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The Scholarly Publishing Scene-The Art of Editing Engineering Handbooks

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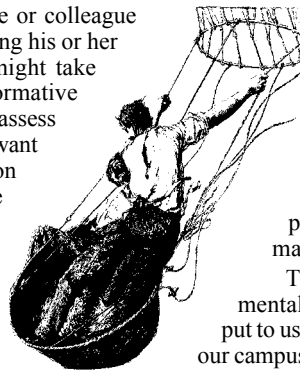
and libraries to order and obtain copies of a book by making sure it is always in stock and by supplying full and accurate metadata about that book to the marketplace. Make it easy for the author events coordinator to say yes to an author because he/she is coming with a ready-made, targeted mailing list of people to invite to an event.

The problem-solver philosophy translated over easily to my work as an acquisitions editor. I am an aide to young faculty needing to put that all-important first book together for a tenure packet. Together with peer reviewers, we map out a plan for turning a dissertation — a document created to adhere to a very specific format and designed to address a sometimes narrow set of concerns — into a work of scholarship designed for a broader audience, work that will add something of significance to the conversations and ideas bubbling up within its discipline. With trade and regional books, I look at project proposals and ask myself, how will the author of this book and I get to the same desired end goal (a well done book that also sells)? What different routes will get us there together? Will switching the voice or tense make a difference in the reader experience? Do we need to discover and thread a stronger narrative arc throughout the project? Will cutting or rearranging parts of the manuscript release the outstanding book just waiting to be published?

Some manuscripts come to my desk requiring little work (sometimes authors are even

lucky enough to have a spouse or colleague who is a fine copyeditor wielding his or her own red pencil), but others might take a year or more in this transformative process. My job is not only to assess where it is that the author and I want to go together, but also to put on my psychologist hat to figure out what exactly an author will be willing and actually capable of doing in the way of manuscript transformation and how to motivate us both during that process. I am a translator of opposing peer reviews (not an uncommon situation), working with the author to figure out which set of suggested changes will most benefit the manuscript. Recently I was talking with a retired academic on a book about a remarkable woman who worked for civil rights in Mississippi. We had been working together for several months, and the author thanked me for my candor on the prospects for the manuscript and the assessment of what kind of work it would need to become a book that readers could successfully engage with. I was glad that she felt my comments were useful to her, but I also realized that what she was acknowledging was this problem-solving spirit as we discussed how to make this germ of a manuscript into something that really shines.

As an administrator, there are all kinds of issues for me to solve. In a world of limited resources, where do we put the money so that our goals as a scholarly publisher are best fulfilled? Are staff putting time into the activities that will most benefit the press and its books,



and do they have the resources they need to do their jobs fully and effectively? Are we embracing the right electronic strategies, both in and out of house, ones that will allow us to disseminate our content most widely and that will let us compete successfully in a challenging marketplace?

The publisher-as-problem-solver mentality is perhaps most effectively put to use as we think about ways to serve our campuses. We are a resource for faculty as we engage in conversations that (hopefully) demystify the complex and rapidly-changing world of scholarly communication. We are a resource for administrators as they assemble teams to create student textbook strategies or rethink the way a campus LMS is being used. We can be valuable participants in discussions of changing tenure requirements and how electronic publishing figures into new tenure guidelines. We should be at the table when libraries develop fair use guidelines for faculty and part of discussions of how faculty and students want to use and access content.

Like our many campus and academic partners, we want to see scholarship flourish in ways that benefit us all. One of the things the revolution in electronic content has done is to knit us — and our fortunes — together more closely than ever before. So let us as publishers bring our perspectives and our problem solving skills to bear on those questions that vex us all as we map the future for our campuses, our organizations, and our readers. 🌱

The Scholarly Publishing Scene — The Art of Editing Engineering Handbooks

Column Editor: **Myer Kutz** (President, Myer Kutz Associates, Inc.) <myerkutz@aol.com>

In this column I'm going to talk about how I develop an engineering handbook, comprised of chapters written by contributors, from conception of the idea for a title to submission of a manuscript to a publisher. This process can take as little as eighteen months to two years, but in many cases, perhaps the majority, it can take much longer. Because I make a significant part of my living from handbook royalties, there is an economic need to keep the process as short as possible. But an academic, say, with more professional commitments than I have at this stage of my life, might keep a publishing house waiting much longer than it would like. Generally, publishers' deadlines for manuscript submission have been soft and delays have been granted with no more fuss than an aggrieved sigh. But now one of my publishers has begun to insist on hard deadlines without an ounce of mercy.

The ideas for most of the ten handbook titles — most of them in multiple editions — I've worked on over the past thirty years have

come mostly from me. (This is also true of the seven books in a series I dreamed up.) There are a couple of exceptions. The first handbook I worked on was intended to be a new edition of a handbook that had fallen into neglect. (The old title was discarded eventually and the update became my own, entirely new handbook.) In another case I put together the fifth edition of an existing title, and one time I produced a reference book in response to an acquisitions editor's request — although it didn't turn out to be exactly what he'd had in mind.

