

Here's the second article about A&A in Shelf Awareness today. Let me know if you didn't get a copy of the first article and would like to read it.

Robert Gray: Hard Lessons, New Hope for Aliens & Alibis

On December 31, 2006, Deb Andolino and Gary McCammon closed the doors of [Aliens & Alibis Books](#). While her faith in bookselling remains strong as she works to build an online business, Andolino is frank about why faith alone wasn't enough.

She says the strengths of her bricks-and-mortar operation included appearance, great handselling and a carefully selected inventory. She tried to stock "as many titles as we could from the smaller presses and highlight some of the midlist authors from the major presses. Our customers liked our ability to recommend new authors based on what the customer had read before. The store looked good. We used oak bookcases and had a couple of comfortable recliners. We tried not to use the bottom shelf of the bookcases so customers didn't have to sit on the floor to see what books we had there."

She admits, however, that lack of business acumen proved to be a major liability: "We should have gone to some classes to learn more about inventories, budgets, etc. Unfortunately, a love of books is not enough; you also have to have a solid grounding in finance. I wish I knew then what I know now, which is the cry of any failed business person."

Andolino regrets "not listening to my 'inner voice.' That little voice kept telling me we were in trouble, but I ignored it for a long time. I told myself that we were so good we couldn't fail. And arrogance was a factor because we were the only store of its kind in the Southeast. I listen in my mind to some of the things I said and shudder."

She advises anyone planning to open a bookstore to "get the best grounding you can in business and finance if you don't have it already. Plan to have at least three times what you currently have in savings to tide you over the rough times."

Despite her rocky ride, Andolino's optimism for the bookselling life is undiminished: "If you can, go ahead and do it. So many people say, 'I've always wanted to open a bookstore but' Gary and I can say, 'When we opened our bookstore' and remember all the people we met--customers and authors. The Independent Mystery Booksellers Association (IMBA) is especially supportive, as are the science fiction booksellers."

Andolino hopes that over time she can establish a strong bookseller's presence online: "We haven't had a large number of buyers yet, but the ones who do buy are either getting the collectibles or new books. I think the new book buyers are not close to an independent mystery or science fiction dealer. There aren't a lot of us out there either as regular stores or Internet stores."

To attract that targeted readership, "Web Maven" Kim Malo says she designed the Aliens & Alibis website so that "maximum accessibility" takes precedence "over pretty but often annoying bells and whistles. I'm not a big fan of a lot of Flash, JavaScript, etc. Too many of those sites look like a web designer trying to justify their fee rather than something to benefit the person browsing the site. I have a high speed connection and I still sit there tapping my fingers as some sites' dozens of images load, having to wait too long just so I can navigate their site . . . or, as is often the case, *not* waiting."

Malo's design goal for Aliens & Alibis was to create a site that was "clean and accessible, not requiring too many clicks to find things. I've added a bunch of appropriate terms in the metaheaders to get the site picked up on searches. Listing the books on the pages where they are crawlable--particularly rare collectibles--is a way of getting people to the site through their searches for books and authors."

Andolino believes that her bookstore can have a successful future online. "I would like for Aliens & Alibis to become known for good quality, collectible books," she says. "I also would like our newsletter to be considered a good source for new and midlist authors to talk about their books. They need all the publicity that they can get. Beyond that, we are just taking things as they come. Who knows what technology will show up in the next few years that might change our direction? I've learned it's not wise to set anything in stone."--[Robert Gray](#) (column archives available at [Fresh Eyes Now](#))

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My bookmark's in Murder With Reservations by Elaine Viets -- a funny and clever mystery. Where's yours?

"It is never too late to be what you might have been." -- George Eliot

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