
Informing Library-Based Digital Publishing: A Survey of Scholars' Needs in a Contemporary Publishing Environment

Megan Senseney
mbonn@illinois.edu
University of Illinois, United States of America

LaTasha Velez
lmvelez2@illinois.edu
University of Illinois, United States of America

Christopher R. Maden
crism@illinois.edu
University of Illinois, United States of America

Janet Swatscheno
jswatsc2@illinois.edu
University of Illinois, United States of America

Maria Bonn
author.email@domain.com
University of Illinois, United States of America

Harriett Green
green19@illinois.edu
University of Illinois, United States of America

Katrina Fenlon
kfenlon2@illinois.edu
University of Illinois, United States of America

Introduction

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). In a rapidly evolving digital publishing landscape, academic libraries are poised to address scholars’ publishing concerns about gaining access to opportunities for support and re-skilling, providing open access to their intellectual content, and ensuring access to the audiences who will most benefit from their work. The growth of library-based

publishing services is evidenced by the 115 college and university libraries currently listed in the Library Publishing Directory (Lippincott, 2016). This paper presents selected results from a US-based survey on the needs of humanities scholars in a contemporary publishing environment, emphasizing aspects of the survey responses that shed light on the question of access in publishing from three perspectives: access to support services, access to content, and access to audience.

About PWW

Publishing Without Walls (PWW) is a Mellon-funded initiative at the University of Illinois led by the University Library in partnership with the School of Information Sciences, the department of African American Studies, and the Illinois Program for Research in the Humanities. Our project is developing an innovative and experimental library-based digital scholarly publishing model that aims to be accessible, scalable, and sustainable. Our objective is to develop a model for library-based publishing services that can be adopted broadly by other academic libraries to address scholars’ emerging needs in a contemporary publishing environment. The model itself places humanities scholar at the center of the ecosystem, with services informed by—and responsive to—scholars’ needs. Research and development within the project are strategically designed to address known gaps within the current landscape: the gap between what and how scholars want to publish and what existing systems of print publishing can accommodate; the gap between the everyday practices of humanities scholars and what high-level tools exist for producing and supporting digital scholarship; and the gap between digital scholarship and publishing opportunities at resource-rich institutions and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).

Survey Method

This paper presents the selected results of a large-scale survey about scholars’ publishing practices and perceived needs. The full survey aims to understand what and how scholars want to publish, when and why they choose to publish digitally, and how they perceive the success of their digital publications. Survey outcomes will directly inform the development of PWW’s shareable service model, but we also anticipate that our survey results will be relevant to digital humanists and other scholars engaged in digital

scholarly publishing, whether such efforts are located within or beyond an academic library.

From June to October 2016, we conducted a large-scale survey of scholars, especially targeted at humanities scholars and scholars at HBCUs in the United States. The survey was developed by the PWW Research Team in spring 2016, and comprised around 30 questions. The survey covers six broad themes: respondents' experiences with print and digital publishing; respondents' publishing objectives; publishing tools and platforms; publishing services and support; publishing from the scholars' perspective of reader as opposed to author; and general attitudes toward print and digital publishing. The survey was distributed through listservs and social media venues targeting scholars in the humanities generally as well as selected niche communities to encourage sufficient responses across disciplines and institutions. The survey received 250 responses.

The team used the Qualtrics platform to present the survey and conduct initial analysis, with further quantitative data analysis in SPSS. Preliminary findings have been reported previously (Fenlon et al., 2016), and analysis is ongoing. The survey instrument and a summary report will also be archived in the IDEALS repository (Velez et al., in preparation).

Results

Respondents were asked to identify which aspects of publishing posed the most significant challenges with respect to their experiences with print and digital content. Figure 1 represents the percentage of respondents who indicated each potential issue as either "quite challenging" or "extremely challenging" in print or digital publishing.

