

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

Level: Intermediate

### 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. The paragraph numbers are given to help you.

affectionately      challenge      discount      independent      knight-errant  
ordinarily      practically      solely      solidarity      symphony orchestra  
unviable      venture

1. a man who arrives and helps you \_\_\_\_\_ (para 1)
2. in a way that shows that you care about someone \_\_\_\_\_ (para 1)
3. almost \_\_\_\_\_ (para 3)
4. only \_\_\_\_\_ (para 5)
5. a large group of classical musicians on different instruments \_\_\_\_\_ (para 6)
6. not able to be done \_\_\_\_\_ (para 6)
7. stand up and fight against something \_\_\_\_\_ (para 11)
8. a new business or activity \_\_\_\_\_ (para 12)
9. in normal situations \_\_\_\_\_ (para 12)
10. a reduction in the price of something \_\_\_\_\_ (para 14)
11. not belonging to or controlled by a larger company \_\_\_\_\_ (para 16)
12. the support that people in a group give each other \_\_\_\_\_ (para 17)

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

1. We prefer to work with \_\_\_\_\_ film producers and directors.
2. Customers can get a 15 per cent \_\_\_\_\_ if they pay before July.
3. He goes to the park \_\_\_\_\_ every day with his two dogs.
4. She touched her grandmother's hand \_\_\_\_\_ and gave her a warm smile.
5. They were \_\_\_\_\_ interested in projects that would make a lot of money.
6. The project is a joint \_\_\_\_\_ between French and German companies.

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

**Level:** Intermediate

**Angela Giuffrida**

**9 December, 2020**

- 1 Customers see Luca Ambrogio Santini as a knight-errant as he cycles around parts of Milan on his red bike delivering books to people's homes. They affectionately call him the "Don Quixote of booksellers".
- 2 "Quixote went to fight against the windmills," Santini said of the main character in the classic novel by Miguel de Cervantes. "My windmills are the multinational online sellers."
- 3 One of those sellers is of course Amazon. The former bookshop owner says: "I practically do what Amazon do, and often I'm faster."
- 4 Santini has been fighting 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 puts his books into a small box on the front of his bike before delivering them to customers in the southern districts of Milan. Before the coronavirus pandemic, he participated in book fairs and other events. Now he survives solely on home deliveries. But the pandemic has, for him, had a positive side: people have spent more time at home and rediscovered the joy of books.
- 6 For 20 years, Santini owned a bookshop in Milan, opposite the home of the Giuseppe Verdi Symphony Orchestra, which made the shop particularly popular for people seeking specialist music books. But he was forced to close in 2013 after the business became financially unviable.
- 7 "It had been a great experience," said Santini. "But the online competition made things more difficult. I tried and tried, and people in the area also tried to support the shop, but we had to close."
- 8 Santini discovered he could apply for a licence to work as a travelling salesperson. And so he became the first to apply for a licence for the sale of books.
- 9 "I have always cycled around the city and so decided to try it out," he said.
- 10 People can order through Santini's Facebook page or by sending him a message on WhatsApp. They can pay online or in cash.
- 11 He, and around 2,000 other booksellers across Italy, recently got together to challenge Amazon. They set up their own website, called Bookdealer.
- 12 It is the first venture like that in Italy and allows people to search for books and to find the nearest bookshop to them. They can also take virtual tours of shops, before buying online for home delivery. Customers can also get the kind of advice they would ordinarily get from an independent bookseller.
- 13 Santini believes it is this personal attention that sets them apart from the online giants.
- 14 "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 on Amazon but they do get good service, professionalism and the chance to speak to a book expert."
- 15 People are using the service and that is a positive sign, especially after data from the beginning of 2020 showed that 2,300 bookshops in Italy had closed in the past five years.
- 16 Santini said the pandemic has helped because people have realized the importance of independent local businesses.
- 17 "Customers are showing solidarity," 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.

- Don Quixote is ...
  - a former bookshop owner.
  - the main character in a classic novel.
  - an Italian website that sells books.
- Luca Santini ...
  - used to run a bookshop in northern Italy.
  - is the author of a classic novel about windmills.
  - plays in a symphony orchestra.
- LibriSottoCasa is the name of ...
  - the opera house opposite the bookshop.
  - a new book-delivery service.
  - an online group of independent booksellers.
- The bookshop in the article was forced to close ...
  - because of the pandemic.
  - when the owner became too ill to run it.
  - when it no longer made enough money.
- Santini's new service became popular when people realized that ...
  - they had more time at home to read and that they liked it.
  - online booksellers are killing shopping centres.
  - they could not buy specialist music books from Amazon.
- Santini delivers books ...
  - at night because he doesn't have a licence to sell.
  - in a small white van.
  - to customers in the southern parts of Milan by bike.

### 4 Using key language

- a. Complete the phrasal verbs and phrases from the text using the words in the box. Find the phrases in the text to check your answers.

apart      on      out      to      up

- |                      |   |
|----------------------|---|
| 1. take _____        | fight or compete against someone                |
| 2. try _____         | do something to see whether you like it         |
| 3. set _____         | start something such as a business              |
| 4. set someone _____ | make someone or something different and special |
| 5. turn _____        | decide to use a different option or offer       |

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b. Use the phrasal verbs and phrases to complete these sentences.

1. I plan to \_\_\_\_\_ my new running shoes this weekend.
2. Joanne \_\_\_\_\_ her software company in 2015.
3. Their large ears \_\_\_\_\_ them \_\_\_\_\_ from other dogs.
4. These days, more people are \_\_\_\_\_ organic products.
5. This evening, Manchester United will \_\_\_\_\_ Barcelona.

### 5 Discussion

- **There's a new book that you really want to read. What will you do? Explain your decision.**
  - 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.**

### 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 200 to 300 words.**