Programme

• Library-based Publishing

What Do They Want Anyway?  
Understanding the needs of scholars in a contemporary publishing environment

Dr Maria Bonn  
• Senior Lecturer, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

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Publishing at the LSE  
Academic-led, library-supported publishing at the London School of Economics and Political Science

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What Do They Want Anyway? Understanding the Needs of Scholars in A Contemporary Publishing Environment

Maria Bonn
University of Illinois Urbana Champaign
February 26, 2018, Researcher To Reader
Project Overview

A library based digital publishing initiative from the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign

- Partnership between
  - University Library
  - School of Information Sciences
  - Illinois Program for Research in the Humanities
  - Department of African American Studies

- Funded by Andrew W. Mellon Foundation
- $1M over four years (2015-2019)
When access as a value of scholarship is foregrounded in publishing, libraries emerge as “natural and efficient loci for scholarly publication” (Courant and Jones, 2015).
Objectives

- Build capacity for participation in innovative publishing initiatives
- Conduct research and assessment of how both established and emerging technologies align with the expressed needs of participating scholars
- Create a new model for the conceptual development of scholarly communication
A time of proliferation of publishing choices

- Medium/Media
- Method
- Partners

... Because digital, because network, because business and service response
Goals will inform publishing choices, so we ask our scholars to . . .

**Be clear on their goals:**

- Visibility, increased reach – geographic and audience
- Impact on discipline/field
- Promotion and tenure, or at least a respectable line on the CV
- Exploiting alternatives to linear, textual narrative
- Being done with it, get it “out there” quickly
- Making an intervention in the political economy of scholarly communication
- An opportunity for professional editing
- Making enough money to get a new car
- Impressing Mom
Research

Research Goals

Understanding…
1. Current publishing practice
2. How scholars consume publications
3. Scholars’ personal, professional, and community objectives for publishing
4. Scholars’ perceptions of and requirements for publishing tools and platforms
5. Scholars’ perceptions of and requirements for publishing services and support

Research Methods

- Interviews
- Focus Groups
- Surveys
A national survey

- 30 questions, 6 themes
  1. Experience with print and digital publishing
  2. Publishing objectives
  3. Digital tools and platforms
  4. Services and support
  5. Readers’ perspective
  6. Attitudes toward digital publishing

- Open June-October 2016
- 250 responses
- 119 respondents provided demographic information
What are your primary goals for publishing?

- To contribute new information to the field
- To encourage and participate in dialogue about your area of study
- To establish a formal record of your scholarship
- To establish your reputation in the field
- To reach the widest possible audience
- To support professional advancement
- To encourage the application of your research
- To promote specific action
- Financial remuneration

Rank 5

Rank 4

Rank 3

Rank 2

Rank 1
The audiences you most wish to reach with your scholarship are:

- Colleagues in your discipline
- Cross-disciplinary peers
- The general, educated reader
- Students in your field
- A special targeted community
- Colleagues at your institution
When you consider whether a publication has met your goals, how important are these indicators?

- Sales
- Coverage in conventional media
- Mentions on social media
- Classroom adoption
- Other evidence of online use
- Citations
- Reviews
- Direct contact from other scholars in your field

- Not important
- Not important, but I would like to explore this possibility
- Somewhat important
- Moderately important
- Very important
- Extremely important
Survey responses: Challenges

Top Challenges for Print and Digital Publishing

- Speed to publication was too slow: 11% Digital, 55% Print
- Securing third-party permissions: 25% Digital, 32% Print
- Manuscript preparation: 19% Digital, 24% Print
- Getting adequate technical support for publication: 25% Digital, 30% Print
- Getting adequate editorial support for publication: 28% Digital, 31% Print
- Getting adequate financial support for publication: 27% Digital, 35% Print
- Finding an appropriate venue for publication: 25% Digital, 38% Print
- Securing a publisher: 20% Digital, 38% Print
- Reaching your intended audience: 11% Digital, 31% Print
- Speed to publication was too slow: 11% Digital, 55% Print
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When publishing, which of the following services and forms of support are important to you?

