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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 gloopy 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 One-Source 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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new technologies and testing their applicability for researchers are using ProQuest 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, siting 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 — an absolute set of consistent, powerful tools that unlock the potential of this extraordinary information vista.

I’ve 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 competitive company. ProQuest plays a pivotal role for researchers and the librarians who serve them, so a strong ProQuest brings a fair amount of stability to the marketplace. We’ve had global growth — especially in countries like China, India, Brazil, and in the former Eastern bloc — so more researchers are to more scholarly resources. In fact, we recently launched an Arabic interface. 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 — an absolute set of consistent, powerful tools that unlock the potential of this extraordinary information vista.

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