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I Hear the Train A Comin' -- ProQuest

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consumers are no longer willing to pay for their print newspapers as a result. A recent study by the University of Southern California’s Annenberg School for Communication “found that 22 percent of Internet users have canceled a print subscription because they could get the same product online” (Vanacore).

“Newspapers and magazines traditionally have had three revenue sources: newsstand sales, subscriptions and advertising,” Isaacson explains. By giving away news content online, the revenue generated from newsstand sales and print subscriptions has diminished. In addition, the newspaper industry has failed to embrace the money-making opportunities of the Internet. “Circulation and advertising revenues have been in steady decline, and newspapers have not figured out how to profit from their Websites. Only about ten percent of newspaper advertising revenues are earned on the Internet,” says CQ Researcher. “Papers still generate 90 percent of their shrinking income from their printed products.”

Where Do Newspapers Go From Here?

In an effort to stay solvent, some newspapers, like the Seattle P-I, have either severely reduced or eliminated altogether the print version of the newspaper, focusing instead on their Websites. The Christian Science Monitor published its final daily print issue on March 26, 2009. A weekly publication, available both in print and online, was launched in its place. The Los Angeles Times stopped printing its Sunday Book Review in print last fall, greatly reducing the physical size of the Sunday edition of the newspaper. AnnArbor.com, the Web-based company launching in place of the Ann Arbor News, will publish continuously online and in print only on Thursdays and Sundays (http://www.mlive.com/news/ann-arbor/index.ssf/2009/05/last_day_for_ann_arbor_news_wi.html).

Isaacson suggests that one solution to the dilemma newspapers and new organizations find themselves in is the return to an old concept, charging for content and subscriptions, even in the online environment. No longer can news organizations afford to give away their content for free online.

Only a few newspapers currently charge for their online editions by requiring a monthly subscription. The most notable of these, says Isaacson, is the Wall Street Journal. While not common, this has turned out to be a good business decision. “Paid subscriptions for the Journal’s Website were up more than 7% in a very gloomy 2008,” says Isaacson.

Pointing out that few people will subscribe to a paper to read a single article or issue, Isaacson also advocates a “micropayment” system, an easy iTunes-like method of payment. “Under a micropayment system, a newspaper might decide to charge a nickel for an article, or a dime for that day’s full edition or for a month’s worth of Web access,” he says.

This approach is also supported by Jason Pontin at Technology Review. Says Pontin, “A reader should be able to buy a lifetime’s subscription or subscribe for a year, a month, a week, or a day. If it made sense, a reader should be able to buy a package of stories or even one story. The price of a subscription should reflect its duration and the platforms on which it is delivered.” The key is to offer flexibility and to consider the online content its own revenue stream, rather than a supplement to the print content.

Conclusion

Most print newspaper advocates voice a strong commitment to maintaining both print and online presences for newspaper publications. In the March 27, 2009 issue of CQ Researcher, John Sturm, current President and CEO of the Newspaper Association of America, argues that “the future is not print or online. It is both, creating a combined digital and print platform that makes newspapers the most efficient medium — and media buy — in any given market.” Sturm expresses optimism in the future of the print newspaper, and it remains to be seen if his optimism is well-founded.

For more on this topic, I recommend the entirety of the March 27, 2009 issue of CQ Researcher (vol. 19, no. 12), which is devoted to the decline of print newspapers, the future of journalism, and its effect on politics and democracy.

Resources


I Hear the Train A Comin’ — ProQuest

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Recently, I had the good fortune to check in with Boe Horton and Marty Kahn of ProQuest. Boe is Senior Vice President of Research Solutions at ProQuest, responsible for building the Serials Solutions, Community of Science and dissertations businesses. He served as Senior Vice President of Strategic Initiatives during the integration of ProQuest and CSA and successfully led the strategic integration of the two companies, as well as the strategic planning process. Marty is the CEO of ProQuest, with 30+ years of experience in the space. He has previously held senior management positions at OneSource Information Services, Ovid Technologies, and Vista Information, among other prominent organizations. Marty and Boe were kind enough to provide an update on ProQuest as it nears the two year anniversary of its acquisition by the Cambridge Information Group.

What are the three biggest challenges facing information providers in the next few years, and what is ProQuest doing to meet those challenges?

Boe Horton: I think the issues are fairly straightforward: have the right content, make it visible, and deliver it to users wherever they are. However, the real challenge comes in developing the best solutions to those issues.

