

## Milan's bicycling bookseller takes on the online giants

Level: Advanced

### 1 Warmer

a. Think about the books you have read in the last year. Tick all the different ways that you got them.

- bought in a bookshop
- bought online
- borrowed from a library
- borrowed from someone I know
- bought in a second-hand bookshop
- given as a present
- other ...

b. Talk to a partner and discuss your answers.

### 2 Key words

a. Match the words in the box to the definitions below. Then find them in the article to read them in context.

affectionately      boon      curated      initiatives      knight-errant  
ordinarily      pondered      protagonist      sector      significant  
solidarity      unviable      venture      wares

1. a man who arrives and helps you \_\_\_\_\_
2. in a way that shows that you care about someone \_\_\_\_\_
3. the main character in a play, film, book or story \_\_\_\_\_
4. goods that someone is selling \_\_\_\_\_
5. something useful that brings great benefits or makes your life easier \_\_\_\_\_
6. very large \_\_\_\_\_
7. not able to be done \_\_\_\_\_
8. actions that try to solve a problem \_\_\_\_\_
9. thought carefully about \_\_\_\_\_
10. a new business or activity \_\_\_\_\_
11. in normal situations \_\_\_\_\_
12. when items are selected from among a large number of possibilities for other people to consume and enjoy \_\_\_\_\_
13. a part of a country's economic or business activity \_\_\_\_\_
14. the support that people in a group give each other because they have the same opinions or aims \_\_\_\_\_

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b. Use some of the key words above to complete these sentences.

1. A \_\_\_\_\_ number of girls around the world do not receive a solid education.
2. The bus service is a real \_\_\_\_\_ to people in the village.
3. She \_\_\_\_\_ for a long time about what to message back.
4. She touched her grandmother's hand \_\_\_\_\_ and gave her a warm smile.
5. He gave up his job in the financial \_\_\_\_\_ and became an actor.
6. The project is a joint \_\_\_\_\_ between the public and private sectors.
7. She decided that the \_\_\_\_\_ of her new novel would have to die at the end.

## 'I'm often faster': Milan's bicycling bookseller takes on the online giants

**Level:** Advanced

### ***Luca Santini took his fight against Amazon and others to the streets after having to close his bookshop***

**Angela Giuffrida**

**9 December, 2020**

- 1 Luca Ambrogio Santini is considered to be something of a knight-errant as he cycles around parts of Milan on his red cargo bike delivering books to people's homes, so much so he is affectionately called the "Don Quixote of booksellers".
- 2 "Quixote went to fight against the windmills," Santini said of the protagonist in the classic novel by Miguel de Cervantes. "My windmills are the online retailers from those monster multinationals ... which for us independent booksellers are unnameable."
- 3 The former bookshop owner sighs before uttering a name: "Obviously, Amazon ... I practically do what they do, and often I'm faster than them."
- 4 Santini has been waging his battle against the online giants since 2015, when he became the first bookseller in Italy to start home deliveries.
- 5 Called LibriSottoCasa (Books on the Doorstep), Santini fits his wares into a 2-square-metre box on the front of his bike before delivering them to customers in the southern districts of Milan. Until the coronavirus pandemic struck, he participated in book fairs and other events. Now, with those events cancelled, he is surviving solely on home deliveries. But the pandemic has proved to be a bit of a boon, as people spending more time at home rediscover the joy of books.
- 6 "Some customers have counted how many books they've read since March, and the numbers are significant," Santini said.
- 7 For 20 years, Santini owned a bookshop in Milan's Largo Mahler, opposite the auditorium that houses the Giuseppe Verdi Symphony Orchestra, which made the shop particularly popular among those seeking specialist music books. But he was forced to close in 2013 after the business became financially unviable.
- 8 "It was a great experience and had done well," said Santini. "But things became more difficult with the arrival of online competition, the general decline in reading books and the financial crisis in 2008. I tried and tried, and people in the area also organized initiatives to support the shop, but we had to close."
- 9 As he pondered what to do next, Santini discovered he could apply for a licence to operate as a travelling salesperson. And so he became the first to apply for one for the sale of books.
- 10 "I have always cycled around the city and so decided to try it out," he said.
- 11 People can order through Santini's Facebook page or by sending him a message on WhatsApp. They can pay online or in cash.
- 12 His is also among around 2,000 other booksellers across Italy who recently united in their goal to challenge Amazon by setting up their own online platform, called Bookdealer.
- 13 The venture is the first of its kind in Italy and allows people to search for books and to locate the nearest bookshop to them, as well as take virtual tours of shops, before purchasing online for home delivery. The initiative is particularly useful for people in towns where bookshops have closed, as they can discover shops that are further away. Customers can also seek the kind of advice they would ordinarily get from an independent bookseller.
- 14 They have a long way to go before the battle can be declared won, but Santini believes it is this personal element that sets them apart from the giants.
- 15 "Bookdealer started at the end of August, 2020, and many people are turning to this option," said Santini. "They might not get a discount like they would on Amazon but they do get a well-curated service, professionalism and the chance to speak to a book expert."
- 16 That people are using the service is a positive sign, especially after data released at the beginning of 2020 showed that 2,300 bookshops had closed in the previous five years. At the time, Paolo Ambrosini, the president of the Italian Booksellers Association, criticized the government for not doing enough to support the sector in the face of online competition.