- Help planning publishing projects
- Instruction in working with digital publishing
- Publisher intervention for organizational and...
- Hosting for supplementary digital materials
- Support for navigating third-party permissions...
- Marketing / audience-creation support
- Publisher intervention for representation of...
- Digital archiving and preservation
- Peer review coordination
- Communication / transparency in process

-60%  -40%  -20%  0%  20%  40%  60%  80%  100%

Not at all important  Extremely important
Of those services you consider important, how adequate is available support?

- Support for navigating third-party permissions
- Marketing / audience-creation support
- Digital archiving and preservation
- Hosting for supplementary digital materials
- Instruction in working with digital publishing
- Publisher intervention for organizational and...
- Help planning publishing projects
- Communication / transparency in process
- Publisher intervention for representation of...
- Peer review coordination

Virtually no support

Very adequately supported
In brief:

- Print publishing is Too Slow
- Digital publishing needs a lot of editorial and technical support
- Financial remuneration doesn’t matter much. Neither do institutional colleagues
- Reputation and attention in the field matter a whole lot.
- Scholars want to know about what’s going on behind the curtain.
- Most people think they are more accepting of change than their peers.
And now we’re asking more questions . . .

"so what’s great about this digital possibility is that you can publish something that’s highly visual. You can mix your textual exposition… with the visual evidence in a kind of interactive way and let people explore the evidence themselves."

“I can’t imagine we can immediately build something that has all the advantages of the traditional paper plus all the things I just mentioned right off the bat. It would be better than some things, worse than others. So it would take a fair degree of experimentation to get from here to there”
We ask things like . . .

1. What are your scholarly goals for your project? What impact would you like it to have, either in your discipline or in the broader public arena?

2. Do you have other professional goals to which you see this work contributing?

3. What kind of information will help you to determine whether you have accomplished these scholarly and professional goals once your results are published?

4. At this time, do you have any plans for sharing the results of your work, either in progress or in final form? If so, how do you plan on doing so? Can you talk about ideal or desired times to publication? How much of a priority do you place on speed to publication?

5. What do you see as the ideal form of publication for your findings?

6. Do you see any impediments to deploying that form? If so, what are they?

7. Are there kinds of support or services that would help you overcome those impediments?

8. Can you talk a little about your past publishing experiences? Have any been particularly successful or particularly dissatisfying? Elaborate on why. Do you have experience with any forms of digital publication?
Themes emerging: What digital publishing might do for me and my work

A big goal of the project is to make evidence come alive in a narrative history. To present that evidence in a way that you usually wouldn’t be able to do if you were writing a traditional scholarly book or article in print.

I hope my work can engage the public and I can produce work that has a broader impact than the scholarly impact.
Themes emerging: Keeping scholarship alive

people can comment and directly link to sources and other people can link to it, that has an attached data set of results that other people can make use of, and check, can revise, refine and other people can update

An evolving document. A living document

The possibility of having versioned scholarship where I could go back and revise it and revise it and revise it and it’s kind of up there as an interactive project.
Themes emerging: Scholarly Being and Time

No small number are at present engaged in those Weighty Productions which require both Time and Assistance, for their due Maturity

The impediments to writing really good journal articles mostly have to do with time management

One of the reasons for my skepticism with journals (is that) it takes years, literally to get things through.
I’ve talked to people about some of the drawbacks, potentially, of using something like Scalar . . . I mean, publishing my work that way and I think that one of the biggest liabilities is that it doesn’t have the kind of institutional weight that the kind of traditional print publication in my field has. It doesn’t have the automatic audience.

I think that people want things that work perfectly the first time. No new technology does that. So we need to have support and tolerance for failure and I’m afraid that universities are very afraid of failure.

I would want to have a limited readership for it so it’s not just out there on the web for people to copy and paste and claim it as their own.
How it all comes together

- Our research informs development of tools and services
- The goals of the scholars inform our deployment of tools and services
- Our tools and services provoke the imagination of the scholars
- The imagination of the scholars aspires to new possibilities for the communication and reach of scholarship
- Working together we realize new possibilities for the communication and reach of scholarship
- The world is a better place
Thank you

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PWW Question by Question Survey Report
http://hdl.handle.net/2142/98576

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