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The Changing Nature of Scholarly Publishing and the Tenure Process

Posted on February 1, 2003 by Editor

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The death of print has been predicted for many years. As each new technological means of disseminating information has been developed during this century, some have proclaimed that the new technology whether it be film or microform or now digital would supplant the printed word. While the first two failed to expand appropriately for this to occur, the digital form has made some real inroads. After all, this article has been published in a magazine that has never appeared in print. This does not mean that print is surrendering without a fight. According to the Book Industry Study Group, the number of volumes sold annually between 1995 and 2000 remained relatively stable. However, the number of title published has gone down over this period with the reduction primarily in scholarly monographs. Similarly, the Gale Directory of Publication and Broadcast Media reports that the number of newspapers and magazines published has also increased over the same time period.

Similarly, many of the attempts to produce profitable electronic periodicals have been failures. Time Warner’s failed Pathfinder project or Microsoft’s Slate (http://slate.msn.com) which has reverted to a free access policy are just two examples. While this may change over time, Salon(http://www.salon.com) for example is surviving on a mixed model of free and fee based content, for now general online publishing has yet to prove itself as a profitable enterprise. This is not true for more specialized types of information. Information provides in business for example have successfully into an online format for delivery of proprietary information in a timely fashion. This is not a recent development. Lexis-Nexis has been providing this type of service for decades. They are beginning to get more specialized competitors entering the market place including Hoover’s and FIS. These companies typically provide services to businesses or professionals who are in need of the most timely information and thus are willing to pay for it. The general public is not yet shown a similar willingness to purchase intellectual content, other than pornography, online.
The other area in which online publishing is proving profitable is scholarly journals. Journal publishers have been converting their content into electronic format for a decade now. The majority of these are electronic versions of print journals. Most are still available in both formats. The primary market for these journals are academic libraries which have had an ongoing budget crisis since the mid-1980s due largely to increases in the cost of what librarians refer to as STM (science, technology, and medicine) journals. While the subscription costs for electronic journals are often not less that the cost of their print counterparts, the many varied pricing models and the development of regional and other library consortia have allowed for cooperative purchasing as well as bundled purchasing of electronic journals. Cooperative purchasing is when a group of libraries negotiate for electronic access to information for the entire group at a reduced cost to each of the individual libraries. Bundled purchasing is the acquisition of a large number of journals from an individual publisher as a group rather than subscribing to individual titles. While this model allows a library or library consortia to subscribe to an increased number of journal titles at a reduced cost per title, many of these arrangements have clauses which limit a library’s flexibility in reducing these titles in the face of future budget shortfalls and it has also led to libraries adding titles they would not have otherwise purchased simply because they are part of the package. Kenneth Frasier, University Librarian at the University of Wisconsin-Madison has called bundled acquisition of journals the “Big Deal” and has predicted that libraries will regret having entered into them over time. The Chronicle of Higher Education has published several articles on this subject. One nice overview appeared in the September 20, 2002 issue and is available online at http://chronicle.com/weekly/v49/i04/04a03101.htm#bundle (subscription required for online access).

The changing model of journal publishing has allowed for library users to access more and more information without physically entering the library. This has been essential for the growth of distance education programs.

While electronic journals have been increasing in number, electronic books have not done as well. There have been several attempts to set up e-book publishing and distribution, both original monographs and electronic versions of print titles, none of which has succeeded financially. This is largely due to fact that most people do not read a great deal of text on a screen and there is no single reader standard that consumers can adopt.

For academics, the publication of articles in scholarly journals or monographs is essential to obtaining tenure and promotions. However, with the changes in publishing, the ability of all scholars to publish their research findings is becoming more difficult. Technological change has also increased the ways in which information can be presented moving beyond the traditional text format, sometimes augmented with charts or other images. The development of online instruction has also expanded the ways university faculty can present information aimed at students. While there are more opportunities available for faculty to be creative the rules by which they are evaluated often do not recognize these efforts. Some academic organizations have attempted to bring this issue to light by developing sample guidelines for the incorporation of new nontraditional publications in the tenure, promotion and review process for faculty. One such set
of guidelines was developed by the American Association for History and Computing and available online at http://www.theaahc.org/tenure_guidelines.htm. These association level efforts serve to inform their members of the issues. They have been augmented by an ongoing discussion among academics both in the literature [1] as well as by independent organizations such as Merlot (http://www.merlot.org) which is attempting to provide a way for faculty to get online information peer-reviewed so that it can be presented to a tenure committee.

