



THE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICAN
UNIVERSITY PRESSES

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STAFF

Meredith Benjamin
Editor

Brenna McLaughlin
Electronic and Strategic Initiatives
Director

SOCIAL NETWORKING

University Presses in a 140-Character World

Colleen Lanick
Publicity Manager, MIT Press

We live in a time where we ask a new acquaintance to “friend” us rather than exchanging phone numbers. National news programs routinely receive tweets containing questions from viewers during news segments and baseball mascots hold up signs that say “Follow me” and list a Twitter handle. Social networking sites have become a powerful source for virtually all of our news and entertainment needs. Recently, I noticed a tweet from a colleague that simply said, “Princeton University Press is now on Facebook. Twitter, Facebook—next the world! muahahaah.” Amusing and perhaps a little diabolical, but it is evidence that the university presses, from Cambridge to British Columbia, have embraced and started to harness the power of social media.

A quick and unscientific survey of several university presses confirmed that most are using some form of social networking, and that the majority are using Facebook and Twitter. A few have pages on MySpace, Good Reads, and other smaller sites, although presses are not generally as active on these sites. Social networking pages are easy to set up, but once the account has been registered and images uploaded, the challenge becomes how to use these incredibly popular and influential sites in a way that fits into current publicity and promotion for specific titles and the press as a whole.

When we first launched Facebook and Twitter pages at MIT Press, we were very aware that we were The MIT Press, not an individual, and had to be careful about how we presented ourselves. The goal is to become part of the community, not alienate it with hard sales or elaborate marketing pitches. Our pages started as an experiment to try to connect with readers who might be using social media, but we never expected them to be as successful as they are—we currently have about 5,000 fans on Facebook and over 2,600 followers on Twitter.

Our primary goal is to put a face on the press and allow our personality to shine through. We try to respond to all comments and questions and encourage interaction with our readers. For a special Facebook feature, we interviewed our acquisitions editors about how they got started in publishing and what kind of books they were interested in. Recently, we asked our fans on Facebook to comment on their memories of the Atari video game. We had a new book on the topic and offered free copies to the first five people to wax nostalgic in our comments section. More than a dozen comments were posted in just a matter of hours. We have a handful of fans and followers who consistently comment on a particular subject area. Of MIT’s list, technology, environment, and art titles generally see the most activity.

Impelsys, continued

e-publishing experiments have shown in recent years: online content that breeds both interest and sales. Sameer Shariff, CEO of Impelsys, believes that this is a particularly important tool for scholarly publishers to reach readers across the globe: “Increasingly discriminating readers will access sample pages and make quick, convenient purchases from anywhere in the world, further strengthening the financial position of university presses.”

Web demos can be arranged for any AAUP member that is curious about these services. Impelsys will also be attending the Frankfurt Book fair, where interested presses can arrange a direct meeting. Use the online registration form or contact Ray Alba (ray.alba@impelsys.com) to set up a Frankfurt meeting or with other questions about Impelsys services. AAUP members can learn more about the AAUP-Impelsys program and pricing scale through the members web site [password required]. Impelsys also offers an online

Metadata, continued

LC and MARC records can only help digital discovery and sales of publishers’ works. The book marketing information provided through ONIX to the retail supply chain is now just as important for library patrons, and in the growing adoption of purchase-on-request policies, library collections specialists. Crosswalks between MARC and ONIX for Books will be needed to combine this data into effective and sharable information flows. OCLC is particularly interested in that concept, and recently undertook a pilot project to experiment with ingesting publishers’ ONIX records, matching and enhancing the data with existing WorldCat records, and feeding back optimized metadata. That project has led to a new suite of metadata services for publishers. A second symposium, to move not just the conversation, but also the possible, forward, is planned for next year. Broadening representation, and easing metadata reuse and collaboration will be goals for the next meeting.

In the meantime, standards continue to change and evolve to serve the book communities’ needs. In April of 2009, ONIX for Books 3.0 was released, and is not backwards compatible with previous versions. The ISTC or International Standard Text Code is being promulgated as “a global identification system for textual works”—that is, to identify a text rather than a product or format, as the ISBN is

“Learning Center” for press staff to delve deeper into the functionality available.

To talk about AAUP’s current e-publishing programs with Impelsys and Tizra, or suggest new program ideas, members are invited to contact Brenna McLaughlin at bmclaughlin@aaupnet.org.

