

Program Archive: 2009-2010

President: Christopher Kelaher, Brookings Institution Press

Vice President: Julian Graubart, American Pharmacists Association

An Evening with Kevin Smokler

Date: September 27, 2009

Location: Reuters Bookstore, 1890 K Street NW, Washington, DC

Presenter:

Kevin Smokler, Founder and CEO of Booktour.com

Event Summary:

Where Is New Media Headed, and Should We Be Following It? A Discussion with Kevin Smokler

Kevin Smokler, author and co-CEO of BookTour.com, addressed members of the WBP about new media and publishers' role in it. He began by stating, "Historically, publishing has been seen as a giant oak tree": ancient, unmovable, and unsusceptible to passing trends. He explained, however, that by its very nature--taking on a project, often by an unknown author, and investing time and resources in it without the assurance of success--"publishing is a wild act of daring."

Electronic innovation, he claims, has created a "fundamental shift in what it means to be in publishing." New channels to distribute content have been opened, and Smokler emphasized the importance of publishers using these channels to their best interests. He said that while the distribution aspects of publishing are becoming less important, editorial and especially marketing remain key areas of focus.

Smokler offered several ideas for disseminating information in new ways with new media. Breaking the content down into smaller pieces, he said, furthers the conversations and interactions that readers and publishers need to have in order to maintain relationships.

Relationships? Yes, he said relationships. Publishers need to listen to their readers and respond to their concerns, ideas, and needs. "Customers want to know you're on their side," he explained. It is important to keep their needs in mind because with no readers, there can be no publishing. "In every capitalistic venture," he said, "the customer wins out"; he offered the example of the music industry, which, by failing to offer pricing that customers considered fair and reasonable, lost a large chunk of business.

Smokler also addressed concerns with Facebook, Twitter, and host of other social media tools crowding headlines. If a service will further the publisher's mission and create content that readers need and want, the service should be used immediately--as long as it continues to function well in that role. He cautioned that before jumping on the social media bandwagon, publishers should first investigate "how the tool can serve you." He concluded, "Listen to what the reader wants; don't just chase every shiny new thing."

Six Ways Publishers Can Thrive in the New World of Publishing

1. Cut through the noise. There are countless distractions for readers, especially in the electronic realm, and it is imperative that publishers are heard amidst the din.
2. Move away roadblocks. Make sure readers do not face obstacles to accessing content. If readers want e-books, figure out how to create and deliver them.
3. Listen, listen, listen. Designate someone to listen to your readers and find out what they want. Without furthering the conversation between the publisher and the reader, publishers cannot know which medium will be most effective.
4. Invent a platform by which readers can reach you. Books and other publications are not dry goods; they are platforms for conversation. Focus on the content and the best way to present it relative to your readers' needs, rather than focusing only on traditional print options.
5. Treat customers with respect. Don't make the same mistake that the music companies made. Always treat your customers' concerns with respect by responding to them, thereby demonstrating an interest in providing to them what they want and need.
6. Take risks. In this time of great change, publishers must take risks in order to survive. Experiment with Twitter. Start a Facebook page. Conduct monthly podcasts with your authors. Find out what works, and don't waste time on what doesn't.

--Melody Wilson and Rebecca Stauffer

The Value of Publishing in a Knowledge-Based Society

Date: October 29, 2009

Location: Brookings Institution, 1775 Massachusetts Avenue, NW

Presenter:

Tom Allen, president and CEO of Association of American Publishers

Event Summary:

The Value of Publishing in a Knowledge-Based Society

Tom Allen, president and CEO of Association of American Publishers (AAP), met with WBP members on Thursday, October 29. Allen addressed concerns about digital publishing, piracy, and, of course, the Google settlement. Allen commented that publishing models have typically been viewed as "mature" and established, but the digital revolution is changing business models, bringing with it advantages and risks. "There's no sense in fighting the future and fighting where the public wants to go," Allen said.

While Allen expressed his confidence that the shift will produce "breakthrough content with new forms of technology," Allen also recognized two major problems that have arisen owing to the digital shift: the introduction of the open-access movement and a significant jump in piracy of copyrighted material.

He explained that many people believe that "if it comes over the Internet, it should be free." He acknowledged that the open-access movement is "based in some good sense. But if the goal is to educate, you don't want material to be transmitted through wikis -- you need the best quality available." Although the push toward open access cannot be ignored, he said, publishers still occupy key positions as the gatekeepers of trusted information that has been fact-checked and peer-reviewed.

Allen also spoke about the threat of literary piracy and the AAP's actions to limit it. As more books move from ink-on-paper print runs to digital formats, piracy has abounded. Allen highlighted the actions of Chinese government officials in defending copyright laws; as China moves toward the creation of publishing companies that would rival those in the United States, it has become more cognizant of the value of protecting intellectual and knowledge-based content.

The discussion then turned to the issue on every publisher's mind: the Google settlement. While Mr. Allen skirted particular details that are still under negotiation, he was able to answer several questions. When asked why the Department of Justice waited so long to question a settlement that was years in the making, Allen hypothesized that the current administration is more focused than the last on antitrust litigation. He added that the agreement is unusual because the heart of it consists of reparations going forward. The settlement is under particular scrutiny because it has created a new remuneration system for publishers in the digital age.

For those concerned about Google becoming too large, however, Allen cautions that we should look to those who have filed the loudest complaints to the settlement: "It seems like what is really going on is a massive struggle between Google, Amazon, and Microsoft." As the number of independent booksellers shrinks, Barnes & Noble, Borders, and Amazon remain -- and Amazon holds 85% of the world's backlist.

