Next-step Digital Publishing Tools and Practices

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Abstract: The rapid growth and proliferation of digital devices combined with cultural and technological changes suggests that in the near future we will see a deeply changed scenario in the publishing industry. Mobile technologies in the hands of a networked society should cause those players who wish to maintain a crucial role in the content industry, such as publishers and editors, to reconsider the way in which content is created, distributed, shared and consumed nowadays.
Keywords: Digital publishing; cross-media design; emergent narratives; location based media.

> *"Publishers have to become more reader oriented in a marketing and trend finding/ setting way rather than in a direct to consumer selling way".*
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> Markus Dohle, CEO of Random House Interviewed by Mike Shatzkin, September 2010 (http://www.publishingtrends.com).

Introduction: A Confusing Scenario

Nowadays the publishing industry seems to face a period of uncertainty, due to an unpredictable evolution of its business model and the vagueness of its role in a deeply changed society. While in the past the work of the publisher could be synthetically described as reviewing manuscripts, editing, marketing and distributing physical books through booksellers around the world, as the business model began to shift, hard-pressed by cultural changes and emerging technologies, many players began to wonder which of the publisher's roles could still be relevant in the near future. Chain narratives, peer reviewing and collaborative content creation, far from the earlier experiments, have reached a considerable level of maturity and reader appreciation; "Self publishing" and "print-on-demand" have become a viable option for a growing niche market; the continuing march toward digital publishing models is making significant changes in business models and processes faster than the publishing industry has ever seen before (Book Industry Study Group, 2009).

According to what Jim Milliot reported in *Publishers Weekly* in 2009 (Milliot, 2009), in the USA, the number of new and revised titles produced by traditional production methods fell 3% in 2008, to 275,232, but the number of on-demand and short run titles soared 132%, to 285,394. Since 2002, production of on-demand titles has grown 774% compared to a 126% increase in traditional titles. Apart from some extreme technological experiments in book production, such as Espresso Book Machine (On Demand Books, 2011), a large photocopier machine, launched in London 2009, that prints and binds books on demand in five minutes, the rapid development of print technologies has greatly contributed to the spread of the self-publishing phenomenon, affecting both economics and processes in book production. Players such as Lulu.com have made it possible to self-publish a book at a cost that is insignificant if compared to the past. Furthermore, the rapid diffusion of e-readers and tablet PCs, combined with the success of e-books, has dramatically reduced costs, transforming self publishing from a cheaper way of publishing to a profitable form of publishing in all respects, including the royalties earned by authors for each copy sold.

The efficacy of most marketing and communication strategies put in place by editors and publishers for the promotion of books and authors is also questioned. As in the old days when there were few mechanisms for distribution, and fewer chances of bringing books to the attention of relevant book reviewers, in the age of the Internet readers have discovered that they don't necessarily care about what reviewers say about a book if it covers a topic in which they are interested. The economic impact

of these dynamics on the book industry should be another matter of concern for most editors and publishers. Since 2006 Vasant Dhar, professor of information systems at New York University Stern School of Business, has shown through a sound analysis (Dhar & Chang, 2008) of the economic impact of user-generated content for the music business, how the music industry has failed not because it was unprepared to recognise self organised phenomena within the consumer base but because instead of focusing on providing their customers value and reasonable rights of usage, the music industry became obsessed with preventing piracy, and it cost them dearly. In this sense publishers should adopt a more market-focused business model that welcomes technological innovation instead of continuing to be disconnected from their rising consumer base, and in so doing underestimating the power of the cultural shift that has been brought about by emerging technologies.

Readers are increasingly self organised as communities of interests that share information, opinions and comments, trusting each other more than advertising and reviewers' opinions. The importance acquired in recent years by User Generated Content has exceeded that of traditional marketing and communications strategies in the publishing industry as in consumer goods and retailing, where in an Internet search carried out on 20 of the world's most famous brands, 25% of the results were links to User Generated Content. On the web 34% of bloggers express comments and opinions on products and brands to a public of whom 78% trust their recommendations (Qualman, 2009). The groundswell, that is, the trend of obtaining information and goods from other individuals rather than from businesses and institutions, assumes, along with the evolution of mobile technology, a disruptive potential which publishers must face. "As powerful as it is, technology is just an enabler. It's the technology in the hands of almost always connected people that makes it so powerful" (Li & Bernoff, 2006).

