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# ATG Special Report-How the Emergence of Digital Content is Transforming the Publishing Industry

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# ATG Special Report — How the Emergence of Digital Content is Transforming the Publishing Industry

by **Delores Meglio** (Vice President of Publisher Relations, Knovel) <dmeiglio@knovel.com>

Not long ago, you had to use a phone book or call directory assistance to get the phone number for a restaurant. Today, by searching online, not only can you find that phone number instantly, but you can also read or post reviews, browse the menu, and make a reservation — without ever placing a call.

Need directions? Just plot your course on an interactive online map, especially if you don't have GPS on your Smartphone or in your car. Not sure how to dress? You can check the weather online. For Gen Y, affectionately dubbed "digital natives," life has always been this convenient. Growing up with the ability to access this type of information almost instantaneously coupled with the availability of digital devices such as iPads, Nooks, and Kindles has created an implicit expectation for fast access to content.

Similarly, the world of publishing and digital content has dramatically changed in the past decade. In 2003, I began working with **Knovel** (<http://why.knovel.com>), a company which offers validated content from more than 70 publishers and societies, optimized search and data analysis tools enabling engineers to find relevant data, analyze, document, and incorporate it into their everyday work. PDF and HTML were the preferred formats for digital content then, while SGML and XML were only available to some extent. The digital platform at that time generally required a custom reader or **Adobe Reader** to access online content. Many vendors still use CD-ROM for content delivery.

Since then, technology has altered the way we view and use content. Consider these advancements in the industry since 2003:

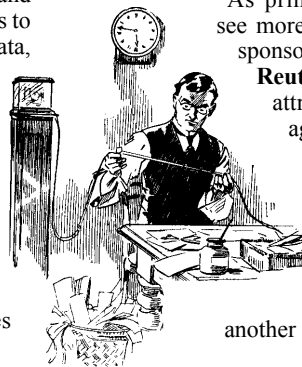
- The **Kindle** and e-readers emerged;
- Content could be directly downloaded to your Smartphone;
- PDFs gave way to Web snippets and customized distribution of content;
- We went from using desktops to laptops to Netbooks, allowing for greater mobility;
- We are no longer tethered to our desks thanks to ubiquitous wireless connectivity.

As information proliferated online, portals developed and search became more sophisticated. Users are now accustomed to accessing free content, while news organizations and publishers struggle to find the right revenue model. As blogs emerged and more people began to self-publish, content producers had to evolve in order to remain relevant, timely, and credible sources of information.

## Staying Relevant

These changes have caused some traditional print publishers to examine how to format their content to accommodate these new demands for access. Since accessibility and distribution remain key considerations for content producers, an online presence may allow for faster distribution and a more efficient production method. Publishers who choose to move in this direction will find other benefits including:

- **Interactive content:** this is one area of growing interest to publishers. Interactive content is already woven into our personal life and increasingly in our professional life. Interactivity allows users to become more engaged with the content. They can extract data, download graphics, share information, and even offer instant feedback.
- **Ease of access:** the ability to access global resources and other content or new subject areas is easier than in the past;
- **Timeliness of content:** publishers can update content more frequently, while others provide only digital content, so that they can routinely update content as new ideas emerge;
- **Discoverability of content:** users discover content in titles that they might not have known existed. Using refined search capabilities across a large section of diverse data improves discoverability.



## Role of Librarians

As digital content continues to evolve and become more sophisticated, one begins to question the role of librarians, particularly in corporate and academic settings. In one of his blog postings earlier this year ([http://sethgodin.typepad.com/seths\\_blog/2010/01/the-future-of-the-library.html](http://sethgodin.typepad.com/seths_blog/2010/01/the-future-of-the-library.html)), bestselling author **Seth Godin** asked about the future of the library and librarians: what should they do to become relevant in the digital age?

Libraries in both the corporate world and academia will exist, but not in the traditional sense that we think of. While stacks may become a thing of the past, as electronic resources become increasingly available and eliminating paper books and journals frees up valuable real estate space, libraries will continue to evolve into a resource center.

