Against the Grain

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ATG Interviews Dr. Anke Beck, CEO of Intech Open

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CEO of Intech Open

by **Tom Gilson** (Associate Editor, *Against the Grain*) <gilson@cofc.edu>

and **Katina Strauch** (Editor, *Against the Grain*) <kstrauch@comcast.net>

ATG: Dr. Beck, you have had an impressive career in publishing, most recently as the managing director for the German publisher De Gruyter. What was it about IntechOpen that led you to move on from a major player in the field like De Gruyter to “the first native scientific publisher of Open Access books”? Please tell us about IntechOpen and what unique challenges and opportunities you see in this new position?

AB: For many years I have believed in Open Access as a means of democratising knowledge. In my past role, I oversaw the transition to open but was keen to move to a digital first and dynamic fully Open Access publisher. Open Access tends to focus on journals but I believe there is an opportunity for books as well; for both Social Science and STEM books. Although in general I believe that content is the key and the format is secondary, books have advantages such as giving ideas more space to flourish and an editor who curates the content. The bringing together of chapters into one coherent overview is helpful for the reader, but we also hear from authors that it introduces them to peers and ideas that sit alongside their own in a way that conferences do but other print outputs do not.

In my first year here, I have observed a hardworking team and have learned that small publishers by no means work less than larger ones. We have fewer people to delegate to and everyone just rolls up their sleeves and gets involved. There are excellent workflows in place that give us the opportunity to concentrate on establishing or focusing our publishing programs and on working with new partners. My knowledge of journal workflows allowed me to see opportunities — for example, we now publish chapters as they are ready rather than waiting to publish the whole book in one go. This means the research is available to discover, read and cite immediately, without delay, which we know is important to researchers. Through this workflow, the “book” and “journal” products grow even closer together.

ATG: Have your expectations been fulfilled so far? What has surprised you about IntechOpen? What are the key differences between an OA monograph publisher and a more traditional book publisher?

AB: My disappointment is that the commitment to Open Access is still a challenge across the industry and around the world. Most mandates, whether from funders or governments, still focus on journals and I would like to see a change in this mindset. I hope that as part of the commitment to move away from impact factors, funders become more format-agnostic and include books in their mandates.

In my view, libraries play an important role in changing the perception of Open Access on

the one hand, but also in making Open Access happen while not losing their main task to curate content on the other. We are working with **Knowledge Unlatched**, who collaborate with librarians to fund Open Access books, for example. They do an excellent job of bridging gaps of the national funding boundaries for Open Access. This is just one example, but I think that more can be done, and librarians are a large part of the solution.

ATG: Can you tell us about IntechOpen’s business model? What separates you from the other publishers in the OA monograph space?

AB: Generally speaking, there is a shift from subscription-based funding to research-funded academic output. We try to be at the heart of that change. That means, we pay great attention whether we are compliant with as many funders as possible. This funder can be either a research funder, but also a funder from the industry. The majority of Open Access book publishers operate in the humanities space and, although we publish some humanities and social sciences content, the large part of our publishing output is in STEM topics. Secondly, we publish original research and — unlike other OA publishers — do not bundle content from cc-by licensed journals content in books. We really do work with authors and editors.

We publish collected works, monographs, and short works, and are also about to introduce a concept for Major Reference Works, where we assemble more than 100 OA articles on a single subject. And as I’ve mentioned earlier, we bring knowledge of journal workflows and apply the parts we believe benefit the author and reader, and the research endeavour overall. We display citations and downloads for each book as well as each chapter publicly on our website, but also inform each author individually about the success of his / her chapter: how many times the chapter was read, where it was read, downloaded and cited. That is pretty unique among OA book publishers.

ATG: IntechOpen divested its online journals in 2016 and now concentrates on producing OA monographs. This runs counter to what one would expect from a science publisher. What caused the shift? What was it that IntechOpen saw in the potential of OA monographs in today’s marketplace that others may have missed?

AB: It is true that the journals were sold in 2016 but I was not at the company then. In any case, what remained was the digital workflow which could be easily adapted to a book workflow. A journal publishes loosely-related content and publishers are very careful not to dilute their impact factor once they have one. It is a mathematical exercise as we all know and does not say anything about the quality or the attractiveness of the individual article. The digital age can take us beyond that information.

A book can be regarded as a special issue in a journal or as a book. By giving it an ISBN, it receives more opportunities to be marketed. Also: in our experience, authors appreciate if you pre-contextualize information they need to know for them. There is so much information out there that curated content offers a real value to readers.

