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Small But Mighty: How University Presses Bring Academic Ideas to the World

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One of the unspoken assumptions of open access advocates seems to be that the crowd-sourcing magic of the Internet obviates the need for the core curation and marketing functions of publishing; in other words, "post it and community response will take the place of peer review, and indexing and search will make the content discoverable." Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, the value of curation and marketing — for authors and readers alike — remains high, regardless of the ultimate business or dissemination model for a published work.

Sales and marketing at a large university press are similar in many ways to operations at any press: we dedicate staff and budgets to publicity, advertising, direct mail, exhibits, social media, digital marketing, account management, and distribution; but as a not-for-profit, we do so with a focus on mission, a close relationship with our audiences, and of course, far fewer resources than commercial presses. I've come to believe one of the key things we do that doesn't show up in anyone's job description, but without which we wouldn't be in business very long, is our advocacy for the reader. Sales and marketing staff excel at this by asking (a lot of) questions, both internally and externally: Why should we publish this? Who will read it? What could be changed to make it more useful for the reader? Do we have the right marketing and distribution mix to reach this audience? Do we really know who this audience is? Really understanding the answer to this last question is especially important for sales managers, since we in turn have to pitch external sales representatives and account buyers where we are competing with many other books and publishers, so we need to be able to clearly explain how this book differs from every other book out there. Asking these questions often results in the kind of collaboration across editorial and sales/marketing that provides university press authors with a wealth of developmental information, a clear and strategic marketing plan, and the sense of a unified effort behind the author and her book.

For example, at **The MIT Press**, sales managers have the opportunity to weigh in on every title before we contract it, and again once the manuscript has been turned over. Getting an early look at forthcoming lists allows us to help shape the development of the book and the release plan. In recent meetings, sales managers have helped influence new works by asking for things like additional content, an abbreviation of some chapters, supplemen-tal materials for texts, and chapter reorganization. Often our feedback is related to ways to make the overall package more appealing: we make suggestions for endorsers and preface writers, title changes (often!), offer ideas for jacket and even interior design, such as, this has gift potential, let's make it a different trim size to capitalize on that.

University presses also are responsible for maintaining and burnishing the values and standards of the university whose name we share, which gives us an even greater responsibility to advocate for the reader. These readers come from all over the globe and bring with them expectations for high quality, careful research, and thoughtful ideas. Preserving this trust is no small part of my and my colleague's task. As has been observed before, living in a world where anyone can publish virtually anything anywhere, thus removing the barriers to publication, means we're all drowning in information. Scholars, students, and curious people seek out university press books because we deliver something of unique timeliness and exceptional quality.

Once we've done as much advocating for the reader as is necessary, we start laying the groundwork for the new release. Marketing does much of the legwork on this through writing catalog and web copy, sending advance copies for review, creating promotional materials for exhibits, and offering faculty pre-publication exam copies for textbooks. Sales also lays the groundwork for key titles with our buyers and sales reps, often a season in advance, to get them excited about what's around the corner. For example, I will share particularly glowing endorsements and introduce a forthcoming series or series editor. One recent title had generated exceptional backorders even before the catalog released, which I conveyed to major accounts that hadn't yet ordered.

The sales function in book publishing is not quite as glamorous as you might have heard. I spend a large portion of my time staring at Excel spreadsheets, and an even larger portion managing distribution channels. Distribution is one of those areas that isn't particularly sexy, but is truly where we bring value to our authors and readers. This is the nuts and bolts of getting a book — whether physical or digital — into the hands of the reader. What stores, wholesalers, digital retailers will stock this book? How will they get there? Which shipping method? What discount will they receive? What are the credit terms? When can they return ones that don't sell? We don't publish everything — but we do specialize in help-ing every book find its audience, and this includes some pretty small audiences. We are also seeing more interdisciplinary work being published that has multiple audiences that don't always talk to each other.