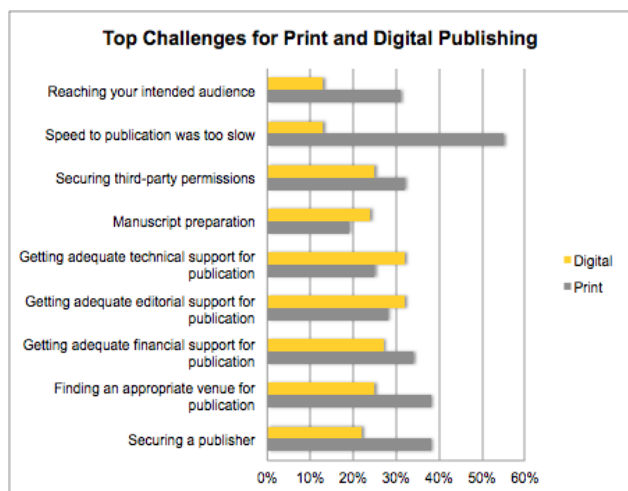


Figure 1. Top Challenges for Print and Digital Publishing

The top three challenges for digital publishing include getting adequate technical, editorial, and financial support for publication. Respondents were also asked to indicate and rank their top five publishing goals, which are illustrated in Figure 2 as a weighted bar graph where a first-place ranking is assigned 10 points, a second-place ranking is assigned 5 points, and a third-place ranking is assigned 1 point. The top three goals are consistent with the traditional expectations for scholarly publishing: contributing new information to one's field, encouraging and participating in dialogue about an area of study, and establishing a formal record of one's scholarship.

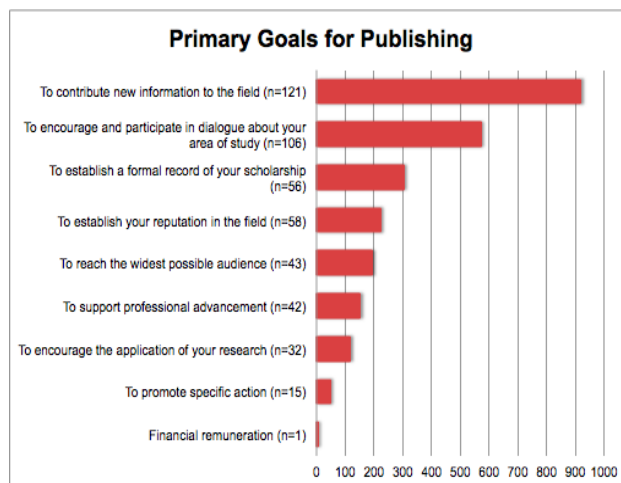


Figure 2. Primary Goals for Publishing

Figure 3 illustrates the top three audiences that scholars indicated they most wish to reach. The top two audiences relate to peers within the academic community. While interest in reaching the general educated reader and students is less frequently cited, it is sufficiently robust to consider how reaching these audiences may have an impact on scholars' decision making with regard to the medium they choose and the venues they seek for publication. Understanding how less traditional, but still prevalent, publishing goals affect these choices is also a potentially fruitful avenue for exploring how explicitly stated publishing objectives inform, and possibly shift, priorities regarding representation and dissemination within scholarly publishing. These themes are explored in a set of four charts in Figure 4.

