

Oyster launches Netflix for books

Steven Bertoni

More and more we are transforming into society of subscribers. Netflix gives us endless, on demand movies and TV. Spotify does the same trick for music. And even though libraries have done this for books, for free, for more than a century, so far there's hasn't been a digital, all you can eat subscription platform for books. Start-up Oyster is changing that.



Oyster on an iPhone

Today Oyster launches its iPhone platform giving users 100,000 titles, from publishers like HarperCollins, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, Workman and self-publishing giant Smashwords, for \$9.95 a month. An iPad version will be released later this fall.

The simple, made-for-mobile app was created by tech veterans Eric Stromberg, Andrew Brown and Willem Van Lancker just last summer. In a year the team not only built the product but, more impressively, was able to seal deals with some publishing heavyweights. Stromberg, who cut his start-up teeth at eCommerce company Hunch, spent three months working with lawyers, authors and publishers to craft workable contract. Meantime Brown, who was a product manager at Google's DoubleClick division, built the tech platform. Van Lancker, the former lead designer for Google Maps, crafted the user interface. The three founders used their tech connections to raise \$3 million from Peter Thiel's Founders Fund, Chris Dixon, SV Angel and Shari Redstone.

Like Netflix, Oyster lets users search by title, genre and also offers recommendations for topics in the news, or in theaters. Since it's on the iPhone, Oyster has social features that let you follow friends to see what they're reading and vice versa. There's also a privacy mode, in case you don't want to advertise that self-help book or Vampire novel (or any other in the "paranormal lust" category) to your network. Stromberg and Van Lancker are tight lipped about how publishers or author get paid through the platform—Netflix licenses content out-front, while Spotify pays publisher each time a song is played.

Oyster's an obvious option for voracious readers, or those of us living in 300 sq ft studios. It's also perfect for skimming select chapters of business books or health books that you're curious about but not willing to pay full price for. Ditto for junk books. Another plus, Oyster brings with it the anonymity of the Amazon Kindle that has made the likes of *Fifty Shades of Grey* blockbuster hits .

If Oyster itself is a hit, it seems inevitable that Amazon, Apple and Google will jump in with their own subscription business, if they aren't already working on them. The founders don't seem too concerned. "It's out of our hands," says Stromberg as we sit in Oyster's minimalist loft space off Broadway in New York. "So doesn't make too much sense to worry about it." Van Lancker adds that unlike giants like Apple and Amazon Oyster has one clear mission: "Our focus is books, that's all we think about."

Fonte: Forbes [Portal]. Disponível em:

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