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Don's Conference Notes--Crossing Boundaries: The 2016 Society for Scholarly Publishing Conference

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Crossing Boundaries: The 2016 Society for Scholarly Publishing (SSP) Conference

*Column Editor's Note: Because of space limitations, this is an abridged version of my report on this conference. You can read the full article which includes descriptions of additional sessions at **http://www.against-the-grain. com/2016/09/v28-4-dons-conference-notes/**. — DTH*

"Crossing Boundaries: New Horizons in Scholarly Communication" was an appropriate title for **SSP's 38th Annual Conference** because it was the first time the conference was held outside the U.S. Meeting in the beautiful city of Vancouver, BC on June 1-3, 2016, it drew approximately 700 attendees and nearly 50 exhibitors. Besides 4 plenary sessions, there were 27 concurrent ones that were grouped in these broad subject areas: marketing insight, product

The Westin Bayshore Hotel Venue for the 2016 SSP Conference

strategy/business models, global challenges/collaborative solutions, careers/industry, and standards/best practices. Two innovative features marked the meeting: Sprint Beyond the Book (*http://sprintbeyondthebook. com*), in which a team of authors (including volunteers from the attendees) collaborated to publish an anthology of publishing topics in 72 hours (watch for a full report in a forthcoming issue of *Against The Grain*), and posters illustrating major concepts of the meeting that were created on the fly by a graphic artist (see sample below).

Melanie Dolechek, SSP Executive Director, Opens the 2016 Conference

Mentoring

One of the emphases of the meeting was career development for professionals entering the scholarly publishing field. A special plenary presentation on mentoring took place on the day before the regular programming began. Here are some of the points made.

- SSP launched a fellowship program in 2016 that offered training and career development opportunities. The program drew significant interest; about 100 applications for the 12 positions in the program were received.
- There are many opportunities for mentorship in the field; everyone is a mentor and mentee at some stage of their life.
- Professional societies are important because they offer many programs to help people at an early stage of their careers.
- Many organizations pair new managers with experienced ones, which is very beneficial. Mentorship is bi-directional; we learn from each other and share knowledge.
- Consultants make good mentors because of their diverse experiences with many clients. They can also provide mentorship services to small organizations that do not have many mentors available.

Photo by Donald T. Hawkins. Reproduced with permission.

Opening Keynote: *The Startup Playbook*

In his keynote address, **David Kidder**, author of *The Startup Playbook* (Chronicle Books, 2013), said that large companies can grow like startups. He presented 5 "lenses" that must be true for success in an entrepreneurial environment:

1. *Proprietary gifts*. Do you have any? We must be smart, seek advantages, and leverage them.
2. *A single big idea*. Have an extreme focus and the courage to fail fast, say "no", accept imperfect answers, and embrace patience. Most startups do not die; they fail because they run out of money.
3. *Create painkillers, not vitamins*. Vitamins are elective, painkillers are indispensable. Kill biased pet and entitlement projects.
4. *Be 10 times better*. Incrementalism is a path to nowhere. Don't chase your competitors' press releases or features; create radical differentiation.
5. *Be a monopolist*. Create permanence with a customer. New growth is hard; accept that fact. Create value where permanence is a long-term outcome.

Ann Michael, SSP President, Introduces the Keynote Speaker

Kidder noted that the greatest companies are led by their founders and are always focused on the customer. What matters is the problem being solved, not the technology. Being right and on time is a massive art. It is important to lower the cost of failure; be 90% right before you bet on something.

CEOs must be super-administrators and super-creators. Watch customers' actions, not their words. The CEO who learns the fastest wins. Playing not to lose is a terrible strategy; play to win. The best environment is where people can fail and keep on trying.

David Kidder

Listen, Engage, Repeat: Lessons from the Front Line of Engagement

How are publishers actively engaging with their communities to support and grow a dialog with them? **Sara Rouhi**, Director of Business Development, North America, **Altmetric**, said that **Altmetric** uses several avenues to communicate with its users, including peer pressure (who else is using your content), webinars (an easy sharable means of educating), an "ambassador" program in which users (not sales people!) explain how to use services, an advisory board of key stakeholders to represent many sectors of the market, and a social media presence that is compelling when it is not exclusively promotional.

Grace Constantino, Outreach and Communications Manager, **Biodiversity Heritage Library (BHL)**, said that **BHL's** goals are to understand who is using their collections and how they are using them. Two new tools, Altmetric and Disqus (*https:// disqus.com*), have recently been added to help transform **BHL** into a social digital library.

