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## From the University Presses -- University eBook Collections: Coming Now!

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# From the University Presses — University Press eBook Collections: Coming Now!

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<http://www.temple.edu/tempress>

eBooks, eBooks, eBooks. Libraries and university presses have been talking about them for years, but creating, selling, and using them on a more limited basis than all the talk might suggest. It's been baby steps — small numbers of books, often heavy DRM, a constant struggle to build the infrastructure necessary to support a large-scale move to digital. That's all about to change.

Four initiatives are underway, with two already providing books, one scheduled to start providing them in January 2012, and another by that June. **Oxford Scholarship Online** and **Cambridge Books Online** are already providing eBooks linked to journals and other materials, so far primarily for their own books, though each initiative also provides books from other presses as well. The **University Press Content Consortium (UPCC)**, the result of **Project Muse Editions** and the **University Press eBook Consortium (UPEc)** joining forces, will offer subject area collections from fifty to sixty presses come January. And **JSTOR** will launch **Books at JSTOR** mid-2012, presenting the combined lists of its own set of university presses.

Full disclosure. I was one of the founding directors of the **UPEc** initiative and so I naturally know more about that project's original aims and how its current alliance with **Project Muse** came about. But there are elements common to all these initiatives that demonstrate how eBooks should encourage a symbiotic relationship between university presses and libraries. That relationship should provide a much-needed boost to the dissemination of humanities and social science scholarship and may help universities regain some control over the intellectual property they generate.

It will surprise nobody to hear again that libraries and university presses both face budgetary stresses. What is perhaps less well known is that the percentage of revenue that university presses derive from the library market has been in steady decline for at least a quarter century. The reasons, including the serials crisis, needn't be rehashed here, but it's safe to say that most university presses currently depend on libraries for only twenty to twenty-five percent of their revenue, down from what was for some presses as high as fifty percent.

Whatever the causes for this decline, it's a pretty safe bet that book prices played a very small role. An informal university press survey in 2010 revealed that the average cloth monograph from a university press sells for between \$40 and \$50. And the work-around used by many libraries whereby they purchase a paperback version of a book published simultaneously in both cloth and paper, then rebind it themselves, yields an even lower cost per book.

Rather than price and in addition to the serials crisis, a major factor in the increasingly precipitous decline in sales of university press books to libraries (as few as 75-100 cloth copies for some simultaneous cloth-paper books) has been their perceived lack of use by faculty and students. Unfortunately, use for printed books can only be measured by checkouts and ignores any in-library use where a book is consulted and then returned to the shelf.

Discoverability is also harder. Though the book is of course in the library's OPAC, a user still has to go to the shelf, find it (let us hope it isn't mis-shelved, even a little), and then take it away. End result — some devastating surveys in the past couple of years that indicated zero checkouts (again, the only form of usage measurable for physical books) for something along the lines of seventy or eighty percent of books purchased.

The university press directors who started the **UPEc** initiative (**NYU**, **Penn**, **Rutgers**, and **Temple**, later joined by **Nebraska**) obviously did so in the hopes we could increase sales to libraries, but it didn't take long in our library research to see that eBooks could vastly increase the discoverability of our authors' work and document many more forms of usage than a print-book checkout system might reveal. Our great hope was and is that more usage would lead to more books being purchased. The notion that we could replace a vicious cycle — don't buy what people don't use — with a virtuous one — buy more of what people use — has been further buoyed by what seems in 2011 to be a mild resurgence in the recognition that humanities and social science scholarship is as vital to a healthy society and a healthy university as STM scholarship. Because university press lists are dominated by humanities and social science books (and fiction, poetry, and regional titles), this is good news for the presses.

For the eBook initiatives to work, publishers in each must provide the books in a way that libraries want to use them and will have to work with librarians to address whatever concerns arise as we go along. I'll argue below that to resolve at least one issue, the presses will have to work together themselves. And librarians will need to recognize that publisher concerns as we launch this collective initiative are indeed legitimate. Happily, all sides I've talked with over the past two years have expressed a real interest in making this work. There is cause for optimism.

All or almost all the initiatives will be providing MARC records for publishers, along

with rich metadata in other forms. Almost all have plans for DOIs and for, if not abstracts on the chapter level, then at least the first 200 words or so to provide a sense of chapter content. One initiative offers XML from the start; the rest will provide PDF at launch, with some form of XML (epub is the current favorite, but I'm not counting on a single format just yet) to follow in relatively short order.