ATG: How many OA books are in your current catalog? What would you say are your major subject strengths? Do you have an annual goal in terms of the number of OA books IntechOpen publishes?

AB: We are on our way to hit 5,000 Open Access books this year. The majority of publications are in Physical Sciences and Engineering & Technology with more than 2,000 titles, then Health Sciences with about 1,300 Open Access books, followed by Life Sciences. And we feel there is great potential to grow in other areas. I’m pleased to say that I represent the largest Open Access book publisher. However, it is not simply the number of books itself that is significant, but also the fact that it is purely gold Open Access content. It is not “content hosting on behalf of” other publishers on one platform do, nor is it mixed with green Open Access content. That adds up nicely for some OA book publishers but is not how we understand our mission.

I am thrilled that **OASPA** has recently accepted us as a member. And we will soon be uploading about 2000 of our books to the Directory of Open Access Books (DOAB), and will gradually add more. The goal is to add 1,200 books per year, and I do not see any reason this should not be possible — as long as the reviewers are satisfied with the scholarly content. We are not short of ideas and opportunities to grow both in quantity but also in quality.

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ATG: *How do you decide what books to publish? Is there a selection committee or board composed of librarians and publishers? Who is responsible for peer review?*

AB: At **IntechOpen**, the book concept is generally developed by an Internal Handling Editor, a member of **IntechOpen** staff, who will search for a recognized expert in the field to act as an External Editor. Once an External Editor has been appointed by the Internal Handling Editor, the book is open for submissions. Prior to submitting a full chapter, authors are first asked to submit a chapter proposal in the form of an abstract which is then assessed by the External Editor for its suitability in terms of the overall scope and direction of the book. The final manuscript is also reviewed and subject to a plagiarism check, and authors receive a full reviewer report. Finally, we provide full XML Typesetting, technical editing, English language copyediting and proofreading to ensure quality.

In addition, we do have general scientific advisory boards. However, people who have worked with me in the past know that I strongly believe that quality in publishing matters, and I believe that competent advisors play a big role in this quality assurance. So yes, we do work with a board, but we plan to establish additional subject related academics as well as a board of librarians and representatives of funders and work closely with them to give us and the authors direction.

ATG: *Looking over your press releases, IntechOpen has taken many unique and perhaps unusual steps at collaboration with Knowledge Unlatched; online first publication, indexing Open Access books, and other initiatives. What do these collaborations say about how you rank your priorities?*

AB: Scientific progress is driven by collaboration and we believe that if we want to continue to provide knowledge without boundaries, we must work with others to try new initiatives, reach new partners and support the academics who publish with us. It is true that community building is part of our strategy and we apply what we learn to our overall workflows.

The cooperation with **KU** gives authors the opportunity to publish Open Access knowing that the funding is already secured, in this case, by librarians. The librarians do exactly the same thing as they would for “normal book collections”: they finance the dissemination of knowledge in a crowdfunding model to the reader, but here it’s in reverse order: the librarians tell us which subject they are interested in and we must guarantee the quality of the publication. **Knowledge Unlatched** collects the money and administers it. Library contacts at this level and at this scale is certainly not our domain. I think it is the perfect distribution of labour: all three parties do what they are good at: libraries curate, **KU** collects and administers, and we publish. But if you ask me more generally, I strongly believe that we have to rethink how the industry collaborates. The market is small, it is under pressure and quickly

changing. We need to collaborate to come to good solutions for all; there is not much time and money for each of us to reinvent the wheel.

ATG: *Do you have any partnerships with other OA publishers or traditional publishers? Are there plans to do so in the future?*

AB: Yes, we would love to form partnerships with other publishers. I think the current environment in publishing offers opportunities for increased cooperation. Let’s not forget that compared to **Elsevier**, **Springer**, **Taylor & Francis**, and **Wiley-Blackwell**, the rest is all quite small. Some “swarm intelligence” is needed to compete and survive. We know a great deal about Open Access publishing while others may still need to embrace that, but those others may have more expertise in different geographical or subject markets than we do. I am sure that we could complement each other. There are talks under way, but it is a bit premature to talk about that publicly.