Tara Robenalt, Director of Product at the **Public Library of Science (PLoS)**, described how the PLoS blog network (*http:// blogs.plos.org*) covers not only specific journals but also subject areas and established research communities. Special collections are created for significant events; for example, a landing page

to a collection of articles on the Zika virus was quickly created and promoted after the current outbreak emerged. Article-level metrics are promoted as the author's story of the impact of their research (see *http://plos.org/article-level-metrics*). **Robenalt** gave the following advice for attracting visitors to a website:

- "Build it and they will come" is not a viable strategy.
- If nobody knows about a site, no community will be built, and the site will be an island.
- Make sure that Google can discover the site.
- Promote the site to make sure that colleagues know the community is available.
- Have social tools available for sharing.
- Serve the researcher (which is most important).

Tracey DePellegrin Connelley, Executive Editor at the **Genetics Society of America (GSA)**, said that some of **GSA's** current challenges are to reach multiple disparate audiences on a limited budget, cultivate loyalty, and reposition its 100 year old journal. **GSA's** culture is to treat authors, readers, and reviewers well; help authors promote their work; pay attention and listen to what people say; and focus on being a resource and a partner so that authors can attain maximum impact.

Small Data/Big Benefits: Mining for End User Relationships

Budget pressures in the library marketplace are continuing, and the publishing environment is becoming more complex. Publishers have therefore begun to promote their products to end users as well as libraries because the end user is the person who needs the information. **Christine Orr**, Sales Director at **Ringgold**, said that a publisher's data is potentially its most valuable asset, but it must be of high quality. End users and institutions can play multiple roles, and when individuals and affiliations are joined together, publishers gain valuable knowledge and capabilities, such as:

- Market intelligence,
- Knowledge about research funding,
- Reduction in the time necessary to calculate open access charges, and
- Ability to avoid or resolve conflicts of interest (such as authors and reviewers from the same institution).

Jenni Rankin, Marketing Manager, **Annual Reviews**, said that her organization aims to communicate with end users through the creation and sharing of quality content. It used to be easy to provide content marketing by simply getting a book to users; now success is based on being in the right place at the right time, and we must continuously work to understand our users. Social platforms can be very powerful marketing devices.

Laura Kane, COO at **BioOne**, said that marketing to end users is a recognition that libraries have many priorities, and promoting a single product is probably not high on their list. The best approach is a collaborative one that respects the essential role of the librarian but also emphasizes the necessity of strong relationships with end users. Because of the need to have its brand recognized in the market, **BioOne** began to market to end users; in today's environment, a publisher that does not have a relationship with end users does so at its own peril. However, it is important not to let gains with users come at the expense of a loyal long-term relationship with the library.

Flip the Script: Moving Subscription Journals to Open Access

This session presented some considerations on collective funding models for OA. **John Willinsky**, Director of the Public Knowledge Project at **Simon Fraser University** (PKP, *https://pkp.sfu.ca/*), noted that libraries are already cooperating in the scholarly publishing area.

The PKP project has developed the concept of a subscription-equivalent-transition (SET), in which libraries would commit to pay a fee equivalent to 3 years of journal subscription costs into the cooperative, which becomes revenue for the publishers while the journal is being converted to OA. The SET is revenue-neutral to both parties; the journal loses no money, and the library spends no more than previously. This model relies on trust and commitment, allows for membership in the cooperative to grow, and will result in improving the quality of scholarly publishing. Several journal publishers are interested in the concept, and in Ghana, libraries and journals have committed to explore the possibilities of having a national basis for forming a cooperative. At the end of the 3-year development period, the libraries have the option of reverting to the subscription model.

SET seems to be a promising strategy because it begins with libraries that already subscribe to the journals and gives time to develop the new model. It involves minimal financial impact and demonstrates a commitment to OA. The challenges are that it does not offer any relief to already strained library budgets and does not provide publishers with a way to meet increasing costs, which may result in significant resistance from them. These factors are working against the SET model:

- *Free Riders*: Some universities may opt to wait until the journals become OA, when they will be able to access them without having to contribute to the cooperative.
- *Inertia*: Promotion and tenure requirements are based on traditional publishing models and have not caught up with OA.
- *Lack of incentive*: Unless libraries and funders are willing to abandon subscriptions, there is no reason for publishers to participate.
- *Sustainability*: What happens when the 3 years are up?
- *Governance*: Libraries might need to participate in multiple cooperatives, which would be an administrative nightmare.