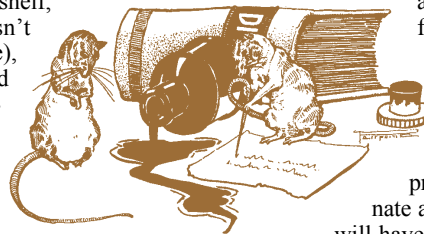
Similarly, the initiatives all employ light DRM and I believe will allow simultaneous views. Some will allow purchase-to-own alongside subscription offerings. At some point all are likely to offer print-on-demand along with pricing for simultaneous print and electronic purchase. Tiered pricing will likely predominate and though each initiative will have its own flavor, it's likely all will work to broaden their selling channels beyond research institutions. Relatedly, all seem to be providing subject area collections, with varying forms of "all or nothing" choice to libraries within those collections.

Collections, though, raise a problem where the different initiatives will have to cooperate with each other and with librarians to solve the problem of duplicate acquisitions. Libraries quite understandably do not wish to buy the same content twice, yet individual presses are free to and are signing up with multiple initiatives. Indeed, **UPCC's** attempt to resolve the duplication issue by requiring exclusivity (in collections only) for its participating presses lasted all of a week. There are too many potential legal and actual psychological barriers involved in limiting sales channels.

At the moment this leaves libraries to sort out any overlap in whatever they might buy in subject collections from more than one initiative. That is clearly unsustainable, and it is the responsibility of the university press community members to cooperate with each other, with the library community, and with vendors to create feasible ways of de-duping. Various projects are already tackling this issue and it is in everyone's best interest to resolve it.

Publisher concerns can be said to revolve around preserving the existing student market while expanding the library market by deploying the light DRM standards librarians require. I am not here talking about introduction to economics books or U.S. history surveys, which are easily identified and can be held out of collections if necessary, but about monographs that unexpectedly go on to enjoy widespread adoption in classes. Such titles are the *sine qua non* of most university press backlists.

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# Acquisitions Archaeology — It's the Platform

Column Editor: **Jesse Holden** (Coordinator of Technical Services, Millersville University) <jesse.holden@millersville.edu>

In my last column,<sup>1</sup> I looked at “media packages” circa 1993 — hardware-intensive and proprietary set-ups that were a best attempt to capitalize on the possibilities unleashed by the suddenly popular but inherently doomed CD-ROM.<sup>2</sup> What emerged was a hardware environment so cumbersome (and, presumably, expensive) that it is now difficult to contextualize such apparatuses anywhere near the cutting edge.

But hardware is only half of the story. **Judy Luther** was also writing about “Multimedia” in fall of 1993.<sup>3</sup> Rather than looking at the environment required to provide a multimedia experience, however, **Luther** gives an overview of several CD-ROM-based multimedia resources. As challenging as the physical multimedia environment was proving to be, it is here in September 1993 I think we start to comprehend the development of a Kuhnian “crisis” or Derridian “aporia” of sorts — the point at which CD-ROMs actually proved to be their own worst enemies...

It is difficult to read the following statement by **Luther** without inferring an ironic undertone: “While multimedia was introduced about five years ago, it does not appear to enjoy the widespread use in academic libraries that is true for CD-ROM versions of printed indexes.” This is not some attempt at deadpan understatement, of course, since it was not entirely obvious at this time that CD-ROMs would never *ever* enjoy the widespread use on the scale that people assumed they would. Or should. Rather, people recognized that multimedia had great potential while struggling with technical hardware *and* software complications needed to realize even the smallest amount of that potential.

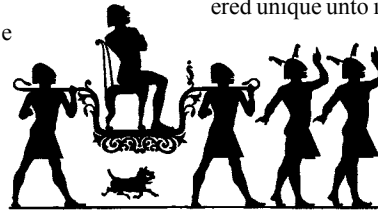
The goal is starting to become clear, though, even if the solution at this point remains out of

grasp. In describing the **Microsoft Bookshelf**, **Luther** comments on “the power of being able to search across several references sources at the same time.” While this may seem completely obvious, keep in mind that in fall of 1993 “each program requires an expensive hardware configuration and operates with different software requiring some user support.” The intensive investment of time, equipment, and software (not to mention money) is still at the resource level.