As a result, librarians will be frequently called upon to be analysts and not merely hunters and gathers. In the past, our end users, specifically those in Research and Development, would submit a request to the corporate librarian who would then fulfill the query. Now, librarians are still identifying the best resources for their patrons, but are teaching them how to use the library's new digital assets to enhance their work experience.

Additionally, librarians need to maintain the digital collection and acquire new content based on the organization's needs. As more books and journals become available online, the librarian needs to ensure that the resource center has access to this content.

In academia, the role of the librarian is already more comprehensive because of the vast collection of electronic resources. As in the corporate world, the role of the librarian is transforming into a teaching role, training patrons how to use resources.

Likewise, academic librarians are responsible for building the collection of content. Many librarians also have to heavily market their content to their users. They leverage social media tools including **Delicious**, blogs, and **Facebook** to sustain a significant online presence, because their job is validated by usage, i.e., how many people access this content and how often.

## Digital Content Concerns

While some traditional print publishers have already moved towards a digital platform, there is still some resistance to digital publishing for several reasons.

### Cannibalizing Existing Print Revenue

Fear of what might happen to the advertising and subscription revenue stream is always a concern. Content producers worry about pricing and whether or not they can charge for electronic access to content the same way they have for print. However, augmenting your print publication with digital content does allow you to reach a global set of users, which is always attractive to advertisers. Not only does digital content meet the needs of the digital natives who are accustomed to online access, but digital copies of books or journals are more easily searched, increasing both discoverability and usage.

As print advertising decreases, you can expect to see more advertising-based offerings such as **Google**-sponsored ads. Subscription models like **Thomson Reuters**, **Ziff-Davis**, and the **New York Times** are attractive for publishers. Working with content aggregators is also an attractive option because it gives publishers a chance to generate ancillary revenues in addition to their other income channels.

### Piracy Issues

Piracy issues, particularly in countries where copyright is not strictly enforced, are another concern for content producers, but many steps

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have been taken to discourage infringement. As digital content becomes more prevalent in the publishing industry, it is important for companies to ensure they have the necessary proprietary tools and preventative measures to track down any culprits. These standard features discourage people from pirating the data.

### Lack of a Universal Platform

With all of the ongoing technological changes, publishers are in a quandary about the best way to proceed — whether they should use PDF, XML, HTML, and what platform is the best to house their data. Currently, there is no universal platform which meets the needs of all publishers. If you implement your own system, the cost of maintenance and development is so much greater. There are other components you need to consider, such as access rights management. Your platform needs to know what rights its users have to access certain kinds of content. Another component is a search engine to render the search results precisely. If a publishing platform doesn't have a strong search engine component, it's useless.

As a result, professional societies and small publishers, which may have limited resources to develop and maintain their own platform, can benefit from working with aggregators that have a platform in place, along with an access rights management system and a search engine function already built in.

In the academic space, librarians are tasked with deciding what type of platform will best serve the specific needs of its patrons. Aggregators are often a good choice because they offer relevant content on a universal platform. They can serve a broad audience with a wide spectrum of content that is consistent with what the academic community values.

### Resistance to Change

One final concern, which is actually more of an obstacle, is that some seniors in executive positions are still clinging to the old comfortable business models instead of venturing into the new digital world. If they still believe that print is the only delivery method, just point out how sales of eBooks recently outnumbered sales of hardcover books for the first time on **Amazon.com** ([http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/20/technology/20kindle.html?\\_r=2&ref=business](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/20/technology/20kindle.html?_r=2&ref=business)).

### The Future of Digital Publishing

There is no doubt that digital publishing is going to be dominant in the future because of its ease of use, ubiquity of the data, and accessibility. As content is commoditized, publishers have to consider ways to add value and offer content that is more interactive.