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- 17 Santini said the pandemic has helped in the sense that people have realized more the importance of independent local businesses.
- 18 "There is a specific solidarity that is being shown," he added. "The situation is still not easy for many but the personal connection has helped people feel united with us."

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### 3 Comprehension check

Choose the best answer according to the text.

1. Don Quixote is ...
  - a. a former bookshop owner.
  - b. the main character in a well-known novel.
  - c. a website specializing in selling books.
2. Luca Santini ...
  - a. used to run a bookshop in northern Italy.
  - b. is the author of a classic novel about windmills.
  - c. is the president of the Italian Booksellers Association.
3. LibriSottoCasa is the name of ...
  - a. the opera house opposite the bookshop.
  - b. a new book-delivery service.
  - c. a website set up to bring booksellers together.
4. The bookshop in the article was forced to close ...
  - a. because of the pandemic.
  - b. when the owner became too ill to run it.
  - c. when it no longer made a profit.
5. Santini's new service has become popular since people realized that ...
  - a. being at home gave them time to read and that it is enjoyable.
  - b. multinational monsters are killing shopping centres.
  - c. specialist music books were not available elsewhere.
6. Santini delivers books ...
  - a. to the southern parts of Milan by bike.
  - b. in a small white van.
  - c. that support the new Bookseller online platform.

### 4 Using key language

a. Match the beginnings and endings of these phrases. Then find them in the article.

- |                 |             |
|-----------------|-------------|
| 1. take         | a. a battle |
| 2. wage         | b. apart    |
| 3. prove to     | c. of       |
| 4. set someone  | d. on       |
| 5. in the face  | e. that     |
| 6. in the sense | f. be       |

b. Talk about what the phrases mean. Look up the meanings of any you do not know.

c. Use the phrases in sentences of your own. Which is the most useful expression for you?

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### 5 Discussion

- **There's a new book coming out that you are eager to read. What will you do?**
  - buy the hardcover version immediately
  - wait for it to come out as a paperback
  - download it as an ebook and read it on an electronic device
  - listen to it as an audiobook
  - other ...
- **What do you do with books when you have finished reading them?**
- **What is more important for you, a discount or good service? Say why.**
- **Do you know of any other shops or sellers that are waging a battle against 'monster multinationals'?**
  - What are they doing?
  - Are they successful?

### 6 In your own words

- a. **What book(s) are you reading now? What have you read recently?**
- b. **Write a short review of a book you have read recently. Write approximately 300 words.**