Despite these challenges, a feasibility study has begun. In an audience poll, over half of the respondents recommended exploring a SET strategy for converting journals to OA.

Second Day Keynote: Encouraging Diversity in Scientific Communication

In her second-day keynote address **Margaret-Ann Armour**, former Professor of Chemistry and now Associate Dean of Science, Diversity at the **University of Alberta**, emphasized the importance of diverse leadership in scholarly publishing. She said that when a society becomes sensitive to diversity, it spreads to many leadership roles and brings an increase in creativity and innovation. When women reach their full potential in the workplace, the workplace becomes respectful and inclusive towards all employees, there is an increase of innovation, and the financial performance of the company is increased. Reasons for lower numbers of women in leadership roles include persistent underlying attitudes and stereotypes, subconscious biases, and differences in male and female styles such as:

Margaret-Ann Armour

- Women are less assertive in communication. They must be encouraged to talk about their ideas.
- Men are expected to lead and make decisions; women are generally expected to support and nurture. We need to give men more opportunity to develop nurturing skills.
- Women are less willing to take risks.
- Women tend to have lower self-confidence. We need to learn to believe in ourselves and not be afraid to fail.

Armour described Project Catalyst, an initiative to help women with their careers. Some of its activities include holding career discussions with female graduate students; examining policies for parental leave, flexible work hours, and day care; and facilitating mentorship. She chairs the **Canadian Centre for Women in Science, Engineering, Trades and Technology** (WinSETT, *http://www.winsett.ca*), a non-profit organization that recruits, trains, and advances women in the SETT fields, and helps them overcome challenges in their workplaces.

eBook Wars: The Libraries Awaken

October Ivins, Principal of **Ivins eContent Solutions**, noted that eBook purchases are governed by 3 licensing terms (called the Charlotte Principles because they were developed at the **University of North Carolina at Charlotte (UNCC)** — see *http://guides.library.uncc.edu/charlotteinitiative*):

1. Irrevocable perpetual access and archival rights,
2. Unlimited simultaneous users, and
3. Freedom from any digital rights management (DRM) restrictions.

The **UNCC** library has formed a working group of representatives from 20 "like-minded" institutions (13 libraries, 4 consortia, 3 university presses, and 1 non-profit vendor) to study how faculty use eBooks, the user experience, licensing principles, platforms, and preservation. According to the **UNCC** library's website, a conference on the results of the study will occur in early 2017, with the final report to be published shortly thereafter.

Rachel Frick, Business Development Director at the **Digital Public Library of America (DPLA)**, said that lessons learned from **DPLA's** Cultural Heritage Metadata aggregation service are that libraries have an opportunity to expand their curation skills beyond their immediate community; we need to take advantage of strategic points of collaboration between academic and public libraries; and while there is a golden opportunity now to restore some balance to the eBooks ecology, it will be necessary to work across our communities to do so.

Here are some of the eBook projects in which **DPLA** is involved:

- The "Readers First" movement was launched to improve access to eBooks for public library users and to advocate standards so that eBooks can be downloaded to any type of reader.
- Library Simplified (SimplyE), a mobile reader for content from any source, has been developed and will be launched shortly. It will allow readers to access eBooks in no more than 3 clicks or taps, make them available to visually impaired readers, and use open source standards.
- The Library E-content Access Project (LEAP) is a coalition of access partners led by the **New York Public Library** to provide a national exchange for open and licensed content. One of its efforts is to create eBook collections for children with special needs, and those in overseas military families.

The common goals of these projects are to serve researchers and readers, increase the universe of readers, and support curious inquiry and knowledge creation.

Transformative Publishing Platforms for Digital Scholarship in the Humanities

A panel of 4 speakers discussed how humanities scholars are applying digital technologies in their research and how publishers are using new tools and technologies to meet their demands. All of the speakers presented lists of problems in the scholarly publishing area; here is a consolidated list of them:

- Technology is rapidly evolving, but many publishers are burdened with a legacy infrastructure.
- Scholarship has become increasingly digital, and scholars want their books to reflect that trend.
- Business models for monograph publishing are shifting, and no single format prevails.
- Monographs cost anywhere from $15,000 to $40,000 to publish and do not sell enough to cover those costs.
- PDF and most e-publishing formations are replications of print which extend but do not transform scholarly publishing.
- Authors want media in their works, and university presses are constrained because they do not have developers on their staff or funding for R&D.

