

Libraries as Publishers; Publishers as Libraries – Where Do We Go From Here?



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Column Editor's Note: *One of the most marked characteristics of our times is the convergence of roles in the scholarly communications landscape. The rapid evolution of new digital technologies has led to the opening of new doors for various players. The roles of librarian, publisher, vendor are being radically recast in ways that could not have been imagined a decade ago when the Web was becoming a dominant force in our society and our work environments. In particular the "participation culture" of Web 2.0 has encouraged everyone to engage in our culture in a seamless and holistic manner, as creator, consumer, and participant. By turns it is a dizzying, bewildering, or fascinating time, depending on the day and the issue at hand. The advent of librarians as publishers, and publishers as librarians, is an important phenomenon that bears witness to the reinvention of roles. This article will explore some of the issues involved in this transformation, from the perspective of values and how they influence our actions and expectations. NB – The role of the vendor is a separate and complex matter that will not be addressed in this article. — TH*

Convergence in the Library

The blurring of roles is in full flight these days. Libraries are enthusiastically taking on the role of publisher in numerous ways — through the development of institutional repositories for the publishing and preservation of the institution's research output; through the incubation and fostering of journal publishing such as open access journals; through the mass digitization programs and the niche digitization efforts that are occurring widely today; and through collaboration in various publishing projects in the home institution, whether it be with a university press or a specific department, or via involvement in a **SPARC** initiative. Theses, monographs, reports, conference proceedings, occasional papers, and datasets are a few examples of the new type of publishing in the digital age that calls for reevaluation of roles and strategies. This transformation can also be seen in large-scale, successful collaborations, — such as **Project Muse**, **BioOne**, **Project Euclid**, and the **ACLS Humanities E-book Project** — that have adopted innovative business and licensing models in response to the challenges faced by the various partners.

Libraries are now working upstream in the knowledge creation process, to ensure that researchers understand how libraries can preserve and make their work accessible in innovative ways, regardless of format. It is a remarkable opportunity for libraries to re-imagine themselves in a much wider role, as they add value to their patrons' information workflow, whether it is for scholarship, teaching, or learning. But can we also view this through the lens of librarianship values? Our values inform everything we do, yet we don't often stop to examine these values and understand how they impact our choices and our priorities.

Back to Core Values

Gorman articulates eight core values¹ that he sees as critical for charting our future: stewardship, service, intellectual freedom, rationalism, literacy and learning, equality of access, privacy, and democracy. These can readily be understood in terms of the library as publisher.

Stewardship requires us to ensure the long-term preservation of our collections through carefully considered standards, policies, and practices; there has been much dialogue and progress on this front. A service ethic is key to how we integrate ourselves into the life of the institution and publishing is now an important component of this role. Intellectual freedom is promoted in our various publishing initiatives, as we emphasize a wide diversity of perspectives, topics, and sources in these projects. Rationalism can be viewed in the orderly, systematic way that we plan our work and ensure long-term sustainability within the strategic framework of the library. Literacy and learning are promoted by the wider diffusion, curation, and access to scholarship, in new formats that respond to effective ways of working with sources of knowledge in traditional and new media. There is a growing understanding of the importance of the life cycle of scholarship. Equality of access underpins the open nature of the publishing that libraries are pursuing, as it is generally made available to all, without heed to status, geographic location, or affiliation. This is the great leveler that promotes greater knowledge and visibility of research. Privacy can be understood in this context as the ability to use the library's published works for one's own purposes and to receive assistance in using these collections with the assurances of confidentiality and impartiality. Finally, democracy is a value that is imbued in the library publishing venture, since the wide dissemination of knowledge serves to promote an informed citizenry that is actively engaged in problem-solving, self-fulfillment, and developing communities of interest. This is deeply linked to how we see ourselves as a free society that respects human rights, in all senses of the word. From the above sketch it is evident that the role of library as publisher is not only a strategic consideration but is also deeply anchored in the values that have guided us for many generations.

