

Varese's little Amazon

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Their last shipment was to Japan, and every day, more than thirty parcels are shipped, from Cantello, near Varese, throughout Italy and the rest of the world. The warehouse where **LiberCroci** is located was one of the many buildings that had been left empty after the economic crisis of the last few years. It was here that they used to manufacture copper chimneys, and beside the shelves, now full of books, there are still signs of that business.

In these days, there is turmoil; they are still organising **the new warehouse, in which more than 60,000 books (about 37,000 different titles) have been catalogued**. Over the years, this small company has completely changed its business.

“Last year we closed our historic shop in Via Como. We were barely able to pay the salaries of the three of us. Today, with online book selling, we’re growing and we’ll be able to pay the salaries of five,” said **Ferdinando Giaquinto**, the owner of the bookshop.

With his two partners, Ferdinando took over Libreria Croci in 2001. Despite its central location and the closeness of many schools, it was always an uphill struggle. And it remained so until they went digital.

Over the years, in addition to the standard business of the shop, they began other initiatives to scrape along, such as local street markets and sharing spaces with other businesses. In 2008, they decided to concentrate entirely on remainder and second-hand books.

“Also at that time, we started to use the Internet to sell, but we didn’t have much faith in it, at least until we decided to close the shop. **From that moment, we only invested in our website and in eBay** and we soon got results; in fact within a few months, we had to change premises because we didn’t have enough space in the first.”

Their story is a concrete response to the economic crisis that the publishing industry is going through. According to the latest report from the statistics institute, ISTAT, there is little hope for those who work with books.

“In 2013, 10.3% of families (about 2,578,000) claimed they didn’t even have one book at home. In 2013, the number of readers fell significantly compared with the previous year, going from 46%, in 2012, to 43% of the population aged 6 and above. According to the publishers,

the main factors preventing book reading are: the lack of effective education policies that encourage reading (44.5%); the low level of general education of the population (36.6%); inadequate public policies that encourage purchasing books (35.3%); and limited promotion of books and reading by the media. To increase demand and expand the group of readers, publishers concentrate on independent bookshops (39%) and online distribution channels (38.8%).”

It was online distribution that was the key to success for Libreria Croci. The professionalism of those who work there is important, but the rest was achieved by the decision to invest in the Internet.

“We couldn’t have imagined such a positive response. The business is doing well thanks to low overhead costs and the global market. Today, we truly sell everything, everywhere. Most of our work is done with eBay, and we rely on the Italian Post Office for the logistics chain. Many speak ill of this company, but our experience with them has been very positive. The book we remember with most pride is the one we sold to the Centre d’Études Georges Simenon, and to the foundation of the same name. Around the world, there are plenty of collectors in search of books. Take, for example, one of the last despatches, which was of pre-stamped forms from the 1800s, from Emilia Romagna.”

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