

While Barnes & Nobles close, Amazon is opening real live bookstores

May 25 2017, by Eli Blumenthal, Usa Today

A luxury shopping complex on New York's Columbus Circle opens to a new tenant Thursday: Amazon.

While some may be excited that this is an "Amazon Store," similar to Apple and Microsoft's respective flagship stores located just blocks away, Amazon says its goal for the new store is the same as it was when the online retail giant first started two decades ago: To sell [books](#).

"We have this 20 years of information about books and ratings, and we have millions and millions of customers who are passionate," said Jennifer Cast, vice president of Amazon Books. "It really is a different way to surface great books."

The Columbus Circle store is Amazon's seventh physical retail store and the first of three planned for the New York area before the end of the summer. A second shop is planned for 34th street in midtown Manhattan with a third set to open in the nearby Westfield Garden State Plaza mall in Paramus, NJ.

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The 4,000 square-foot-store features roughly 3,000 books, all with their covers facing out in order to better to "communicate their own essence," Cast says. The company's recommendation system makes a physical appearance in the bookstore through an "if you like this" section, which combines the data Amazon gathers on the books listed with human

curators to recommend new books. To someone who walks in to browse, it feels like a high-tech Barnes and Noble.

Physical bookstores, including the large Borders chain, have reeled with the rise Amazon's online sales engine and e-books. So the decision to open bookstores may seem perplexing. In fact, the new store occupies a space not far from where a since-bankrupt Borders bookstore once stood when it was in Columbus Circle.

Unlike other bookstores, Amazon isn't necessarily relying on the books themselves to keep the business afloat. Instead, it is using the space as an extension of its brand. Many of the company's popular gadgets, including Kindle eReaders, Fire TV devices, Fire tablets and, of course, the Echo and its smart assistant Alexa, dominate a space towards the front of the store to highlight Amazon's growing devices group.

Kindles are even placed on the shelves alongside the traditional paperbacks and hardcovers as a way to showcase the digital alternative. Kid-friendly Fire tablets are spaced in the children's section to appeal to the younger generation's digital appetite.

The data about customer preference that has played such a large role in Amazon's success is also a big part of the bookstore's operation.

"It reflects how people are reading, what they're reading, why they're reading," says Cast. Many of the books on Amazon's shelves feature the ratings they have on the company's website as well as a spotlighted customer review. Aisles are categorized by the usual sections you'd expect in a bookstore— fiction, children's, young adults, cooking, biography— but there are also Amazon-specific sections, with titles curated by the data Amazon has gathered, such as a "Page Turners" section that comprises books that Kindle readers read in three days or less.

Amazon already has stores San Diego, Portland, Or., Chicago and its hometown of Seattle as well as two in Massachusetts. Additional bookstores are slated to open in California and Washington this year, raising the company's total number of stores to thirteen.

Unlike traditional bookstores, cash is not welcome at Amazon's stores. All purchases are made via a credit card or through the Amazon app that links up with your Amazon account. Subscribers to Amazon's \$99 per-year Prime service will receive the same, discounted Prime pricing they would see if they were shopping online (if you are not a Prime member you will have to pay the regular retail price listed on the book).

As for the future of Amazon's [bookstore](#) plans, Cast says: "With every [store](#) we're learning more about how to make a better discovery experience for customers and we're looking forward to learning in this one."

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