Resources:

iPublish Central: <http://www.ipublishcentral.com/>

E-books at the MIT Press: <http://mitpress-ebooks.mit.edu/>

AAUP-Impelsys program details: <http://aaupnet.org/members/impelsys.html> [password required]

AAUP’s current e-publishing programs: <http://aaupnet.org/programs/epub/index.html>

Impelsys “Learning Center”: http://www.ipublishcentral.com/learning_center.php

used. Progress is being made on the International Standard Name Identifier (ISNI) to help in the correct identification of authors, a task that is required not just for better discovery but also in royalties and rights systems (such as the proposed Book Rights Registry from the Google settlement). In July 2009, CrossRef announced it had registered 1.7 million DOIs (Digital Object Identifiers) for book chapters and references. While the complexity of metadata standards is growing, so too are the support systems for producing and sharing accurate metadata. In the coming months, AAUP is planning to survey its membership about shared problems and needs in this area.

Resources:

OCLC Publisher and Librarian Symposium Reports:

<http://www.oclc.org/publisher-symposium/default.htm>

Metadata White Paper: Streamlining Book Metadata Workflow: http://www.niso.org/publications/white_papers/StreamlineBookMetadataWorkflowWhitePaper.pdf

BISG Product Metadata Information and Best Practices: <http://www.bisg.org/what-we-do-cat-21-product-metadata.php>

ONIX:

<http://www.editeur.org/8/ONIX/>

Social Networking, continued

The University of Arizona Press, like many presses, joined Facebook first, and opened a Twitter account more recently. Kathryn Conrad, Arizona’s Interim Director, says they use Facebook, where they have around 170 fans, for spreading news about press events (including photos) and about media coverage for their titles. They use Twitter very differently. Their thousand-strong Twitter community “does not like marketing or self-promotion,” she says. “So, what we are doing here is trying to actively engage in the communities that are relevant to us.” They use Twitter to “engage not only in talk about books and publishing but about our state and local community, environmental concerns, indigenous rights issues—anything that relates to what we publish.”

Brian Bowen, Publishing and Marketing Coordinator at Yale University Press, views their Twitter following, currently at 3,500 and growing steadily, as a vital part of their promotion. He has been able to track which posts attract the most clicks, and has found that “the 140-character format allows would-be book buyers to stumble upon our content in the process of their normal web browsing.”

Most staff at member presses believe social networking sites should primarily be used to communicate with media and consumers, and not for direct sales, though I was pleased when on a recent post linking to a Q&A with the author of a recent book, one of our fans commented: “I have been seduced by social marketing and have ordered the book.”

Rebecca Ford, blog editor and voice of Oxford University Press tweets, uses Twitter to build relationships and communicate with journalists about Oxford titles. They currently have around 1,300 followers. “It’s important to be accepted by the community,” she said. “You have to participate in the community, not just provide information. It is worth it if you want to invest the time to get into the community.” She has experimented with give-aways, promoting the original content on their incredibly successful blog, and linking to openly available content from Twitter. She also promotes author participation on Twitter, encouraging authors to talk with each other and collaborate.

The key to keeping people interested in your content is involving them in the discussion and paying attention to their issues and concerns. “Twitter allows us to communicate both directly and indirectly with readers and tweeters who

do or might enjoy Yale books,” says Bowen. “I’ve used the @reply feature to respond to readers’ questions related to our books. Both help to expand our readership and create an online personality for the press.”

While they routinely receive comments on their posts such as “great article,” and “I really want to buy that book,” the most gratifying response Arizona received on their Facebook page centered on a post they did about the press celebrating its 50th anniversary. A local journalist saw the post and emailed Conrad saying she would like to do a story for a local weekly. “It turned into a cover story including interviews with multiple staffers and authors,” Conrad said. “We got great coverage without ever making the pitch.”

Arizona has had many fruitful interactions on Twitter as well. “We discovered a local blog that then publicized a promotion we had going on. I helped a customer find one of our books she thought was out of print. We discovered a

specialty account we’d never heard of and donated some hurt books for a fundraising effort they had going on. In general, I would say it’s a lot like being at BEA or a book festival: you never know what good thing will come of it.” Conrad added that they have, “been exposed to more publishing news than you could ever find in the mainstream media.”

It is doubtful that social media will replace traditional publicity and marketing efforts. Rather, they enhance what we are

already doing and afford us more direct communication with our audience, a crucial aspect that is occasionally lacking in more traditional efforts. So many of us get our news via social media that it is only logical that university presses want to participate in this rapidly growing phenomenon.

Most university presses use social media to discuss what is happening in their community and the publishing world as well as what is going on with particular books and authors. At MIT, we have found it very useful to follow others, including colleagues at peer presses and trade houses, journalists, authors, and other organizations and individuals that are relevant to our list. Editors are using social networking to attract authors. Publicists can quickly scan Twitter for alerts when book review editors resign or contribute to the buzz about a particular topic or title, and authors can keep the press and their followers interested in what they are doing to promote their new book. The possibilities are endless.

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