At the same time, the Internet is still there in the background. If what is wanted at this time is a kind of universal or “meta” platform for the creation, delivery, and access of multimedia, why has the “Net not yet emerged as the platform of choice? A little illumination may be gleaned from **Eleanor Cook’s** “Drinking from the Firehose” column in which she poses the question “Why are Internet Informational Tools Labeled with Silly Names?”<sup>4</sup> In defining various online tools available at the time (**VERONICA**, **GOPHER**, etc.), **Cook** ends her list of definitions with the following entry:

**WORLD-WIDE-WEB (W-W-W):** This was developed in Europe, at CERN, the European Particle Physics Laboratory, Geneva, Switzerland. It utilizes hypertext methodology (which provides expansion of various concepts), and utilizes WAIS technology much of the time. I’ll leave it at that.

This concise description of the Web hardly suggests a transformative technology that will change our *creation of and interaction with* information forever. And the idea of a



“platform,” a delivery and access mechanism that will be commonly understood in libraries in just a few years, still seems remote. **Cook** poses the question, “Why can’t we call things what they are? Why <**Infotrac**> and <**ProQuest**> instead of <*Reader’s Guide to Periodical Literature*>? [sic.]?”

The rhetorical question of “what they are” shows that a fundamental ontological shift has yet to happen. Each discrete resource is considered unique unto itself. In 1993, the Internet is

still about different technologies specific to certain resources, as **Cook’s** article shows — just like CD-ROMs. The notion of content thought of separately from format with *platforms* being the

“thing” (rather than the content itself) is still a ways off.

From what I can tell, the potential of the Internet generally (and the Web in particular) is obscured by bringing the paradigm of resource-level technology already common in the world of CD-ROMS and applying that the Internet. What is not yet obvious in 1993 is the Web’s potential to be a “meta” platform for all kinds of information resources, a potential that simplifies both the hardware and software contingencies inherent in “multimedia” resources.

So it is not that CD-ROMs were merely a distraction from the developing Internet but that they conditioned a kind of thinking about multimedia resources that may have limited, in turn, how Internet resources were thought about and subsequently developed.

So we have the *aporia*: CD-ROMs were not able to live up to the very possibilities — followed soon by expectations — which they created.

And we have the *crisis*: Proprietary software and specific hardware configurations resulted in unique content-technology objects at the resource level which were not sustainable in any sense (time, equipment, support, etc.) — despite both the possibilities and expectations multimedia resources created. 🌱

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An example at my home press would be *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York*, by **Kathy Peiss**, a revised dissertation that went on to become the bestselling book in the history of **Temple University Press**. Even if publishers could predict which titles would enjoy widespread adoption (and we can’t), withholding them from our eBook collection offerings would dilute the appeal of the collection as a whole. But offering them with no DRM could risk financial ruin. Remember, library sales are only twenty to twenty-five percent of a scholarly publisher’s revenue; student adoptions are closer to fifty percent. Risking the loss of that student market could be suicidal and university presses are understandably reluctant to do so. Some modeling within the eBook initiatives has taken account of this

risk, but concerns remain. On this subject, too, librarians and publishers will need to work together with the shared understanding that our success must be mutual. As in most things, good eBook deals will be those in which each party perhaps gives up a “maximum” win to ensure both sides win.

This is all to the good. As the recently published **Association of American University Presses** white paper, *Sustaining Scholarly Publishing: New Business Models for University Presses* ([http://aaupnet.org/resources/reports/business\\_models/index.html](http://aaupnet.org/resources/reports/business_models/index.html)) shows, libraries and presses working together are creating solutions that benefit the entire academic community. And so the most exciting aspect of all the current and about-to-launch eBook initiatives is this: two members of the academic community can together increase dissemination and usage of scholarly books to the benefit of the entire academic community. Let us make it so! 🌱

### Endnotes

1. **Jesse Holden**. “Acquisitions Archaeology: Paradigm Shift” *Against The Grain*, v.22#6 (February 2011), p. 70
2. **Linda F. Crismond**. “Media Minder.” *Against the Grain* v.5#5 (November 1993), p. 12.
3. **Judy Luther**. “Innovations Affecting Us: Multimedia.” *Against the Grain*, v.5#4 (September 1993), p. 29.
4. **Eleanor I. Cook**. “Drinking from the Firehose: Furry Little Animals and Comic Creatures: Why Are Internet Informational Tools Labeled with Silly Names?” *Against the Grain*, v.5#4 (September 1993), p. 51.