

Why Book Dash produces beautiful, proudly African storybooks

By  Eugene Yiga

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[Book Dash](#) is a non-profit organisation on a mission to make sure every child in South Africa owns 100 books by the age of five. All content is created by once-off volunteers, though some creatives have participated at more than one of the 12-hour events that craft a book from start to end. I spoke to programme director Julia Norrish to get the inside story.



How have your books been received?

Julia Norrish: We aim to provide a world-class product for free (digital) or for an affordable price (in print) so it's a great vote of confidence when we find people who have enough money to buy more expensive books still purchasing or reading Book Dash books because they're of equal or higher quality and far more relevant to their kids. We're also thrilled to see the amount of young children and babies reading our books. It shows that you're never too young to love stories.

What progress have you made so far?

We're nearing in on having a hundred original titles and that makes our vision of every child owning a hundred books by the age of five much more real. It's astonishing that we've achieved that in four years. The pooling of funding to do print runs together is our major potential growth avenue: it can mean the difference between ten funders each separately spending R10,000 to print 300 books at about R30 per copy or those funders putting R100,000 together and printing 10,000 books at R10 per copy. Economies of scale are everything in printing.



How it is going now?

We're hitting our targets, but we'd obviously always like to do more. Just as important as cash, though, is impact. We're in the process of laying out a hundred more translations of our books. We'd also be keen to talk to sponsors interested in funding the creation of new African storybooks.

What do you think appeals to your supporters?

We produce beautiful, proudly African storybooks for African children; that's something that few publishers are doing at the moment. We can afford to do this because we are driven by what South Africa's people need and not what they can afford to buy. Other publishers are dictated to by what the current South African book-buying market likes. That means innovation is limited to what will sell well. As a non-profit organisation that gets funding from other sources, we don't have that issue. We do retail our books, but it's one of a few different revenue streams.

What trends is the publishing industry going through right now?

I love the general positivity that local writing is receiving at the moment, especially young writers. It's awesome to see

Africans valuing African content. That's a big for Book Dash as well. It means we're on the right track and that others are on board.

Where are your books available?

The easiest places to get the free digital versions are on our website or download the Android app. Physical books can be purchased through our stockists listed on our website for smaller quantities. Non-profit organisations can apply to receive free copies and any organisations that work with kids or want to fund books are welcome to buy directly from us at bulk discounts.



What are your goals for the future?

Our primary objective will always be to build up a whole new future book-loving market by giving away thousands of books for free right now. We'd love to work with government and more corporates to make this a reality.

ABOUT EUGENE YIGA

Eugene graduated from the University of Cape Town with distinctions in financial accounting and classical piano. He then spent over two-and-a-half years working in branding and communications at two of South Africa's top market research companies. Eugene also spent over three-and-a-half years at an eLearning start-up, all while building his business as an award-winning writer. Visit www.eugeneyiga.com, follow @eugeneyiga on Twitter, or email hello@eugeneyiga.com to say, um, hello.

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