

ARGON DAISY EDITION – DAISY IN THE COMMERCIAL BOOK-TRADE IN GERMANY

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ABSTRACT

In October 2008 Argon published the first DAISY audio books: 20 bestsellers from the publisher of audio books were “DAISYfied”. At present 10–15 DAISY titles are released per month, which are obtainable at the booksellers. The DAISY books can be classified as type two books; they combine textual headings and audio content. The accompanying booklet is recorded as well and is added as audio content. To distinguish DAISY audio books from audio books on audio CD, the former are packaged in a keep case with a label in Braille. According to Argon’s programme profile the titles of the DAISY edition cover all kinds of genres from literature, entertainment, crime fiction and children’s books to non-fiction.

1 Argon Verlag GmbH

Argon publishers, founded in 1952, changed its programme from books to audio books in 2005. It is a subsidiary company of the Georg von Holtzbrinck publishing group. Argon records novel top titles by book publishers, unabridged classics, popular nonfiction books and children’s books as audio books. About 100 novelties annually appear by authors like Cecelia Ahern, Paul Auster, Simon Beckett, Carlos Ruiz Zafón or John Boyne. The narrators are mostly noted actors from television, film or theatre.

2 Start of the DAISY project at Argon publishers

Argon initiated the DAISY project in May 2008 in cooperation with the German Central Library for the Blind, Leipzig (DZB). Both companies recognize the similarities between the audio book sectors for sighted and non-sighted listeners and want to connect them by launching DAISY audio books into the book market. Argon is well-established in the audio book market and the DZB contributes its expertise on DAISY. The aim is to offer a multiplicity of DAISY audio books for purchase for the first time, so that sighted as well as non-sighted consumers have access to DAISY audio books in ordinary bookstores and online.

All titles of the edition have previously been published by Argon on audio CD. The same audio book, read by the same narrator, is offered to sighted clients as well as to visually impaired and blind clients – both the DAISY audio book and the ordinary audio book are available and only differ in format.

The first 20 titles of the *argon daisy edition* were released in October 2008 and presented at the book fair in Frankfurt. Of course there is great need for explanation but the release of this new form of audio books was met with great interest in the book sector (Stöcker 2008; Anonym 2008; Wagner 2009; Kahlefeldt 2009a, Kahlefeldt 2009b).

The first DAISY titles are mainly titles which had previously been successful bestsellers as ordinary audio books. By and by more novelties are added to the DAISY programme. The long-term aim is to publish novelties in DAISY format shortly after the audio CDs. Additionally, backlist titles are transformed into DAISY for-

mat. According to the first plan, 100 DAISY titles were published in 2008, and in 2009 the *argon daisy edition* is continued. There will be more than 200 DAISY audio books by Argon on the market by the end of this year.

3 The spectrum of titles in the argon daisy edition

Following the regular programme profile of Argon publishers, the *argon daisy edition* focuses on popular entertainment. Typical genres are:

- Comedy (e.g. Tommy Jaud, Christian Ulmen, Ralf Schmitz)
- Historical novel (e.g. Tanja Kinkel, Kate Mosse, Sabine Ebert)
- Literature (e.g. Jane Austen, Christoph Ransmayr, Stefan Zweig)
- Crime (e.g. John Katzenbach, Tana French, Simon Beckett)
- Romantic Fantasy (e.g. Lara Adrian, Mary Janice Davidson)
- non-fiction audio books (e.g. Dale Carnegie, Steffen Möller, Jörg Pilawa)
- books for children & adolescents (e.g. Ernst H. Gombrich, Tanya Stewner)

The majority of audio books both of Argon's regular programme and of the *argon daisy edition* are abridged versions authorised by the author. This is general practice in the German audio book market.

4 The structure and packaging of DAISY audio books

The DAISY books by Argon can be classified as type two, they connect audio content with textual headings. Audio files are structured with regard to content, the arrangement depends on the printed version of the book. Generally there are one or two hierarchies such as parts or chapters. Apart from the book content a DAISY audio book contains information from the printed booklet of the audio book. This booklet is recorded and added as audio content to the book content. These additional pieces of information are structured following the manual for Medibus members so that the same headings can always be found at the same place in the structure.



Figure 1: Two examples of DAISY packaging

The DAISY audio books are packaged in a keep case with a label in Braille. A keep case provides enough space for the added label; furthermore it is easier to distinguish a DAISY audio book from an audio book on CD if it has a different size and package. The label in Braille is composed of three lines with 15 signs each which provide author and title. If necessary, these are abbreviated.

To ensure a value of brand recognition the DAISY cover is identical to the audio CD edition's cover (Fig. 1).

The prices of DAISY titles are always identical with the prices of the audio CD edition: If an audio CD edition is reduced in price, the DAISY audio book's price will be reduced as well.