I favor broad topics — the name of an engineering discipline (mechanical, biomedical, or environmental engineering), a major sub-discipline (transportation or plastics engineering), or an activity like materials selection for engineering

applications, environmental degradation of engineering materials, design of machinery used in food production, or how engineers and scientists measure things. Over the years, I've made enough contacts in STM publishing that I can get an acquisitions editor's ear for an engineering handbook idea without too much trouble. Unlike trade publishing, an agent is not required.

From this initial, and preliminary, point forward, the process becomes more formal for everyone, even for someone like me who has a leg up in getting a publisher to say yes. Publishers have standard proposal forms which require authors and editors to provide a great deal of information about who they are and what they have in mind. A proposal form can ask for a detailed description of the book being



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proposed; if the book is to a contributed work, who potential contributors might be; a full table of contents; the benefits the proposed book will provide to users; an analysis of any competing works; even how many pages long the work will be and how many equations and figures it will have. Years ago, I used editorial boards to put handbook Tables of Contents together. But given not only my STM publishing experience, but also my having worked as a mechanical engineer (I hold engineering degrees), I put that editorial-board crutch aside after the first couple of projects.

Once the proposal form has been completed to the satisfaction of the acquisitions editor, the proposal goes through an approval process that may include a single higher-level decision maker or an editorial board or committee charged with deciding which proposals to accept and what changes they might like to see made. The contract offered to an author or editor is rather one-sided — in the publisher's favor, of course. For authors and editors not used to the language lawyers find necessary, indemnification clauses, say, and other contractual provisions regarding timely delivery and acceptability of manuscripts will sound intimidating. I blithely sign these documents. Contributor contracts of similar menace exist. But for more than a decade, I have used my own, brief handshake-style agreement with contributors to my handbooks. It specifies the due date for a chapter, how long I want it to be, that the contributor warrants that the chapter is his or her own work, that permission must be obtained for anything borrowed from a copyright holder, and what the contributor gets in remuneration — these days, a copy of the book. (It's a miracle that I can get contributors and that more than eighty percent of them actually deliver high-quality chapters.) The agreement fits on one page. It's much shorter than anything a publisher sends out.

So basically I contact with individual chapter contributors and a publisher contracts with me alone for a complete handbook. I'm a packager, more or less. Currently, one publisher, with a new head of contracts—a lawyer, of course — is balking at this procedure, which has worked well for years. This publisher's own contracts have gone out to contributors to a new handbook, and some of them are also balking, no surprise to me.

Thirty years ago, when I undertook my first handbook project, I'd been working in STM publishing for some time. I'd started as an acquisitions editor, I'd travelled a great deal, mainly to university campuses, to recruit authors, and I'd built up a large Rolodex of engineering professors and other professionals. At that time I used the telephone to look for potential handbook chapter contributors, going to one possibility, getting names and phone numbers of other possibilities if that person couldn't contribute, and on and on until I found someone who would. (Around that time I ran into a legendary acquisitions editor who told me that his contact method was a formal letter, sent without prior contact. I thought he was barmy.)



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Nowadays, of course, I use the Internet. Engineering schools make faculty expertise and contact information freely available, and clever use of search terms can expand the possibilities to industry and government. You can find anyone, anywhere, who knows about any particular thing. Whether that person will be willing to contribute a handbook chapter is another matter. To inquire, I use a standard, one-page email under a subject like Invitation to Contribute Handbook Chapter. I think it's important to keep the request brief. I mention the particular handbook at issue, of course, the topic of the chapter I'm asking for, when I'd like to receive it, how long it ought to be,

and the technical level at which it I'd like it to be written. Under my signature, I list all the contributed reference works I've published.

Sometimes I get a reply instantly. If I haven't heard anything after a couple of days, I resend the email under the subject, Second Request. I don't keep statistics on success rates. It can take as many as a dozen tries to secure a contributor for a chapter. Sometimes the first invitation works. Occasionally, I can't find anyone. It's all random and unpredictable.