ATG: *Can you tell us more about why you feel the industry needs to rethink how it collaborates? And what would that collaboration look like? What type creative partnerships do you envision?*

AB: Our strength is not only a deep knowledge of the Open Access market, but also the utilization of the right workflows and technologies, a good sense of the — let’s call it “author psychology” — and contacts to funders inside and outside of the academic research market. Others, and I’m not necessarily talking about other publishers here, may have a better understanding of author behavior as they measure it on other platforms. There may be organizations or societies who want to move quickly into Open Access, either because they want to or have to. That, for example, would make a good match.

ATG: *You told another interviewer that you planned to lead IntechOpen forward “in a way that enhanced the quality of scientific information.” Can you talk about your strategy for making this happen?*

AB: The most important thing in any publishing strategy is to bring authors what they want, which is service and convenience. We need to curate our data well, need to become more granular in our search options. That is costly and the needs (which are primarily the researcher’s needs not ours) must be explained to the funders as they or “somebody” has to come up for the costs. Above all, we need to listen to academics to understand their needs and develop systems and workflows that support them. It is the academics who create, read, and cite the content, so if we do not correctly interpret what they want we will have no strategy and may as well go home! I see our role to enable more scientific analysis and to assist the creation of more research, not to prevent research. That happens largely through the quality of digital data and sharing it with researchers. I may add that my appointment in the *Rat für digitale Infrastruktur der Bundesrepublik* (Council for the Digital Infrastructure in Germany) gives me further insights and makes me even more sensible for what researchers and funders need. That informs the digital road-map we have to pursue.

ATG: *Digital Science recently posted a report on the state of Open Access monographs. One of the challenges they noted for publishers of OA monographs is discoverability and inclusion in library catalogs. How is IntechOpen addressing these concerns?*

AB: Our books and chapters are indexed in various repositories. We believe in the widest possible distribution. That’s why we try to export our data for free usability to as many platforms as possible. See it — use it — spread the word further. This is what the mission of an OA publisher should be. We have extremely active social feeds to try to reach wide audiences.

All chapters have DOIs and we are also in the process of including our books in the DOAB. We also make Zip files available and we export to libraries so they can better include the data into their catalogues. This is an industry-wide issue and libraries play such an important role. We would love to be a part of the solution and to work with partners, including libraries, to improve the situation.

ATG: *IntechOpen has been criticized for the high price (more than \$1,000) of authoring a chapter in one of its books. How do you respond?*

AB: It is a myth that our prices are high, particularly given our technical and personal service to researchers we offer. HSS subjects have about the same or possibly slightly lower costs — maybe because they only offer pdf files in most of the cases, and when you compare our price to other STEM publishers, we are definitely on the non-expensive side. Also, we include many services in our APC that other publishing houses would charge extra for, including the creation of xml files, technical editing, and language copy editing. And of course all chapters have the “online first” option, we can release each chapter once it is ready. In fact, a recent **Simba** report highlights us as being at the cheaper end of STEM Open Access publishing and comparative overviews like this one <https://www.openaccess.cam.ac.uk/paying-open-access/how-much-do-publishers-charge-open-access> support this as well. Like other publishers, we have discount options in place for multiple chapters or for institutions. In our cooperation with **Knowledge Unlatched**, we also closely coordinate our discount structure for libraries. If **KU** grants discounts to libraries which have pledged a certain amount of money, we, of course, acknowledge that discount for authors from that university, too.

ATG: *IntechOpen works with a number of globally-recognized funders ranging from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to the European Commission to the Chinese Academy of Sciences. Can you tell us what role funders like this play in your publishing program?*

AB: Funders have a huge role in encouraging academics to publish in Open Access formats and also in moving away from impact factors and journals. Many funders now say they are less interested in the venue of publication than the idea or output, and I would

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love to see this reflected in Open Access mandates. The incentives structure around publishing needs to change and that is down to funders, too.

I also see an important role in working with private funders. My home country, Germany, for example, has a large number of private foundations that support the publication of academic knowledge. However, not all of them have “caught the wave” of digital publishing. For example, some of them still have a reference to the weight of the paper in their application forms. I am sure we will get there, but it takes a while.

ATG: *Are all your OA books funded or are there other books which are not supported by the OA funding model which are published regardless?*

AB: Yes, there are. We take special pride in supporting women in science through our program of the same name. Open Access in general helps to remove barriers and allows everyone to access valuable information, but particularly in this program we do not want to exclude talent for any reason. The goal for the program is to charge zero APCs. The interest in publishing in this program is high, but we cannot cover all the costs. In order to allow

for the highest number of publications and the highest visibility of women in science, we are looking for sponsorship from foundations and companies. But librarians can also pledge to the program via **Knowledge Unlatched**.