5 The production of DAISY titles

The production of DAISY audio books is not integrated in the general cycle of Argon's production, because the number of copies of each DAISY title is in comparison extremely low and the keep cases are only produced for the *argon daisy edition*. A first production cycle from editing the audio data files to the DAISY audio book's delivery takes from six to eight weeks, additional editions can be supplied faster. The first edition of a title contains 50 to 100 copies. These numbers come close to those of on-demand production. Generally, a DAISY title is published at present one or two months after the audio CD edition.

6 Distribution of the argon daisy edition

In the promotion and distribution of DAISY audio books Argon tries to appeal to the blind and visually impaired as well as to the sighted. Thus the company uses different channels: Since the buying patterns of sighted and non sighted readers and listeners differ to a certain extent and their knowledge about DAISY varies greatly, potential customers have to be addressed in very different places.

The core target group of the blind people can be reached by classic target marketing: A barrier-free website for the *argon daisy edition* (Argon Verlag 2009) with all information and a list of available titles was created. This website is linked to the bookshop for blind (Blindenhörbuchladen) (MetaGIS-Systems 2009), where all titles can be ordered and which is well-known in Germany by many members of the target group. Interested customers can download an acoustic catalogue in DAISY format at the Argon website or order it on CD.

At the national day of the visually impaired on June 6, 2009, Argon took part in a joint project with the German Association for Blind and Visually Impaired People (DBSV) and Thalia. Thalia is a big chain of bookstores in the German-speaking area which presented DAISY titles in a lot of stores nationwide. Furthermore, Argon presented the DAISY edition for the first time on a fair for additives for blind and visually impaired people in 2009. In future the additives' distribution network will be used increasingly.

Argon naturally stays in direct contact with individual clients and with relevant multipliers such as institutions for blind and visually impaired people.

Of course, sighted customers can find the DAISY audio books at the graphical website, too. For them there is also a printed catalogue of the *argon daisy edition*.

All DAISY titles are available in the German speaking commercial book market and can normally be ordered overnight. They are listed in all relevant indices which are used by booksellers and the book wholesalers keep them in stock. All titles of the *argon daisy edition* are available online at the big booksellers sites, too. To test the market a selection of titles are also available as downloads.

Still, the DAISY format has to be introduced further into the ordinary market, but developments are already discernible: At the book fair in Leipzig in spring 2009 there was less need for explanation as had been at the fair before in autumn 2008.

7 Conclusion after one year DAISY audio books by Argon

The DAISY project has already become an established part of Argon's programme: In August 2009 10,000 copies of the *argon daisy edition* were sold. The top selling title sold is *Dale Carnegie's How to Stop Worrying and to Start Living* with over 170 copies.

Clients who order regularly and whose orders can be registered by Argon are mainly book wholesalers and major bookshops. Less often there are direct orders by smaller bookshops, since as a general rule these order mostly at book wholesalers instead.

At the beginning of the *argon daisy edition* book wholesalers ordered the same number of all titles for their store. In the German book-trade it is possible and common practice to remit audio books without any financial disadvantage, so these first orders are of limited significance. These days, orders are increasingly focussed on individual titles.

Argon is mainly in direct contact with blind clients. Customers without impaired sighting who are known to the publishers are mainly purchasing DAISY audio books for blind people of their acquaintance.

DAISY audio books have become increasingly popular, but there is still a lot of promotional work to be done. Many booksellers and clients still do not know about "DAISY" and the advantages of the format and the titles are never on display in bookshops.

In the course of digitalisation it is obviously necessary to think about synchronisation of text and audio. DAISY offers many possibilities which Argon hesitates to use at the moment. This hesitation is not only due to the enormous additional expenses which such a synchronisation entails and which are not necessarily justified by gaining great benefit in the eyes of consumers of entertainment books. The additional applications are mainly not used by Argon because the publisher as a licensee specialised in audio books does not own any rights to publish texts.

8 Outlook

In future, Argon will continue lobbying for DAISY, focussing predominantly on informing sighted clients about the product. The promotion of DAISY audio books among blind and visually impaired people is of course of unchanging importance as well.

Libraries for the blind in Germany will stop using cassettes from January 1, 2010 on. Consequently, this is an important date: The number of DAISY users and probably the demand for audio books of the *argon daisy edition* will grow essentially.

Still, the "audio book for the blind" is momentarily deemed to be a niche product. This status can only be changed if DAISY titles increase in number and quality. Argon's aim certainly is not to gain a monopoly position, quite the reverse: Other audio book publishers shall be convinced to offer DAISY titles in the near future.

Publishers have to make clear to sighted consumers that DAISY is based on the easy to handle MP3 format – and that it offers additional and surplus value for free. To make the consumption of DAISY audio books as comfortable as possible a new device to play them is desirable: A low priced DAISY player with display or an application for existent equipment would be ideal.

To make sure consumers can buy DAISY titles in all possible forms, Argon is planning to offer the *argon daisy edition's* novelties as downloads.

Argon is convinced that the international audio book format DAISY can be and will be established by and by on the commercial book market in Germany.

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