Our role as an information partner is to ensure that we focus our resources on the new products and technologies that deliver the most value to libraries and their users. That means listening intently and responding to a unique community: researchers. ProQuest is listening to users every day, in focus groups, advisory boards, Webinars, and inside the library to determine what they need and what they expect. We’rezeroing in on researchers and the institutions that serve them, finding the precise common denominators that mean success to these users to build products that fit new and emerging online search behaviors. In fact, I’ve just come back today after a series of interviews with academic faculty members, researchers and graduate students regarding their needs and ideas we have regarding next generation services that would aid them in the research process.

Our outreach to researchers extends around the world. We have just completed a study of researchers in China that I will be presenting next week to senior Chinese academic librarians in Hang Zhou that looks at the challenges researchers face and areas in which librarians and vendors can help. I’d be pleased to share some of the key findings in a future edition of Against the Grain!

We’ve also formalized the feedback process with the establishment of a dedicated R&D organization, which is focused on investigating and promoting new ways in which our services and content can improve user performance. Our R&D organization is continually monitoring continued on page 93
new technologies and testing their applicability with researchers are using. The team collaborates with technology vendors, publishers, librarians, end-users, and educators, and tests prototypes in ProQuest's R&D lab. For instance, the team is currently looking into enhanced language and translation capabilities and intelligent linking of cross disciplinary content.

ProQuest is a substantially different company today compared to a decade ago. In what ways has its mission changed, and in what ways has it stayed the same?

Marty Kahn: While the times have changed considerably, our commitment to libraries as our core business has not. We firmly believe in the role that libraries and librarians are going to perform over the long term. Their creative function in helping their communities find sources of information and enlightenment is not diminishing. In fact, it's increasing, and will become an ever more important function as information becomes more complex.

A decade ago, ProQuest was beginning to leverage its experience as a leading microfilm and CD-ROM provider to create online information solutions, and users were just beginning to experience the potential of the Internet. It was very much about this new way of hosting information. Today, we're looking at the user experience: breaking down silos of information so that it's all there for the user without barriers, enabling research that goes deeper and deeper into content, uncovering insightful, new pieces of data that illuminate the user's research. It's really about creating tools to work effectively with that content — identifying it, sitting through it, analyzing it and applying it. In fact, we're well into the development of a brand-new platform which, over time, will host all content in the ProQuest family. By early 2010, we expect to unveil this new platform, which for starters, will bring an excellent user's research. It's really about creating tools to work effectively with that content — identifying it, sitting through it, analyzing it and applying it. In fact, we're well into the development of a brand-new platform which, over time, will host all content in the ProQuest family. By early 2010, we expect to unveil this new platform, which for starters, will bring an excellent

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ways, all of it aimed at helping users find obvious ways to start their research. Not only is there the Summon service and the new eLibrary, but in 2008, we also launched ProQuest Central, the largest aggregated full-text database for libraries. It serves as the scholarly resource. ProQuest Central offers the most full text scholarly publications in a single database. As the crown jewel of our aggregated offering, we anticipate that it will be the single most used database across disciplines — it’s already giving libraries a solid starting place for the diverse needs of their patrons. The launch of ProQuest Central helps fulfill our mission to create indispensable research solutions that connect people and information.

Serials Solutions has, in recent years, expanded the notion of e-resource management. Can you explain the process by which an innovative product such as the Summon unified discovery service comes to be?

Boe Horton: The genesis of the Summon service is our own research into end-user markets — specifically, students — and a growing body of studies showing a gradual disintermediation of the library in the faculty research process. These studies showed a fundamental stumbling block in getting to library resources — no clear, compelling starting point. End-users were just confused by the wealth of resources. We saw in Summon an absolutely critical component to its success. Obviously, Summon brings an excellent set of resources — not only content, but relationships with publishers. The involvement of other publishers is essential. Gale, with its tremendous content, is also a key contributor. We also have about 100 other content providers and more are signing on everyday. We’re all in this together — aggregators, publishers. We all recognize that tackling this barrier is essential to healthy use of libraries and their content.

ProQuest celebrated its 70th birthday last year. What is the common thread that binds the company’s history from its University Microfilms days through today?

Marty Kahn: University Microfilms was created in 1938 by Eugene Power to safeguard the world's scholarly resources, and has served as the dedicated steward of significant collections — including graduate works — ever since. Eugene Power’s vision of using UMI to preserve and make content accessible globally is similar to the mandate of today’s online publishers. Power used the best technology of his time to provide worldwide access to information, just as ProQuest does today.

ProQuest continues to be a pioneer — increasing access to information, ensuring that content is available for generations of patrons to come, and redefining the end user experience.