Filling out a contributor roster can take months. I have been pleasantly surprised on

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And They Were There

Reports of Meetings — 32nd Annual Charleston Conference

Issues in Book and Serial Acquisition, “Accentuate the Positive,” Francis Marion Hotel, Courtyard Marriott Historic District, Addestone Library, and School of Science and Mathematics Building, College of Charleston, Charleston, SC, November 7-10, 2012

Charleston Conference Reports compiled by: **Ramune K. Kubilius** (Collection Development / Special Projects Librarian, Northwestern University, Galter Health Sciences Library) <r-kubilius@northwestern.edu>

Column Editor’s Note: Thank you to all of the *Charleston Conference* attendees who agreed to write short reports that highlight sessions they attended at the 2012 conference. All attempts were made to provide a broad coverage of sessions, and notes are included in the reports to reflect known changes in the session titles or presenters, highlighting those that were not printed in the conference’s final program (though some may have been reflected in the online program). Please visit the Conference Website, <http://www.katina.info/conference>, for the online conference schedule from which there are links to many presentations, handouts, plenary session videos, and plenary session reports by the **2012 Charleston Conference** blogger, **Don Hawkins**. Visit the conference blog at <http://www.against-the-grain.com/category/blog-posts/charleston2012/>. The **2012 Charleston Conference Proceedings** will be published in partnership with **Purdue University Press** in 2013.

In this issue of *ATG* you will find the final installment of 2012 conference reports. The first four installments can be found in *ATG* v.25#1, February 2013, v.25#2, April 2013, v.25#3, June 2013, and v.25#4, September 2013. Watch for 2013 Charleston Conference reports to begin next year in the February 2014 issue of *ATG*. — **RKK**

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 9, 2012 AFTERNOON PLENARY SESSIONS

SCOAP3: Going Live with the Dream — Presented by **Ann Okerson** (SCOAP3 Steering Committee Member, and Senior Advisor to CRL, Center for Research Libraries)

Reported by: **Ramune K. Kubilius** (Northwestern University, Galter Health Sciences Library) <r-kubilius@northwestern.edu>

In this brief plenary session, **Okerson** familiarized attendees with the SCOAP3 project — its formation by a coalition of stakeholders operating under a fair share principle, each country contributing its own. From initial consultations in 2005, the project developed an early business model, received “expressions of interest,” with bids and evaluation, and publishers opting in. The

“go live” date will be Jan. 2014 with a “reconciliation facility” for redirecting cost reduction increases. In a wider context, SCOAP3, though physics subject-oriented, can serve as an observatory, a case study, and libraries cannot afford to “opt out” of this trend. This type of activity can decrease subscription costs and provide a voice in governance, become part of the IR, and the larger OA community.

Find > Search — Presented by **Marjorie Hlava** (Access Innovations); **Elisabeth Leonard** (SAGE Publications Ltd); **Meg White** (Rittenhouse Book Distributors, Inc.); **Stanley Wilder** (UNC Charlotte); **Elizabeth Willingham** (Silverchair)

Reported by: **Ramune K. Kubilius** (Northwestern University, Galter Health Sciences Library) <r-kubilius@northwestern.edu>

White served as moderator and the panel provided input to questions she posed — How do organizations view “search and find?” How are we doing? Can we do better, etc.? **Leonard**, representing vendors, stated that data must be analyzed — it explains usage, the patterns of authors, users, readers. One can’t sit with the user every day. **Willingham** mentioned that “search” starts at the authoring process: that is why it is so hard. **Hlava** maintained that designing a search algorithm is 5% discovery and 95% knowing what the users want. **Wilder** argued that there is an element of “attitude” and “churn,” and that after building consensus on the centrality of issues, resources are poured into that area. **Google** sets the bar. As for the tolerance for false positives, there seems to be an expectation of “surprise me” rather than a definitive answer. “Don’t change the search, but where they go” (are led). Can users be educated about taxonomy, “library science meets computer science,” MARC vs. field data...? Consumers will look and look (for shoes or airline flights), but for medical searches, they want to know when “they are there”... Quoting an earlier plenary speaker

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occasion, however. Getting a dozen contributors for a book on sustainable manufacturing took less than a week. I give contributors nine months or so to submit their chapters (the human gestation period just feels right). I often have to wait longer, and sometimes I have to hound people, mindful always that handbook contributors don’t get paid — although recently one of my publishers sent contributors to one of my handbooks a modest honorarium. (The publisher’s email request for tax ID information provoked suspicions of an identity theft scam.) The success rate of obtaining chapters pretty much adheres to the positive side of the eighty-twenty rule.

In a future column, I’ll discuss what happens after I receive an acceptable chapter. For now, I’d like to turn to the question indicated by

this column’s title: Is editing engineering handbooks an art? Of course, it does take some imagination, an essential factor in making a work of art, to think up a topic that will work. Then it’s not merely a matter of dreaming up chapter titles and slotting them properly into a TOC. You also have to feel confident that you can find contributors for those chapters. Rooting around the Internet for a while, and seeing whether there might be multiple contributor candidates for some chapters, can help put your mind at ease. Once you actually start filling out the contributor roster, other considerations arise that require experience and imagination. When you find someone who seems to have the expertise you want for a particular chapter, you have to somehow assess whether that person will be willing to sign a contract, and having done that, actually deliver the chapter nine months or so later. It’s seeing into the psyches, or souls, of people you’ve never met, and getting it right eighty percent of the time, that strikes me as an art. 🐛