Solutions to these problems include finding workflow efficiencies and shrinking the costs of publication, creating efficient and scalable procedures for effective electronic publishing on the web, and hosting books on a network that is open source and standards-based. Interesting projects in these areas are underway at the **California Digital Library (CDL)**, **University of Minnesota Press** (the Manifold project, *http://manifold.umn.edu*), **University of Michigan** (Fulcrum, *http://www.fulcrum.org*), and **New York University (NYU)** Press and Libraries (development of a new reading interface using the Readium reader (*http://readium.org*)).

Riding the Technology Wave: How to Avoid a Wipeout

Mark Johnson, Director of Marketing at the **Public Library of Science (PLoS)**, discussed the "build or buy" decision. He said that the reason for technology is to fill a need, but many people find a technology and then try to figure out how to use it, which leads to disaster, heartbreak, and frustration. Before doing anything, ask, "How does this help the researcher?" **PLoS's** approach to technology is:

- Is there an open source solution available that can be cost-effectively leveraged to meet the need? If so, use it.
- Would an "off the shelf" solution meet the needs? If so, choose cheap or free solutions.
- Do we have unique needs that require a custom solution? If yes, then build it.

PLoS built Aperta, a manuscript and peer review submission system to streamline the publishing experience for authors, editors, and reviewers (see *http://youtu.be/yKDTqOryWhk*). Here are the lessons learned from the experience:

- Manuscript submission and peer review are core to the PLoS mission: the goal is for an author to be able to upload a manuscript in 10 minutes or less.
- User focus is important: authors are first, followed by editors, reviewers, and then **PLoS** staff.
- Agile works. Steady communication is effective.
- Be flexible on cost and timeline.

Alison Belan, Assistant Director for Digital Strategy at **Duke University Press**, noted that books are just containers, but they are still valued by people. There are significant differences in how they are produced, bought, sold, and consumed. Decision factors in a purchase decision include:

- Organizational character. Which aspects of the culture are healthy and which are harmful?
- Existing systems and partners. Know about your systems and question if they are the right ones.
- Maintainability. A system must be customizable while remaining maintainable.
- Compliance with local security procedures. Open source systems can be a security risk.

Belan said that build vs. buy is a lie! Almost everything today is built except standard systems like MS Office. It is complex and hard to build a system; development costs are massive and do not change.

Closing Plenary: Change is Already Here: Revolutionary Examples

The closing plenary session was a panel discussion moderated by **Kent Anderson**, CEO of **Redlink, Inc.** and former president of **SSP**. Panelists were:

- **Faye Chadwell**, Oregon State University Librarian and Press Director;
- **John Maxwell**, Associate Professor and Director of the Publishing Program at Simon Fraser University;
- **Stephanie Dawson**, CEO of ScienceOpen, Inc.; and
- **Alison Muddit**, Director of the University of California Press.

Here is an edited transcript of the conversation (questions posed by **Anderson** are in italics):

What did you see of interest at this year's meeting and what are the biggest trends in the industry?

Panelists identified several trends such as persistent identifiers, standards, and ways to make content more interoperable. It is important

to find and attract an audience and engage users, so trust and collaboration are vital. Publisher-librarian partnerships bring value to different approaches in publishing.

The focus seems to be shifting away from journals and toward articles; it is questionable whether journals will have a future as the container of articles.

What are some futile trends you see currently?

The value is not just the content but the connections between it, and the connections between people. The danger is in trying to wall off information. Science and scholarship deserve to be wide open. Researchers want to get their information out on an article level, and open access is the way to do that.

Publishers have outsourced services like manuscript submission and camera-ready manuscripts to authors, which may be leading to the growth of pre-print servers and self-publishing outlets in response to these pressures and developed capabilities. These function differently in the book and journal spaces. Where do university presses fit into this?

Authors express a strong preference for a formal publication process and want the imprint of the press on their books because it is valuable to their career progression. Presses and libraries are beginning to think about how they can collaborate.

Researchers have called for data publication to become part of the university infrastructure, like email or faculty webpages. Is this a new role for libraries? Would it require new forms of cooperation?

Yes, and this is an area where libraries may need to hire people without an MLS degree. It is imperative for libraries and researchers to be collaborative.