In relation with the news industry, this phenomenon has recently been analysed by the Pew Internet and American Life Project (Purcell, Rainie, Mitchell, Rosenstiel & Olmstead, 2010) according to which people's relationship to news and information is becoming increasingly portable, personalized, and participatory: 33% of mobile phone owners access news on their phone, 28% of Internet users customise their home page with news from third party sources, 37% of Internet users contribute to the creation of news, comment about it, or disseminate it via blogs and social media web sites. Marketing and communication strategies that have characterised the positions taken by the publishing framework within the complex system of promotion of books and authors, and the even more complex system that generates profits through book selling, are rapidly making way for social media and user generated content, so that editors and reviewers may influence readers' preferences much less than in the past.

Collaborative content creation, as both technological solution and cultural attitude, is rapidly spreading not only in the academic sector. Looking at some recent experiments, such as Booki,[1] The Book Oven[2] The Book of MPub[3] or CommentPress[4] it could be argued that there are numerous "communities of interest" that are increasingly involved with the technological solutions and environments that allow individuals to cooperate and share comments, access, reuse and remix content, and that the issue of formats and size (printed book, print, epub, pdf, HTML5, html and so on) through which the content is released, looks like a purely functional issue; the focus is on collaboration, and formats are relevant only as a way to make content accessible.

Giovanni Ragone (2005) talks about the fourth generation of publishing, where the web serves as an increasingly important route for communication as a source, as an archive and as an environment in

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[1] At Booki, people are encouraged to write a book by themselves or with others, discuss views, seek assistance, translate or reuse content and publish completed works (http://www.booki.cc).

[2] The Book Oven, an open source book publishing platform, helps teams of people turn manuscripts into finished books, and then publish them generating clean, well-formatted books in multiple outputs: .epub, print-ready PDF, InDesign-ready XML, and so on. It is built for writers, editors, proofreaders, designers and small presses (http://bookoven.com/splash).

[3] The Book of MPub, launched April 16, 2010, curates research and critical thinking from students in the Master of Publishing program at Simon Fraser University. In doing so, it makes a contribution to a collective discourse on innovative technologies in publishing—epublishing, new business models, and crowd sourcing and social media. The Book of MPub furthers discussion in three formats: blog, ebook and the classic, ever-evocative print form (http://tkbr.ccsp.sfu.ca/bookofmpub).

[4] CommentPress is an open source theme and plug-in for the WordPress blogging engine first released by the Institute for the Future of the Book in 2007 aiming to allow readers to comment paragraph by paragraph in the margins of a text turning a document into a conversation. It can be applied to a fixed document (paper/essay/book, etc.) or to a running blog (http://www.futureofthebook.org/commentpress).

which readers organize their own newsrooms; the web 2.0 is like a non-place where contents and products are always available and accessible, exploiting the characteristics of a digital text (multimedia, hypertext, interactivity). The new web by its nature subverts the traditional roles of producer and consumer of content, creating an environment where people unknown to each other share information and contents on the basis of common interests.

Changes that are occurring suggest a "cognitive" revolution linked to the network that will have an impact on internal processes throughout the publishing industry.

Conclusion

In the next few years, digital devices, interactive technologies, collaborative platforms, advanced distribution systems, augmented reality, will revolutionise the publishing industry. The sector will see the creation and dissemination of publications, cross-medial, multi-authored, open-ended, and intimately associated with the web and community of "professional readers" using mobile technologies, location-based platforms, and interactive design. Publishing houses, then, will have to reconsider their role and consequently update their processes and products to keep up with social, cultural and technological changes that have profoundly modified the way in which digital content is produced, distributed, displayed and accessed.

In a changed scenario, publishers may still play a significant role as a bridge between authors, content and readers, sustaining communities and creating a solid technological framework that enhances multi-authorship, cross-medial distribution, interactivity and knowledge dissemination.

Aiming to reconsider the role of publishing houses and to identify possible ways in which they would continue to represent a fundamental cog in the publishing engine, it could be suggested that successful publishers may be those that:

- enhance interactivity, so that content can be updated, extracted, remixed, re-contextualized, distributed, reviewed by both readers and authors;
- design and develop a robust technological framework that inspires a complex range of user experiences and new forms of content dissemination, through the web and mobile platforms;
- create an integrated technological environment that transforms standard multimedia content (text, images, videos...) into its cross-medial version;
- actively contribute to building communities that involve authors and a group of readers interested in a topic, encouraging projects that aim to build and nurture these communities, experimenting and developing new ways of visualizing, consuming and sharing knowledge developed around a theme;
- sustain multi-authorship, leaving contents to be hosted in environments that welcome multiple voices, points of view and layers for interpretation, at any time and place; and
- produce publications that address multiple media in harmonious ways so that contents may be accessed on paper, web, mobile phones, architectures, objects, and bodies, by using ubiquitous and location-based technologies.

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