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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’re zeroing 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

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helps fulfill our mission: We’ve seen tremendous innovations coming to the market now. We’ve helped more researchers use academic resources across Brazil, and in the former Eastern bloc — so libraries and librarians are going to perform considerably, our core business has not. We firmly believe in the role that libraries and librarians will become an even 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 provide users with access to existing ProQuest, CSA, and even some Chadwyck-Healey content on one platform with a set of consistent, powerful tools that unlock the potential of this extraordinary information vista.

It has been almost two years since Cambridge Information Group acquired ProQuest. What tangible impact do you think this change has had on the marketplace?

Marty Kahn: We’ve seen tremendous growth in the last two years. The lines between our former businesses and organizations have been dissolved to build a united, stronger, more 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 even more important function as information becomes more complex.

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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 makes the greatest impact in academic markets, but we’re also enthusiastic about and investing in our schools division. You can see that effort in our revolutionary change to the eLibrary research database. The new eLibrary lets students engage immediately with a topic by offering editorially selected results that jump-start the research process. That’s the big hurdle for young researchers — where do I start? It’s designed for next-gen users, with features familiar from Web search engines, customized in-product Web applications, media-rich content and Web 2.0 interactivity.

I’ll touch on one more example — one that will make a big difference for public libraries and casual researchers around the world: we formed a partnership with Google that will enable the Summon of academic resources and local newspaper content that will be available on the open Web. This is an interesting model that spares library budgets and brings to the online world content that wouldn’t normally be digitized, but has value to someone.

I believe the growth and development we’ve had since the acquisition is a direct result of the combined deep knowledge of libraries that both CSA and ProQuest brought to the table and the extensive end user research we’ve done as a unified organization.

In the press release at the time of the acquisition, there is a quote stating, “The new company will leverage deep content sets with a history of innovative product development to bring the community of libraries, researchers, faculty and students one of the most extensive electronic resources available.” How would you grade the company on that front, and why?

Marty Kahn: At that time, we were looking at the almost eerily perfect way that ProQuest and CSA content complemented each other. For instance, CSA brought expertise in natural sciences, social sciences, arts and humanities. ProQuest brought content strength in business, economics, general reference, genealogy, humanities, social sciences, scientific, technical and medical content. Put those two together and you have the spectrum of academic research covered. Both sides of the business brought technological and A&D expertise. The ProQuest platform, of course, has a history of innovation and CSA brought deep indexing technology that allows unprecedented searching and retrieval of the content that resides in illustrations. The combination of assets formed a foundation to address the challenges faced by libraries and their users better than ever before.

It’s still heady stuff, but that was just the start. We continue to hunt down valuable content sets hidden data that offers genuine insight. Further, we know that another important role we can play in this world is giving the user very clear sign posts about how to get to the information they want. We’re tackling that in a number of 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 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.

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Serials Solutions has a deep understanding of libraries. It was founded by librarians and set its mission to identify the barriers that prevented libraries from fully leveraging the opportunities that e-resources present. It has a legacy of creating logical tools that allow libraries to overcome these barriers. Further, it has technical expertise and experience with hosting systems. However, because this is a single search against a pre-harvested index of content, cooperation of content providers is absolutely critical to its success. Obviously, ProQuest 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.

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