Publisher as Libraries

If we now turn the tables and examine the publisher as library, we see a similar scale of

transformation [NB – this discussion will focus on commercial publishers, as their interests can be more easily juxtaposed against libraries than the non-profits]. Publishers have recognized the need for change in order to remain viable in the scholarly information marketplace. They have recognized the importance of recall and precision in Web platforms that aggregate large scale content (journals, books, working papers, reference sources), both for searching and browsing, directly via the user's desktop or laptop. They have developed platforms that support RSS feeds, personal profiles, alerts, OpenURL linking, citation tracking, export to citation management systems, and now they are developing virtual spaces that promote collaborative research and social networking in the spirit of our participation culture. They are forging partnerships with **Google** to expose their metadata to a much wider audience, implicitly recognizing the power of **Google** to bring countless new eyeballs to their portals. The inclusion of the word "library" in the name of various resources, such as the **ACM Digital Library**, **Gale Virtual Reference Library**, and **Naxos Music Library**, reflects the marketing appeal of the library concept that patrons can relate to (and which, incidentally, recognizes the library brand as being beyond books, in opposition to the findings of the **OCLC Study on Perceptions of Libraries and Information Resources**). They are partnering with software companies and content management providers to offer an integrated package to libraries.

Publishers are aggregating content and layering services that are sensitive to the researcher's workflow in the digital age. In certain respects this is a deliberate adoption of the library's role in selecting, acquiring, organizing and make accessible information resources. Moreover, the importance of maintaining in perpetuity a comprehensive archive, spanning coverage from the earliest journal literature to the present, has also been understood, and much investment has been made in this area. The fact that long-term, stable, perpetual access is of much concern to libraries has not been lost on publishers, who are promoting this as a service that they can offer, either via their own servers or via a trusted repository such as **Portico** or **LOCKSS**, or in collaboration with national institutions in various countries.

Key Functions of Publishing

The scholarly communication model is commonly understood to begin with the **Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London** in 1665. **Jean-Claude Guédon** notes that "In particular, it introduced clarity and transparency in the process of establishing innovative claims in natural philosophy, and, as a result, it began to play a role not unlike that of

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a patent office for scientific ideas”²². Over the past 350 years, scholarly publishing assumed four key functions that guide its existence: 1) Dissemination of new knowledge; 2) Quality control; 3) Establishing the canonical archive; and 4) Recognition of authors.

This led to a stable system of publishing in which the roles of the different players — authors, editors, publishers, and subscribers both institutional and individual — were well understood and fairly stable, if not always harmonious. In recent years, however, the confluence of new communications technology, an explosion of knowledge sources, radically different user expectations, concentration of ownership, and embattled legal frameworks of intellectual property and copyright have completely upset the traditional model for scholarly communication. Inevitably this has led to much prognostication and hand-wringing about the future.

Do the four classical purposes of publishing hold true today? Libraries can easily claim some or all of these functions for themselves, in varying degrees. Through their publishing initiatives, libraries disseminate new knowledge as broadly as possible. There are various initiatives and discourses for developing standards and procedures for archiving this knowledge and confronting the thorny issue of long-term preservation, regardless of format. There is no doubt that author visibility and impact are positively affected by library publishing (such as increase in citation counts), but how this translates into peer recognition and the career reward structure for academics is a difficult question. Quality control, understood in terms of editorial support and peer-review, is an area where libraries have had least impact, but this too is changing as libraries are collaborating in a more significant way with campus presses, with open access publishers, and other non-traditional vehicles of publication.

Publisher Values

As librarianship values are important to consider in relation to publishing, it is equally important to discuss publisher core values. What would these be? I am not a publisher, but I would venture to speculate that the following seven are essential: reputation, quality of product, advancement of knowledge, partnership approach, customer focus, return on investment, and in-house expertise. Let’s consider these one by one. Reputation is the coin on which the publisher trades — without it the best efforts and strategies would be for naught. Quality of product ensures that the outputs of publication are valued by the marketplace and find an appropriate niche. Advancement of knowledge, in our world of specialized research and interdisciplinary activity, remains an essential value in promoting the public good, whereby society benefits culturally and economically. The partnership approach recognizes that publishers need to work effectively with an array of individuals and groups to be successful — authors,

editors, societies, distributors, wholesalers, retailers, bookstore chains, digital aggregators, software providers, and others. Customer focus should be a motherhood value to all publishers, regardless of size or type, as being a daily barometer for performance and corporate strategy. Return on investment can’t be ignored, since there are shareholders and bottom-line objectives to be kept firmly in view, which will vary according to the type of publisher (for-profit and non-profit). In-house expertise, such as editorial, layout, marketing, and distribution, would be another essential component for publisher livelihood, and closely linked to reputation and quality of product. Not being a publisher, I hope that the liberty I’ve taken to speculate on these matters doesn’t stray too far from the truth.