The definition of "book" is changing. According to Allen, AAP, as an advocacy organization, protects copyright and intellectual content while supporting effective education tools. Allen underscored the importance of quality student education and enhanced communication about the roles of publishers in society. "What we're doing is fundamental," Allen said, elaborating that "the role of reading, writing, communication, and learning is central to our development as humans." Publishers play an important part in this development, and in a knowledge-based society and economy, it is crucial that we make a public case about the value of publishing itself.

The Rights Attitude: Contract Issues in Book Publishing

Date: November 17, 2009

Location: CQ Press, 2300 N Street, NW

Presenters:

Elaine English, attorney and literary agent, Elaine P. English, Esq.

Bob Pursell, associate publisher for advertising, sales, and marketing at American Psychiatric Publishing Inc.

WBP Holiday Party and Book Exchange

Date: December 10, 2009

Location: National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1785 Massachusetts Avenue, NW

Navigating the E-Market: The Devil Is in the E-Tails

Date: April 8, 2010

Location: CQ Press, 2300 N Street, NW, Suite 800

Presenters:

Sheila Bounford, deputy managing director, National Book Network International

Becky Clark, former president of WBP; marketing director, Johns Hopkins University Press

Chris O'Brien, College Group Marketing Manager, CQ Press

Ed Tureen, director of publications, marketing, and web development, Peterson Institute for International Economics.

Event Summary:

Sheila Bounford, deputy managing director at NBN International (book distributor)

Knowledge of IT and electronic practices are essential for successful publishing.

No use in cursing Google, Amazon, etc., because we have to work with them--don't be immobilized by concern.

Electronic sales grow as a percentage while brick and mortar decline.

The e-tail environment gives power and choice to consumers--they become their own order processing clerk.

In time of recession, it's not a bad idea to look abroad; reference book sales, especially, have remained strong.

Amazon and B&N are not as important yet in Europe; they lag behind 2-3 years.

UK Amazon Advantage Programme has 30-35% of NBN's sales; no returns, so she encourages publishers to use.

The Book Depository is a very popular UK e-tailer: high distribution, low margin.

E-tailers redistribute to lots of places but often don't know who the ultimate consumer is.

It is essential to manage stock and keep available; figure out if POD is worth it; ensure digital print to quicken fulfillment.

The dues and subscription format survives (barely); backorders are dead--no customer patience.

The IT behind these systems is constantly changing and upgrading; if your distributor isn't also upgrading and changing, you probably have a problem.

Expect to spend some money.

Get as much customer data as possible.

Know your customer: who and where they are; how they want to buy.

Understand your supply chain: the customer requires fast and courteous service, especially in a recession.

Successful publishers will have a passion for customer service; customer expectations are high.

Pay attention to your buyer's buying experience.

Becky Clark, marketing director at Johns Hopkins University Press

Approx. 25% of JHUP e-tail sales are from Amazon; #1 client; B&N and Borders return too much.

Very low barriers to entry? If an e-tailer is offering terms that sound too good to be true, it probably is (experience with not being able to pay their bills).

Metadata drives business... boring but essential. This is not the fun copywriting, creative stuff of before; everything is automated, and if the correct metadata isn't being fed, books won't sell.

Yes, Vendor Central (Amazon) is frustrating and weird things happen.

Chris O'Brien, course adoptions manager at CQ Press

There has been a significant change in how course adoption business works because students want to purchase their texts online.

After using Amazon Advantage, we see sales fairly consistent year-round, not just in fall and spring; 2006-2010 growth went from 1% to 10% of total sales.

It is essential to supply Amazon with good data, both metadata and the "search inside the book" feature.

Professors will often use Amazon (sometimes with sales rep in the room!) to check the price before adopting book (less than campus bookstores).

Ed Turren, director of publications, marketing, and web development at Peterson Institute for International Economics

Because of book turnarounds of 8-12 weeks, multiple title changes can occur along the process, so publishers must keep metadata updated.

Amazon is consistently the largest buyer, with anywhere between 20% and 40% of sales.

We have seen a significant decline in sale through our own Web site.

We have a few books on Kindle and see it as potential growth area.

It is easier to get books onto Nook for B&N, but still far fewer sales than even a few books on Kindle.

From Question-and-Answer Period

A rise in the number of textbooks sold through Amazon and other online retailers means a loss of bookstore data (who is adopting the book) and pushes marketers closer to the actual academics doing the adopting, rather than the bookstore manager.

PubTrack for Higher Education (Bowker product) is currently in negotiations with Amazon to acquire sales data for course adoptions; check this product out, because it could be really helpful for targeting professors, although probably expensive:

<http://www.bowker.com/index.php/component/content/article/4/54>.

Everyone seemed to agree that working with Amazon is often frustrating, but sales (with no returns!) is worth it.

Book Design & Effectiveness Awards Ceremony

Date: June 10, 2009

Location: Resources Conservation Center, 1400 P Street NW, Washington, DC

Judges:

Nancy Bratton, Nancy Bratton Design

Robert Faherty, Vice President and Director, Brookings Institution Press

Don Reisman, Publisher, RFF Press

Piper Wallis, Director of Design, Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group

All About E-Books: Formats, Markets, Requirements, and Sales

Date: June 24, 2010

Location: Brookings Institution, 1775 Massachusetts Avenue, NW

Presenters:

Puja Telikicherla, intellectual property manager, Georgetown University Press

Betsy Kulamer, acquisitions editor of ASCE Press

Chris Kelaher, marketing director, Brookings Institution Press