Finding and connecting these readers is a big part of what we do. Because we have a long term, global relationship with sales reps, bookstore buyers, library suppliers, and professors, we can gather and synthesize information that will guide authors and editors in meeting their readers' needs. We also use this information to troubleshoot problems before they arise, anticipating demand and getting books where they are needed at the right time. Recently, we had a book on a subject that all of a sudden started popping up in news outlets around the world. The release date was a month away, but we were able to move quickly to release early, airmail some stock to the UK warehouse (not something we like to do on a regular basis!), and take advantage of the percolating publicity. Unfortunately, despite laying the groundwork, we still do spend quite a bit of time in reaction mode, responding to market changes. There's no silver bullet for this, and be wary of anyone who tells you there is.

So what does "best in class" for effectively distributing books look like? Depending on who you talk to, you'll get different answers, and it's difficult to quantify. But I would start with: Best in class means no international barriers to sourcing a book, and no warehouse glitches where the publicity is flowing in but **Amazon** is telling buyers not to expect stock for 6-8 weeks. When our authors can sleep easy at night, knowing their book will be available in stacks for their signing event the next day. Where a new book is eagerly anticipated because the groundwork has been appropriately laid.

The value in matching readers with books is obvious to authors, publishers, librarians, and booksellers alike. Recent improvements in our global distribution partners means we can reach faculty and students in Southeast Asia with the finest introduction to algorithms at a price they can actually afford to adopt. That English-language readers in Brazil can find a recent trade title on neuroscience, despite massive reductions in government spending and fewer than ten academic bookstores in the entire country that import books.

Of course expanding access only to print books is not the goal: digital distribution has been invaluable to getting books to people who wouldn't ordinarily have access to them, either because their local store didn't carry it, or (more likely) they didn't even have access to a local store and shipping rates were too exorbitant. At this point, ebook sales are still small for university presses, but the ability to
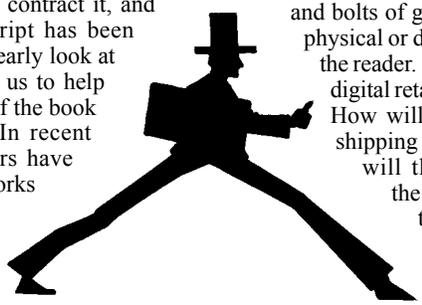
Adding Media, Adding Value

by **Susan Doerr** (Assistant Director, Digital Publishing and Operations, University of Minnesota Press) <doer0012@umn.edu>

provide eBooks where once no books would have arrived is clearly a win for our mission of information dissemination.

Yet we clearly have more to do on this front, as thorny obstacles relating to distribution and access in the digital environment still remain: competing digital rights management formats that hinder reader satisfaction but seem to do nothing to discourage piracy; multiple software formats that need to be downloaded depending on your device, and issues with ease of highlighting and annotation.

What else needs to change with the times? From a marketing perspective, our budgets are torn between the many buyers who still prefer to receive print catalogs and promotional materials, and the opportunity to reach more people through digital promotion. We've had success with our social media channels and blog tools for reaching individual readers. The goal here is not to sell books through Facebook, but to drive awareness of our brand and books to populations that may not ordinarily find out about books through more traditional channels. We see the large trade houses expanding their D2C marketing efforts considerably, finally realizing that understanding the end reader, not just the store buyer, is key to maintaining, much less increasing, relevance. This is one area where being specialized is really helpful: university presses have strong connections with many of our individual readers already as a result of creating a home for unique and specialized work and connecting readers and writers to one another.

And while we're on the topic of change, as the largest percentage of our books are bought through online retailers, the perennial issue of helping readers discover our books has led us to devote additional staff time to the creation and dissemination of increased metadata: more formats, more accurate, more thorough, and delivered more quickly to vendors. Current projects we're working on at **MIT Press** include increased frequency of ONIX feeds, releasing book data on ONIX feeds earlier than in the past, and including greater keywords in our ONIX feeds and **Amazon** book descriptions.

