



# Book's Face

"It's only the beginning"

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Niels 't Hooft, Co-founder of Tech startup Immer and Winner of Renew the Book Innovation Award 2021

I'm Niels 't Hooft, born in 1980 in Leiderdorp, The Netherlands. Living in Utrecht, married and father of two girls. I co-founded Immer, an early-stage reading tech startup, together with Lennart de Meij in 2020. Before Immer I started other internet

companies and I was a journalist reporting about videogames a lot. I was, and still am, a writer of novels, games and apps. I've been reading a lot of short stories recently, for example by Ted Chiang, and I think Immer would be great for these too.

## 1. Can you please describe your innovation in 100 words?

At Immer, we're developing a new way of reading books on the phone. We feel that, just like cinema is much more than a theater play with a camera pointed at it, digital reading can be much more than digitized paper books. Our digital devices have many capabilities to present something attractively, and to guide the user through an experience in an engaging way, and we built Immer on that.

The Immer app takes the same great books, but presents them way better: with meditative sound and colors that draw you in and help you focus, in digestible chunks so it becomes easier to have nourishing reading moments during your busy day. Another way to put it is that Immer is an all-in-one reading experience in which you discover, try, read, rate, share and pay for your books.

## 2. How will the book industry benefit from your innovation?

The book market worldwide is shrinking slowly, even though the benefits of books are obvious: they are entertaining and enriching, and they offer the deeply personal moment of reflection that only reading text can provide. With Immer we're unlocking this untapped potential, packaging books in

a new way, helping to bring the book industry's great works to a broader audience. Right now we're focused on re-activating 'dormant' readers, but in the long run we also want to help existing readers have more reading moments, and even create new readers by offering quick, attractive reading session. We think Immer can be a TikTok of reading.

## 3. What is the most exciting / striking thing that ever happened while working on the application?

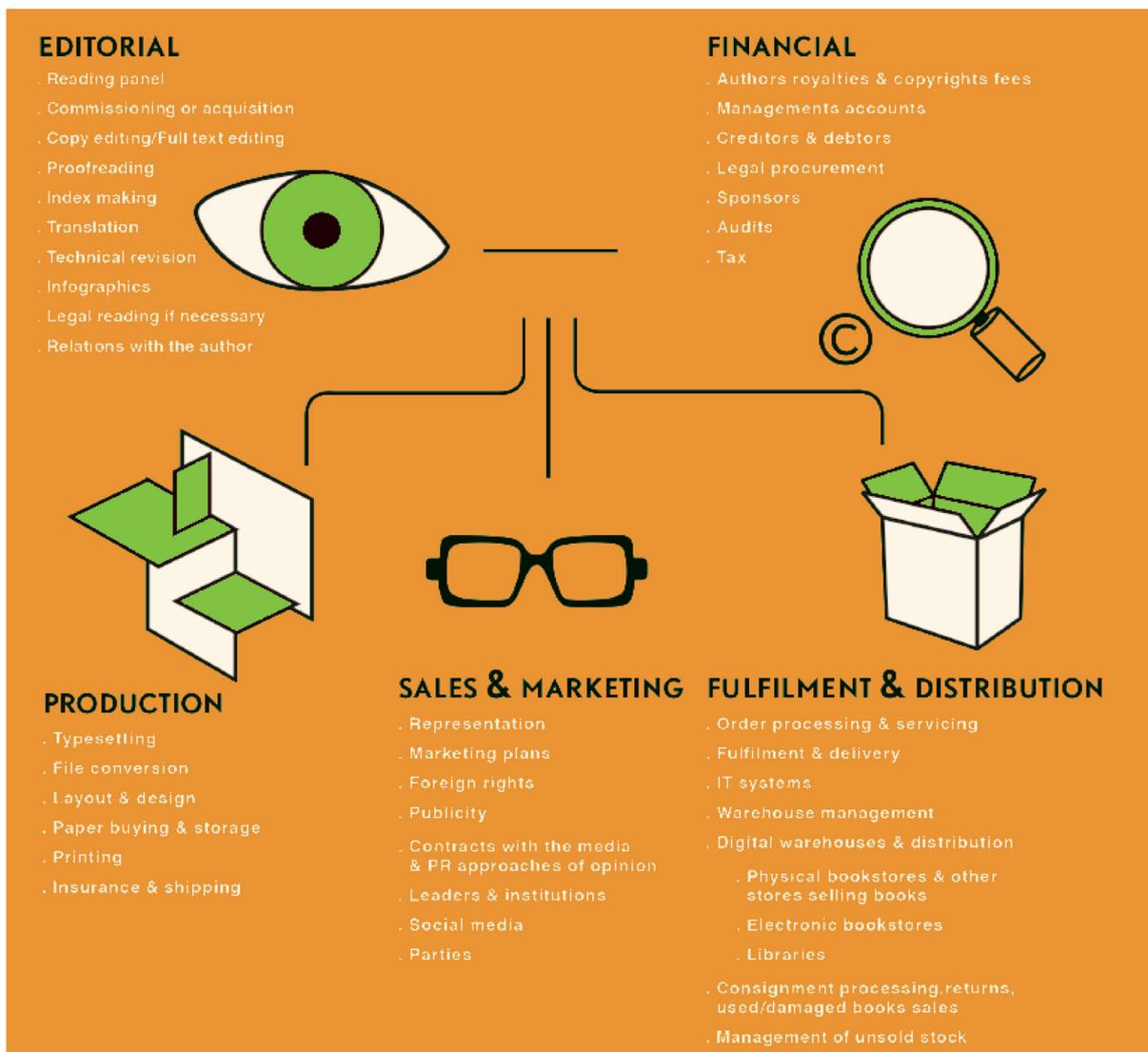
I'm originally a novelist and Immer started out as an experimental app. I wanted to create a new digital novella with an audiovisual component, working with artists but also diving into reading science and talking to publishers and fellow writers. The prototypes we made got me distracted from my own story, because testers started saying things like: "Your app helps me focus on the text, it's so much nicer than e-books. I want to read every book like this." Even people who said they couldn't read anymore, they'd just lost the attention span, said they liked to read with our prototypes. That's when I decided I had to start a company and develop these ideas further.

## 4. Can you describe a typical working day?

I go to our studio every day. I'm there usually alone, as of the team I live closest and we want to limit physical proximity in these covid times. Right now I'm in meetings with investors a lot, as we're raising a funding round, but I can't wait to get back to the designs for the next major version of the app that our development team is preparing. We currently have the first version of Immer live in The Netherlands on iOS and Android, but it's really only the beginning. We have so many ideas and want to bring the Immer experience abroad, too.

## 5. What did you want to be when you were five years old?

I wanted to be a comic book artist! But after my first comic, I got bogged down in writing a list of titles for the next installments... I have to say that looks a lot like planning an app: you create an MVP, a basic first version, and then you think of all the features you want to build in the future... Then instead of getting mired in a long wishlist, you start building again! I think the aspect of wanting to 'will something into existence' was always there in my life. And also the aspect of different disciplines meeting each other to create a gesamt-kunstwerk of sorts. Something beautiful, useful, and hopefully profitable as well.



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