking feedback.

He also emphasized that Amazon was both changing the industry and continuing long-term practices.

"More approaches to publishing I think is pretty healthy: The more competition there is, the more choices there are for authors, the more we figure out what succeeds," he said.

He added that Scribner and Doubleday were among the publishers who ran bookstores and that Barnes & Noble also published books. "This idea is not terribly unusual."

Shatzkin noted that with e-books sales and online purchases leveling off, the book industry might be in for a relatively stable period. Grandinetti was skeptical. He said observations like that made him nervous, and wondered whether similar comments were offered in the months before Amazon launched the Kindle e-reader in 2007 and effectively launched the e-book revolution.

"It's hard to predict when things emerge that cause you to have to change the business," he said.

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