One current trend is that online content is shifting people towards handheld devices. Also, as networks become faster, they are able to download large quantities of information and not just text — they'll be able to download heavy graphics and multimedia content, thus allowing even more interactivity with the content.

Publishers must keep abreast of these technological changes and be innovative or partner with companies that are constantly communicating with the end users to remain ahead of trends and opportunities. At the same time, librarians must be active in keeping publishers informed on what users want and need to do their jobs or tasks effectively. 🌱

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### Five Considerations for Digital Publishing Partnerships

There are five elements to consider as you evaluate content distribution partnerships:

- 1) Experience. As you select a digital publisher partner, consider their network of trusted sources. Who are they working with? Do they have a track record of success? How long have they been in business? Are they in a similar industry? Is there a fit for a small publisher (if you are)?
- 2) Value-Add. Many publishers, particularly smaller ones, fear their content will be commoditized. When going digital, they want to be sure the partner will add value to sales and not cannibalize existing revenue streams. The partner should be able to add value to the content offered and make it stand apart from other offerings (i.e., make content interactive). Are they able to add to your existing revenue base?
- 3) Expand Markets. Will the partner enable you to reach a new market of buyers? Will they enable you to differentiate from the market of printed books? Can you sell digital as a premium? New space should equal new revenue. Avoid cannibalization. Do they have a good sales and marketing team? Do they have a channel to promote growth?
- 4) Digital Rights. Select a partner that aims for reasonable protection. You can't rely on technology alone. A thief will find a way. Select a partner that has a fundamental respect for copyrights of Intellectual Property. Ask if they have a plan to monitor usage. Do they take steps as issues arise? Some may opt to manually review peer hosting sites to search for content.
- 5) Evolving IT Environment. Don't get locked into a legacy or proprietary platform. Select a partner that is responsive to new technology and trends. With the right partner, you can raise your profile and ride the coattails of their successes and innovation.

### Rumors

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I am planning to visit as soon as I can!

Have to ask you all to take a moment to remember **Judy Webster**, long-time coordinator of the **Charleston Conference** until her untimely death in December, 1998. I still miss her. ; (

*Against the Grain*, Dec, 98/Jan 1999, v.10#6  
[serials.infomotions.com/acqnet/text/acqnet-v9n002.txt](http://serials.infomotions.com/acqnet/text/acqnet-v9n002.txt)

1986 was a very good year for the **Charleston Conference**. It was the first year the **Conference** ran for three days (November 6-8). It was the first time that the unforgettable bookman **Lyman Newlin** was a speaker. It was

the first year that the **Conference** broke 100 attendees. And it also was the first (and only) year that **Katina** had everyone to her house for the **Opening Gala Reception**.

So sorry to learn that the wonderful **Leonard diSanto (H.W. Wilson)** will not be at the **Conference** this year because he had to go care for his sick Mom down in Florida. But the just as wonderful **Deborah Loeding** will be here!

Let's not forget to welcome the hundreds of **new attendees** at the **Charleston Conference** this year — at last count 331 of 1144, nearly 30%! We have **people profiles** on some of the new timers which we will post online at the **Conference Website** and hopefully print for the **Conference** tote bags!

Was talking to **Cindy Campbell**, a first timer (or new timer as opposed to old timer)

the other day. She is Acquisitions Librarian at **Edison State College** in Fort Myers, Florida. **Cindy** was telling me that **Thomas Edison** built **Seminole Lodge**, a house in **Fort Meyers**. And, guess what, there is an **Edison Festival of Light** every year in February. The **Edison Festival of Light** has been named one of North American's Top 100 events and one of the top 20 in the Southeast. And **Charleston** thought that we had the first lighted house (Sotile house) in the U.S.! What you don't learn when you talk to a librarian!!

[www.edisonfestival.org/](http://www.edisonfestival.org/)  
[www.edison.edu](http://www.edison.edu)  
[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas\\_Edison](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Edison)

And **MANY THANKS** to the companies that gave scholarships to the **Charleston Con-**

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