The **Ithaka Report**, “University Publishing in a Digital Age,” describes the ways in which scholarly publishing is breaking away from the past:

Publishing in the future will look very different than it has looked in the past. Consumption patterns have already changed

dramatically, as many scholars have increasingly begun to rely on electronic resources to get information that is useful to their research and teaching. Transformation on the creation and production sides is taking longer, but ultimately may have an even more profound impact on the way scholars work. Publishers have made progress putting their legacy content online, especially with journals. We believe the next stage will be the creation of new formats made possible by digital technologies, ultimately allowing scholars to work in deeply integrated electronic research and publishing environments that will enable real-time dissemination, collaboration, dynamically-updated content, and usage of new media.³

New research behaviors and expectations are creating an environment where the roles of “librarian” and “publisher” are no longer distinct and mutually exclusive. In a society where anyone can publish, what does it mean to be a publisher? In a world where anyone can collect and organize information, what does it mean to be a library? It is an era rife with opportunity and experimentation. Which solutions will be sustainable in the long term, and which will reflect the core functions of publishing? How will we balance the desire for visibility with the measurements of quality that are the hallmarks of scholarship? Partnerships in the educational community, such as the earlier mentioned initiatives, are examples of successful and logical adaptation. Libraries, presses, learned societies, scholarly communications offices, and library-led associations have collaborated in remarkable ways that recognize

the complementary strengths of each player for the greater good of all.

Librarianship Values

If we compare librarianship values with publisher values, what do we see? The former focuses on our place in a democratic society and how we bring our knowledge and skills to support the goals of our institution and ultimately the success of our user community in achieving their personal and professional goals. These values are infused with the importance of collaboration, innovation, equality of access, a culture of sharing, and a dual focus on present and future. The publisher values, by contrast, focus more on corporate growth and development, with a keen sensitivity to quality in the evolving marketplace and how one shapes and positions products in a turbulent world where

change and competition are the only constants. The difference between the non-profit, public sector environment of most libraries, and the for-profit, private sector environment of many publishers,

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is reflected in the different values that animate them. Perhaps nothing illustrates this difference greater than the question of the economics of the information marketplace. For many years this was articulated as the serials crisis in the scholarly ecosystem, and the various lamentations, arguments, and potential solutions for saving our journal literature that shaped this discourse. The issue is far broader today, and strikes at the very heart of what defines scholarship, and involves many related issues such as: the tenure and promotion system for faculty; the structure of knowledge and cultural practices within a discipline; historical models for the advancement of knowledge; re-evaluation of formal and informal modes of distribution; and the incalculable impact of new tools on the workflow and analytical approach of researchers. It also raises the issue of publishing as a business versus what are seen to be the rights of the user community in the public research sphere. Today’s debates reflect a paradigm shift that brings us back to fundamental questions, such as — How do libraries ensure that their community’s needs and institutional priorities guide decision-making? How do we envision future needs when there is a paradigm shift reflected in transformational tools, information resources, and user expectations? Are the librarianship values described above still the right values? In the face of much uncertainty, **David Lewis** states that “...the work that needs to be done is at core what libraries have always done — to be the mechanism for making knowledge available in communities and organizations.”²⁴ If **Lewis** is correct — and I believe he is — then it is a question of redefining our services, collections, and systems but not reevaluating our basic values.

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Risks

How do publishers face a myriad of challenges while not losing track of their value system? Publishing has traditionally been a conservative culture — not unlike libraries — and the variety of new business models and delivery options that have been put forward in recent years is a reflection of the publishers' need to redefine their purpose and remain relevant in today's landscape of distributed knowledge. How do publishers craft a sustainable business plan that responds to legal, technological, corporate and client-driven issues? **Michael Jensen** speculates as to whether scholarly publishing will survive; he asserts that “those who completely lock their material behind subscription walls risk marginalizing themselves over the long term. They simply won't be counted in the new authority measures. They need to cooperate with some of the new search sites and online repositories, share their data with outside computing systems.”⁵ However it is also likely that black and white solutions will not survive in the long term; hybrid approaches tailored to particular audiences and delivery channels have more chance of success.