The world of scholarly communication in particular and publishing in general is changing because of the technologies that have been developed with the Internet. While print is not dead, nor will it die any time soon in the opinion of this author, there are more ways to create and distribute information than at any time in the past and the ability to do so without having to go through any intermediary such as an editorial board or a publisher has led to a vast array of sources of information of varying quality. In this environment, university faculty need to find a way for their more creative efforts to be acknowledged in the formal evaluations conducted by their universities or they risk being left behind in this new environment. For this to happen, there must be an acknowledgment of the new models of publishing in the standards by which faculty are judged and the means to evaluate these materials must be clearly defined. While professional associations can suggest guidelines, they are not binding on the institutions or their faculties. In May of 2001, the faculty of the Washington State University Libraries incorporated such guidelines into the criteria by which they would be evaluated that are a part of the faculty manual. This document is online at http://www.wsulibs.wsu.edu/faculty/faculty-handbook/Guidelines-For-Evaluation-of-Electronic-Publications.html. These guidelines provide for the faculty to be creative in current and future technologies by establishing a method of evaluating the quality of those publications that are produced outside of the traditional avenues of peer-reviewed journals or monographs. While this is but one example, it does signify the willingness of at least some academics to acknowledge the changing nature of publishing and to provide themselves with the flexibility to try new things and reach outside of what has been and toward what can be.

Footnote


This entry was posted in Uncategorized by Editor. Bookmark the permalink [http://bcis.pacificu.edu/interface/?p=2688].

10 THOUGHTS ON “THE CHANGING NATURE OF SCHOLARLY PUBLISHING AND THE TENURE PROCESS”

Wojewódzki

on January 30, 2014 at 7:09 AM said:
One additional program in favor of advertising your web site is posting comments on a variety of directories in your blog link.

**Peter Deshotel**  
*on January 30, 2014 at 6:15 PM said:*

Hello, you used to write excellent, but the last several posts have been kinda boring

**plotka**  
*on February 1, 2014 at 1:47 AM said:*

Incredible points. Outstanding arguments. Preserve up the excellent spirit.

**Olsztyn**  
*on February 1, 2014 at 3:54 AM said:*

One more point I would like to talk about is that as an alternative to trying to accommodate all your on the net degree lessons on times that you simply end work (since the majority people are tired after they get home), try to have most of your instructional classes on a week-ends and only a couple courses in weekdays, even if it methods a smaller time away from your saturday and sunday. This can be excellent due to the fact on a saturdays and sundays, you happen to be more rested as well as concentrated in school work. Thanks significantly for your a variety of issues I have figured out through the site.

**nigeria**  
*on February 3, 2014 at 1:34 AM said:*

Bravo, what phrase…, a magnificent idea.
temat

on February 3, 2014 at 1:55 AM said:

for that greatest cost on the industry super real all

nigeria dating

on February 5, 2014 at 12:16 AM said:

I could be beating a dead horse, but thank you for posting this!

Angele Hey

on February 5, 2014 at 4:37 PM said:


Young Wulf

on February 6, 2014 at 9:05 AM said:

Ik ben nieuw op dit forum. Ik heb verschillende aangepaste bouwwijzen de afgelopen jaren gebouwd, ben ik misschien gaan bouwen een nieuwe rig deze zomer (kredietcrisis in afwachting) Dus zullen vragen veel domme en waarschijnlijk gemakkelijke vragen. Maar zal ook proberen en commentaar en anderen te helpen ook. Heres aan het begin van een groot forum van leren en plezier.
Jillian Moles

on February 6, 2014 at 1:24 PM said:

Je pouvais m’identifier totalement à ce que vous disiez. Vous devez bien lu mon esprit