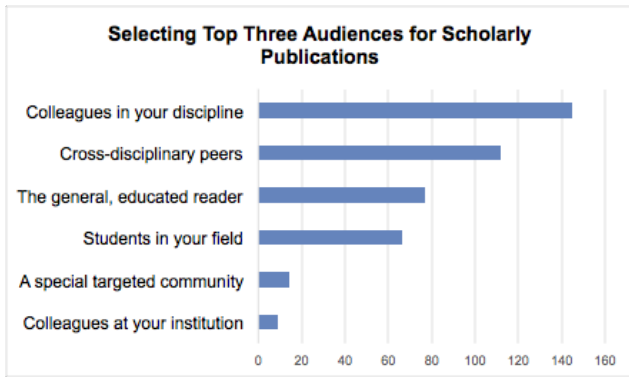


Figure 3. Selecting Top Three Audiences for Scholarly Publications

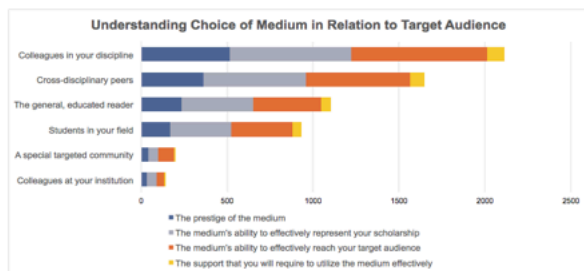
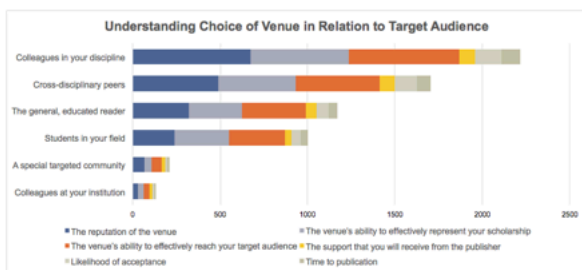


Figure 4. Comparing Scholars Selection Criteria for Publishing Medium and Venue in Relation to Target Audience and Publishing Goals

Discussion

When comparing scholars' characterization of challenges in digital versus print publishing, speed to publication and reaching one's intended audience emerge as the two greatest challenges to print publication, but they are perceived as relatively less challenging in digital formats. This difference between print and digital suggests that these "challenges" might be considered the primary "affordances" that scholars perceive for digital publishing. For digital publishing, the top three challenges that scholars face all relate to receiving adequate support for the logistical aspects of the process, including technical, editorial, and financial support. Though not one of the top three challenges, another aspect of publication that the survey responses suggest is more challenging in digital than print publication is manuscript preparation. Despite the fact that the most prevalent challenges to digital publishing relate to issues of support, the support that scholars will receive from publishers never emerges as a major factor in a scholar's choice of publishing medium or venue, regardless of their specific publication goals and intended audiences.

The top three considerations with respect to choosing both one's medium and the venue in which to publish are the ability to effectively represent the scholarship, the ability to reach one's target audience, and the reputation or prestige of the venue or medium. The weight of these and remaining factors, however, shifts when analyzed in conjunction with scholar's goals and target audiences, suggesting opportunities for developing more nuanced consultative support services when selecting tools and platforms in light of scholars' goals and intended audience. For digital publishing, the first two considerations (representation and audience) are likely to be the determining factor in a scholar's decision to shift away from traditional print publishing and to consider library-based digital publishing opportunities. The emphasis on reputation and prestige, however, may prove problematic for fledgling initiatives that seek to develop alternatives to the established publication models of university presses. Further research will investigate what constitutes acceptable markers of prestige to determine the importance of affiliation with an institution of higher education, which libraries already have, or affiliation with known university presses, which most libraries do not have.

Conclusion

Compared to other publishing models, situating support for scholarly communication in the research library creates possibilities for addressing challenges related to access and sustainability of digital scholarly publishing. This support can be performed efficiently as a part of library activities, leveraging pre-existing technical infrastructure that is designed to support discovery and preservation as well as digital scholarships programs within scholars' commons. These aspects of library-based publishing prove especially compelling in light of survey findings that the biggest challenges for digital publishing include securing adequate technical support services, in addition to financial and editorial support.

The Publishing Without Walls initiative is seeking to offer attractive solutions for authors 1) whose scholarship is not sufficiently represented in the print medium and 2) who place a high value on the technological affordances provided by open access digital scholarship to reach their intended audiences. We further anticipate that developing value-added support services in the form of individual consultations and incubation workshops will help ease the support-related challenges cited by scholars, particularly when assessing which platforms and tools will best represent an author's scholarship.

Bibliography

Courant, P.N. and Jones, E.A. (2015). "Scholarly publishing as an economic public good." In M. Bonn & M. Furlough (eds), *Getting the Word Out: Academic Libraries as Scholarly Publishers*. ACRL. <https://www.ala-tore.ala.org/detail.aspx?ID=11378> (accessed 29 October 2016).

Fenlon, K., Bonn, M., Green, H., Maden, C., Senseney, M., and McCollough, A. (2016). "Understanding the needs of scholars in a contemporary publishing environment." *Proceedings of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, 53(1).

Lippincott, S. (2016). *Library Publishing Directory 2016*. Library Publishing Coalition. <http://www.librarypublishing.org/resources/directory/lpd2016> (accessed 29 October 2016).