

The challenge of ebooks in academic institutions (JISC project)

Creation of ebooks: Case study:

Manchester University Press

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Manchester University Press, background¹

Founded in 1904, Manchester University Press (MUP) is the third largest University Press in England and publishes monographs and textbooks by authors from all over the world. MUP currently publishes 145 new books a year and manages a portfolio of 14 journals as well as an extensive backlist of over 1000 titles. A hardback print run is typically around 300 and a simultaneous paperback would be up to around 2,000 for an initial print run. Of those around half are currently available as ebooks. The two key audiences for MUP are libraries and academics- and hence there is obviously a need to make content accessible (discoverable) and easy to procure for both audiences.

Why publish ebooks?

The MUP ebook strategy is driven by consumer, scholarly and technology factors. The basic aim is improved dissemination of scholarly works. Ebooks support this, alongside initiatives such as print-on-demand (POD) which MUP has been involved in for well over ten years. The MUP POD program has worked very well extending the life of the backlist and re-introducing old 'classics'.

In summary the reason for ebooks are essentially:-

- Increased dissemination
- Match with consumer behaviour. For example digital enables consumers to broaden their palette. Browsing content becomes much easier and in turn exposes the reader to content that may previously have been ignored.
- More value from our backlist. E offers a good opportunity to extend the lifespan of good scholarly content by freeing it from the constraints of the print paradigm. In many respects, the ebook is a natural progression from POD.

Summary of how ebooks are created

Production

The pre-output stages, (commissioning, editing etc) are shared with print. PDF Ebook output is either created in house, by the typesetter or is outsourced to a conversion house like CodeMantra (which used by a number of publishers including many university presses). Alternatively conversion may be done by a **publishing** partner for a specific ebook project — e.g. MUP is a partner in the University Press Scholarship Online (UPS²) working with Oxford scholarship online (see below under distribution).

In essence the output format is determined by technical demand of the specific distribution platform (UPS²) or reseller (Amazon Kindle, Apple, Kobo etc.).

¹ The following article offers useful background and perspective on ebooks in the context of university presses: 'Ten Questions and Tentative Answers about the State of E-book Publishing for University Presses'. By Marlie Wasserman, Director, Rutgers University Press. NIS Information Standards Quarterly. Spring 2011, v.23, no. 2 ISSN: 1041-0031 doi: 10.3789/isqv23n2.2011.03 http://www.niso.org/publications/isq/2011/v23no2/wasserman/FE_Wasserman_10questions_isqv23no2.pdf

² <http://www.universitypressscholarship.com/>

Distribution

MUP does not sell direct. Ebooks are distributed through a number of ebook channels such as:-

- Aggregator ebook platforms such as EBL, Ebrary, MyiLibrary, EBSCO, Dawson Era.
- Amazon (Kindle), Apple, Nook, Kobo etc. MUP – Manchester Scholarship online (MSO)³ is a collaboration with Oxford Scholarship online and the University Press Scholarship Online (UPSO) platform. All content on the UPSO platform is fully cross-searchable. This is a collaborative University press channel that promotes the scholarly work under the umbrella of a coherent platform. Content is in XML—which enables detailed and intuitive searching of content. For a library it means easy access and deep searching of high quality scholarly content across a number prestigious university presses through one portal.
- MUP (with technology partner Metapress) has developed a ‘hybrid platform’ - Manchester Mediaeval Sources Online MMSO.⁴ MMSO is a platform of around 30 medieval texts that can be purchased at a one-off price or on an annual subscription in an attempt to fit in with budget realities of universities where it can be easier to secure budget for a one-off payment rather than committing to the long term expenditure of an annual subscription.

The key issues

As a University Press based on the campus of University of Manchester, MUP is very close to academic librarians, the services they provide to the immediate and wider academic community as well as in tune with the requirements of their audience—that is a key value of a UP like Manchester. MUP are always keen to work proactively with libraries. Both publishers and libraries see the value in making the discovery and curation of ebooks easier, there are issues that need to be addressed in order to advance this:

- Creation and distribution of metadata to a wide range of intermediaries, in the most efficient way.
- Need to develop new business models both in terms of pricing and delivery of content e.g. facilitating the ability purchase discipline specific portfolios of content, ‘pick and mix’, PPV, PDA and subscription.
- Meeting financial constraint of publishing multiple formats. Things are changing quickly and there is a cost to keeping up to date with formats for example.
- Outsourcing technological responsibility means more business partners. So we see some of the bigger UPs are offering platforms to smaller Ups e.g. University Press Scholarship Online and Cambridge Books Online.
- UPs are not *just* publishers—they have other skills in terms of service provider that can be combined with other campus based service providers e.g. MPublishing (University of Michigan Press and University of Michigan Library).

³ <http://manchester.universitypressscholarship.com/>

⁴ <http://manchester.metapress.com/content/H6520V>

- While ebooks offer the opportunity to capitalize on a strong backlist—and that strengthens our position in the market - there are significant technical and cost issues in getting that backlist content converted. There will be a need to collaborate with various technology and/or publishing partners to achieve that efficiently.
- Various intermediaries are looking to play a role in ebooks. For example the (physical) book distributor is looking to provide a role in the delivery of ebook content. NBN international through their Fusion service is looking to offer ebook distribution and the University of Chicago Press provides e-distribution via the well established Chicago Digital Distribution Center (CDDC). These services currently sit between publishers and aggregators like Ebrary or Ebsco but it could be feasible that they may look to a more direct role with libraries.

Lessons learnt and advice to give

- E is a new production model—creation and distribution issues are different. Getting workflow right is paramount for UP or publisher of our size. Issues such as checking permissions and rights (important where a lot of our output is edited collections so there may well be several potential rights holders) are more complex for e with its different formats and platforms offering different features and capabilities.
- Creating an ebook is more complex/intricate than a print one. There was a notion that e would give publishers easier access to more dissemination channels. However technical complexities have meant this is taking time to realise.
- Good metadata is even more important in digital-as there is no physical ‘bookshelf’ to browse.

Thoughts on the future...

Print and online in academic publishing will co-exist for a time yet. E markets are more complex in terms of channels, formats, and business models and we expect to see continuous change and development and as a result MUP (like many other academic presses of similar size) will have to continue to adopt a variety of models in order to deliver content and meet demand.