Bylined, meanwhile, estimated that it will sell between 750,000 and a million of its short e-books, which it calls “originals,” this year, and plans to publish three or four per month, “ideally in an equal combination of fiction and non-fiction,” according to CEO John Tayman.

The Atavist, which specializes in non-fiction e-singles enhanced with rich media, claims to have sold more than 100,000 copies. Apple’s own e-singles, called Quick Reads, debuted in September 2011 and are available in the iBooks store. Barnes & Noble calls its short books Snaps. Hearst is using its e-singles to up-sell to its other products with mini-cookbooks and “Cosmo’s Sexiest Stories Ever.”

E-singles sold in e-bookstores are a clear break from selling books on bookstore shelves. “To be ‘successful,’ books up to now had to have a minimum spine width so they’d have a great shelf presence in a physical book store,” said Joe Wikert, general manager and publisher, O’Reilly Media. “Of course, that completely goes away in the digital world and I see us finally getting to the point where an author or an editor doesn’t have to puff up a book to be artificially 300-400 pages when the concept itself is 20-30 pages, just because in the past you couldn’t get noticed on a Barnes & Noble shelf if you were that short.”