Looming above this discussion, like the stormy sky in a **Dutch Master Painting**, is the role of **Google** and its ever-expanding suite of services. **Google** wants to encompass all roles within the dynamics of our participatory culture. I don't believe the sky will swallow us; it is clear that the scholarly communication process needs the functions assumed by libraries and publishers, though morphed into new roles for new times. **Google's** model is fundamentally linked to its advertising revenue and for all of the vaunted innovation in the **Googleplex**, it will never be able to replace the skills and value that libraries and publishers bring to the creation, collection, dissemination, accessing, and preservation of knowledge, and how this informs the evolution of scholarship. **Google's** services can complement but never replace the role of libraries and publishers, and this is becoming increasingly understood.

Dialogue

In the convergent world in which we live, libraries and publishers can learn from each other's experiences and challenges. We have major disagreements on one level while recognizing on another level that we need to work together in spite of these differences. The intersection of the commercial world with the non-profit educational community is reflected in our divergent values and the debates over such issues as digital rights management; copyright and licensing issues; pricing models for journals; equitable access; and how one legitimizes formal and informal modes of scholarly communication. In examining our values and actions we can have a keener understand-

ing of where our differences lie, and where is the potential synergy for collaboration. This should not be viewed as a zero sum game of winners and losers but rather a re-evaluation of our respective missions filtered through the lens of values and mission statements. There is no doubt that more opportunity for dialogue and mutual understanding can only serve to benefit everyone. We discuss issues at meetings, conferences, or workshops; we exchange emails and blog postings on current challenges; but how well do we really understand each other? Do we understand the complexities of technology, workflow, strategic planning, and decision-making in our respective worlds? Do we ever see this up close? Do we understand the stakeholders and interests in our differing environments? While there are laudable industry-wide initiatives such as **SERU**, **Project Transfer**, and **COUNTER**, does this dialogue trickle down to the institutional level? For example, does the publisher community understand the pedagogical and curricular trends in postsecondary education, the overwhelming impact of interdisciplinarity, the complexity of library operations and services, and the performance measurement indicators by which many libraries are now evaluated? Does the library community have a keen understanding of the various internal and external pressures facing publishers and how these affect the corporate decision-making process? I would suspect that in general we have only a superficial understanding of each other's environments, despite good intentions, and that we need to do much more to develop a common understanding, within the limits of what is possible.

Where do we go from here? Publishers and libraries both need to assess their strengths and weaknesses in the turbulent digital information economy — where does potential look strongest, and where do our threats come from? Risk has a certain meaning in the public sector world of most libraries; it has a very different meaning in the private sector world of commercial publishers — how do we factor risk into our strategic planning, and how do we distinguish good risks from bad ones? How do we determine priorities in allocating our time and money wisely? This links to the importance of innovation in how we chart the future. The **ACRL Report**, “Establishing a Research Agenda for Scholarly Communication,” notes that “The process of assimilating innovations into communication practices depends upon our ability to characterize and to understand their sources, trajectories, and potential benefits. . . . Innovation is difficult to track and may not be recognized for some time after it occurs. Even useful innovations aren't necessarily recognized and used by those who stand to benefit from them. Adoption of new communications approaches is varying widely within disciplines and even within sub-disciplines.”⁶ Innovation is usually assessed in hindsight, and we can learn from what has or hasn't been successful in our newfound role as publishers by assess-

ing impacts and outcomes, and by reflecting on the partnerships that were involved. The end user is one of the bridges between library and publisher, where both sectors critically need to focus. By dedicating more attention to the complex information-seeking behavior of today's users, we can move towards greater transformation to keep us both relevant and central to their workflow. This is already happening in many quarters. Identifying long-term trends, however, as opposed to the flavor of the month, is a more subtle affair that needs to be understood in relation to the cumulative impact of innovations both technological and social.

As libraries and publishers, how do our respective sets of values lead us consciously — or not so consciously — to approach opportunities and reinvent our roles in particular ways? There are no easy answers to these questions, but a sober reflection on our values as we face complex challenges can only improve our decision-making, and ultimately the impact we have on our institutions and on the future of the library profession. I would expect the same to hold true for publishers. Our conversations need to embrace both the crazy contradictions and patterns of coherence that make up the vibrant landscape in which we work. As an inveterate optimist, I am hopeful about the future. It is an exciting and bewildering time in the evolution of our knowledge-based, information-drenched, highly-networked society. 🌻

Endnotes

1. **Michael Gorman**, *The Enduring Library: Technology, Tradition, and the Quest for Balance*. (Chicago: **American Library Association**, 2003), 70.
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