We have moved from "digitalization" and "globalization" to "platforms, networked systems, and next-gen tools." Are we reaching a plateau of digital content distribution? What might the post-digital marketplace look like? What is the next level?

Technically we have solved the distribution mechanism, but the social and cultural problems still remain. The problem is how to gather an audience for whom the material is relevant. It is easy to make things public (we do it all the time on systems like Facebook); reaching an audience is more subtle. There are many linguistic barriers. Google and Google Scholar are where you find the content in western cultures, but in Asian cultures, publisher websites are where researchers find the content. There are specific differences, and we need to understand them to help people find the content.

What are you trying to improve on or fix in traditional publishing models? Why do they need fixing?

We are trying to improve search and discovery. We are not listening to scientific voices outside of our northern sphere. We may never have heard of journals from some other areas of the world, but we must proactively push their content out after publication. Starting to move content after publication can solve many problems in the industry.

Can you manage to wear both the "publisher" and "librarian" hat at the same time? How do you resolve conflicting demands of these communities?

Publishing is an ecosystem, not a functional model. We need to respect and value what each entity brings to the table. Presses and libraries are separate at many institutions, but when they are in the same ecosystem, what happens at the press will affect the library. It is very important to recognize the values of each and take a collaborative approach.

Given the correlation between "scarcity" and "prestige," do we risk destabilizing the monograph system if we move to the OA approach? If these approach the "mainstream" level, will the value propositions that hold monograph publishing together be threatened?

It is easy to feel threatened by anyone and everyone. University presses tend to face more toward the universe of scholars; libraries are more focused on services to the campus community. It is hard work to be a publisher. Some libraries think they can publish their own journals, but there are not many success stories.

Closing Plenary Panel (L-R): Stephanie Dawson, Alison Mudditt, Kent Anderson (Moderator), John Maxwell, Faye Chadwell

If a change to all or even much more OA is inevitable, who is left after the revolution? What kind or level of collateral damage would be acceptable?

Traditional value propositions are holding monographs together. There is no reason why an OA monograph cannot be reviewed, win prizes, etc. When we understand how OA monographs are used, we will be getting more data that creates higher prestige. Value comes from quality, editorial, and peer review processes.

If OA ramps up, we will have much more scholarship at the monograph level and much more work in circulation. In the journal world, different review processes lead to downward pressure on content published. But publishing more does not have to mean this. In some small fields, it is hard for researchers to get their work published because the market is so small.

What research questions related to changes in scholarly publishing would you like to see the community pursue?

We need more focus on the needs of readers, authors, and scholars. Scholarly publishing is about a community: where are students as knowledge contributors and creators? How are libraries and presses contributing to student successes? We have come from an ivory tower paradigm. The interesting research to be done is who cares about scholarly research. How do we mine social media to find how people are using scholarly content, including the public who have an interest in science, health, etc? How do we know what students are finding?

We need tools to help us with deep mining and to help us read papers before they are published. People are not going to be able to read all the research being published in their field. We are still far away from the machine as reader; more research in that area would be useful.

The **SSP** meeting was enjoyable and provided an insightful look at a wide variety of topics related to the scholarly publishing industry. Organizing the meeting around several broad subject areas made it easy for attendees to focus on their specific interests if they wished. The exhibit hall was well attended and provided a good look at innovative products and services, for example, translation and editorial services from **Crimson Interactive** and **Editage**, **Squid Solutions' Inqwell** analytic and visualization of product usage metrics, and **Inera's eXtyles** editorial tools to help automate document production. And of course, the beautiful venue greatly added to the enjoyment of the meeting.

The 39th Annual SSP conference will be held May 31-June 2, 2017 in Boston, MA. 🐘

Donald T. Hawkins *is an information industry freelance writer based in Pennsylvania. In addition to blogging and writing about conferences for **Against the Grain**, he blogs the **Computers in Libraries** and **Internet Librarian** conferences for **Information Today, Inc. (ITI)** and maintains the **Conference Calendar** on the **ITI** Website (**http://www.infotoday.com/calendar.asp**). He is the Editor of **Personal Archiving: Preserving Our Digital Heritage**, (Information Today, 2013) and Co-Editor of **Public Knowledge: Access and Benefits** (Information Today, 2016). He holds a Ph.D. degree from the **University of California, Berkeley** and has worked in the online information industry for over 40 years.*