plateau on which we’ve been residing for centuries. But one thing’s for sure: We won’t be bored.

Niko Pfund
Vice President and Publisher, Trade and Academic Books


Many nights, I have the same dream. I find myself in a vast warehouse filled with books and journals. I trek past all the aisles from ‘aa’ to ‘zz.’ Exhausted at the end of my journey, I leave the room through a door and am greeted by a technician in a white suit who hands me a minute metal box with his latex-gloved hands. ‘Here you go, Mr. Bacher,’ he says, ‘just plug this into your USB port and the world’s information is yours.’ I wake up.

A report out of Berkeley’s School of Information Management and Systems indicates that 800MB of new information is created per person annually. Of that information, 92 per cent is stored on magnetic media, primarily hard disks. Film represents 7 per cent of the total, paper 0.01 per cent, and optical media 0.002 per cent.¹ To put this into perspective, a PDF file of one of our smaller monographs takes up 2.8MB of space, meaning that each person on the globe produces the content of more than 300 books each year. Of course, most of the information is of no use to scholars.

University presses, and the academy at large, are at a crossroads in serving their clients. Since the availability of vetted and authorized information is the driving force to discovery, since information is being created at an alarming clip, and since prices primarily for scientific and technical publications have risen above inflation consistently, all participants are grabbing onto life preservers to stay afloat. Much of the current conversation revolves around the issues of open access, open archives, retention of rights, digital
repositories, and other new schemes of distribution and storage, all meant to streamline the scholarly communication environment and reduce the price per barrel of publications.

The era of cyberspace publishing has also changed the speed equation. When print was the predominant means of receiving information, the time from idea creation to idea dissemination was relatively homogeneous across disciplines, though the time lag for the sciences has always been shorter. In the sciences, journal articles have been the main carriers of new ideas. In rapidly moving scientific disciplines, monographs are useful for educational purposes, and for comprehensive reviews of topics and areas that have developed and changed over time, but they do not have the same utility or cachet among the idea creators that monographs have in other disciplines, for example, disciplines in the humanities. Driven by customers’ demands as a result of technology innovations, some creators have bypassed the traditional system by opening pre-print and e-print repositories, a trend that will continue to encompass more academic disciplines.

The avalanche of information is also an outcome of technologies that have made us all publishers and have lowered the entry barriers into the publishing industry. Access to the traditional (print) publishing distribution chain is still, for the most part, controlled by major publishers and vendors. In the digital world, the great common denominator is the Internet. A scholar needs a computer, a Web site, and remarkably inexpensive software to open a publishing enterprise. Over the last decade, expanded competition and new entrants into the publishing arena have led to a decline in profit margins in the industry as producers look to lower costs by outsourcing and consolidating.

For university presses, collecting suitable content is now more crucial than publishing that content in a printed format. Like all industries faced with declining revenues and technological shocks, publishing must develop new products and seek efficiencies to offset rising internal costs usually associated with overhead. Commercial publishers retrenched and consolidated, but university presses did not follow suit. Granted, university presses were hesitant to do so, since administrators might see such moves as an immediate way to save costs and thus lessen support for their university presses.
Since the mission of university presses is to publish works that advance scholarship, forays into mid-list and trade publishing, though enticing, have muddled the nature of university press publishing and, in some cases, have increased staff and costs at an inopportune economic time.

Although they do not make my dreams change overnight, no pun intended, changes can be taken by university presses to enhance their roles in the cyber-revolution affecting the scholarly communication system.

First, collaborate, collaborate, and collaborate. At Purdue, the press reports to the dean of libraries (PUL). The press has a knowledge base in acquiring information, editing and formatting information, and printing or displaying it in ways that meet end users' standards. PUL – because of their cataloguing, metadata, retrieval, and distribution systems for both printed and digital material – are the sustainable information interface for faculty, students, and administrators on campus. When Purdue Libraries’ e-Scholar (the institutional, data, digital, and archival repository) was planned and implemented, the press contributed as part of the development team and was able to assist faculty members in creating and publishing three journals using the repository tools. Internal collaboration will continue to grow as more tools are developed to join and catalogue repositories and mine the information that they contain.

Second, mirror the academic strengths of your parent institution. Administrators, rightly or wrongly, may not understand the workings of a university press. Nevertheless, administrators do understand that branding has become a key component in a university’s attempt to attract students, faculty, and donors. Since even the smaller university presses have multi-channel marketing strategies that include domestic and international distribution, presses are positioned to become a key co-branding partner. In the value equation, the university press becomes a bargain to a university by providing global exposure at a significantly reduced cost.

Third, do not focus on the form of output (form is not important). To make an analogy, one of the primary ARL ratings for libraries was, and still is, the number of volumes in a library’s collection.
Because of the large amounts of digital information that research libraries purchase, volume count has become less of a factor in a library’s rank. Likewise, the future value of university presses will be determined not by how many books the production department can publish annually but instead by the type and importance of the information. The success of distribution systems like Project MUSE should inform university presses that a similar system for monographic content would provide a rich revenue stream.

*Fourth*, understand that how content is being authorized in the academy has changed and will continue to change. Typically, especially for books, a completed work comes in and is sent out for review to authorities in a particular field. This vetting determines the worth of the work, and, after a press’s editorial board gives final approval, the work can be published. This process is linear. A newer process has emerged in which works get posted to a digital site and the value of the work is determined by the members who send comments to the creator, or by citation of the article in subsequent works. University presses need to adapt acquisitions to embrace this non-linear approach. In effect, a product is a collection of content a particular user envisions.

*Fifth*, realize that areas of research specialization will continue to expand. Some of ‘publishing’ will be handled by the participants themselves, other output will be a mix between self-publishing and external distribution environments like institutional repositories, and, for very large areas, traditional publishers will continue to control much of the inter-institutional commerce.

Presses that take these things into consideration will see that administrators will be glad to support their presses, especially at this point in the march toward a new paradigm in scholarly communication. Considering that scholarly discourse is maturing to a complex digital system, universities that have university presses are quantum leaps ahead. University presses will be able to ensure that the digital exchange of information among universities meets important standards in the areas of creation, citation, presentation, reliability, and longevity. In the digital world procedures will undoubtedly change, but the functions American
university presses have provided for more than a century will not disappear.

*I think it’s time for a dreamless nap.*

*Thomas Bacher*

*Director*

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