As we transition more thoroughly into a more digital, more open space, there may be books published in exclusively Open Access formats, where generating sales is no longer the driving force it is today. Still, the value of excellence, the skill of advocating for the reader, the relationships with distributors and buyers all over the world, the knowledge and network of individual readers, and the granularity of our metadata will only enhance the value we bring as publishers to the reading ecosphere.

Author's Note: *This article discusses the expanded media resources that may accompany a web-based, edition of a monograph and the impact the higher number of media brings to bear on a publisher's time.* — **SD**

Publishers have heard countless authors ask to include many images, tables, charts, even multimedia in their scholarly books and are used to saying, "Sorry, but it is not possible. The print format and space constraints just don't allow for that material." Today, with the creation of new digital platforms, the space and format constraints of print is becoming a thing of the past. Those of us who are building these new platforms are realizing that more is not always better, and that more media can lead to higher costs.

Two digital publication platforms that are currently in development, Manifold, from the **University of Minnesota Press**, and Fulcrum, from **Michigan Publishing** at the **University of Michigan Library** — both funded by grants from the **Andrew W. Mellon Foundation** — allow authors and publishers to expand the amount and types of media that can be included in a published project. As more media are added, a press' editorial and production staff, and the author, will spend more time preparing these media for publication. At the **University of Minnesota Press** we were able to quantify the increase in the amount of time we spent on our first projects prepared for the Fulcrum and Manifold platforms, giving us an idea of how much more time we might expect to spend on this work.

Manifold, developed in collaboration with the **GC Digital Scholarship Lab** at **CUNY** and the digital development agency, **Cast Iron Coding**, is a platform being developed to publish a monograph as a dynamic web-based digital edition — the "Manifold edition." In the grant proposal for the Manifold platform we defined the characteristics of a Manifold edition as:

- A book that makes visible its own process of creation (published iteratively, in pieces as the research and writing evolves) culminating in a formal, peer-reviewed Release Version;
- A book that is versioned, while still allowing access to (and citations of) previous iterations of the text;
- A book that enables access to the primary research documents and data;
- A book that links to archives (either through hyperlinks or by embedding archival materials, as permissions allow);

- A book that incorporates rich media, such as audio, video, and interactive game files;
- A book that integrates scholarly conversations in social media channels;
- A book that incorporates social reading practices such as reader feedback and critique (separate from peer review).

Enabling access to primary research documents and data, embedding or linking to archival materials, and incorporating rich media all require that editors and authors secure — and pay for — permissions, prepare and deliver media files to production staff, and create metadata for each item. While we are not limited by technology to a maximum number of media that we can include in a Manifold edition, both the author and press staff are limited by the time that they can realistically devote to a project, and this imposes a limitation on the number of media we are able to include in a Manifold edition.

At the **University of Minnesota Press** we estimate that our editorial and production staff collectively spend approximately 20 to 30 minutes on each media resource that appears in a book. This time is spent working with the author to determine if permission is required for illustrative content, quoted texts, and previously published chapters of works and securing required permissions; working with the author on captions; and adding information to our rights and permissions logs within a manuscript's record in our database.
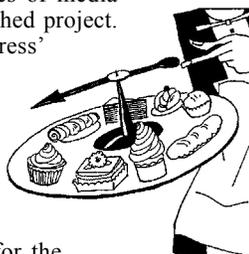
Securing permission is a hybrid responsibility. Many university presses ask that authors seek permission and pay any licensing fees required by the copyright holder. The press is responsible for maintaining permissions records and adhering to the restrictions imposed by the copyright holder. In practice, editorial staff often advise authors about when/if permission is needed and provide template letters and forms for requesting and granting permission. The **Association of American University Press** offers a 21-page permission FAQ for authors and university presses (*http://www.aaupnet.org/policy-areas/copyright-a-access/copyright-a-permissions/copyright-a-permissions*), a document that both press staff and authors use in doing this work.

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