ATG: *As you look out over the next three to five years, what role do you see for OA monographs in the world of scientific publishing? What changes and innovations do you anticipate in that world? And how do you see IntechOpen contributing to those changes and innovations?*

AB: Already we see that academics interact with single figures, or datasets, as well as with articles or chapters rather than the whole package as we have created it. In the future, publishers will move further into curating knowledge by connecting different aspects of research using new technologies and with machine learning. Publishing already sees itself as a service industry but we will move even further into this, working with academics and digital development to serve our communities in new and more technological ways. I think we will see many changes in how content will be created, how people will work together, what a publication even *is* and how we will review it. There’s a reason why AI is a buzzword: it will play a major role in both the creation of and validation of content. I would like my company to give itself room to experiment with these new ways to arrive at new knowledge,

even if not financially successful in the beginning. I think it is generally important to allow yourself a dosage of experimentation.

ATG: *We like to end our interviews by asking what you like to do in those rare moments of downtime. Do you have any favorite hobbies or leisure activities that you particularly enjoy?*

AB: I really like to do things that make me look at and think about things differently — wine tastings, for example, where you pair wine and salty chocolate. Try it! It has surprising results. I like classical, but “crazy” music. If you have ever heard John Adams’ “Harmonielehre” then you know what is awe-inspiring to me, but possibly not inspiring for everybody’s ears. I also, honestly, still do enjoy a good academic talk with a good hypothesis and sharp conclusions. In general, I like to leave a talk, a concert or a wine tasting thinking “oh gee, I was not aware that this was possible.” Either that or to swim, where it’s just me and the water.

ATG: *Thank you for taking time out of what we know must be a busy schedule to talk to us.*

AB: It was a pleasure. Thank you for the questions. 🌿

Blurring Lines — The Rise of Virtual Reality/ Augmented Reality and the University Librarian

An Interview with Sarah Howard of Queensland University of Technology

Column Editor: **David Parker** (Senior Director Product Management, Alexander Street, a ProQuest Company;
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Virtual reality, as an educational technology, is still in its infancy. The term itself, virtual reality/augmented reality, is understood by its advocates and its newest adopters to mean different things: 360 video, Google cardboard attachments for mobile devices, browser-based, interactive simulations, headset-and-haptic enabled, software-driven virtual environments and immersive caves offer a continuum of experiences and opportunities for adoption. And if one attends an academic conference in a field that is leading in the adoption of virtual reality for learning, such as nursing, medicine, architecture or engineering, examples of each of these technologies will be on display.

From the perspective of the library and the “virtual reality expert librarian,” virtual reality often connotes a physical space (3D Printers, Makerspaces) and/or an expertise in procuring, managing and educating users in the use of software, hardware and various other devices. Organizations that serve the institution and the library specifically, such as **ProQuest** where I am employed, are engaged with supporting the curation, acquisition, hosting and delivery of virtual reality content, although our decision to license, curate and deliver hinges on the degree to which our customers are coalescing around a content type, e.g., 360 videos. What will the role of the educational technology company be that exists to serve the library as virtual reality becomes more widely deployed across universities and classrooms? This question led me to the positing of a hypothetical continuum of provisioning and deploying, with the library/patron/institution taking up a space on the continuum deploying the virtual reality technology and the educational technology company, such as **ProQuest**, providing virtual reality content and platform services. To begin exploring the efficacy of the concept of a continuum of provisioning and deploying, I reached out to **Sarah Howard of Queensland University of Technology** and conducted the following interview.

Sarah, please describe your role and your library, particularly as concerns support for virtual reality in support of course learning.

SH: I am the Liaison Librarian at the **Queensland University of Technology Library (QUT)** (Brisbane, Australia) and I support the School of Nursing and the School of Optometry and Vision Science in the Faculty of Health. The three main areas of support I offer to the Schools is in information and digital literacy, research, and collection development.

I am also currently the *Council of Australian University Librarians (CAUL) Digital Dexterity Champion* for **QUT**. This new exciting role enables me to be part of the CAUL community of practice whereby I share resources and develop skills, whilst also leading the promotion of digital skills within the **QUT Library** team. In 2017, in addition to my Liaison Librarian role at **QUT**, I was extremely fortunate to lead a project entitled

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