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What Publishers Really Do for the Academic World

“Do Authors and Publishers Need Each Other?” I have been asked this question as an academic publisher, and my first thought was: How absurd! Of course they need each other, otherwise we publishers would have to write our books ourselves, and the authors would have to finance and sell their books themselves. In any case, the mere existence of thousands of publishers and thousands of authors in all fields answers the question sufficiently. Rather than wasting too much time in dealing with this question, we should therefore turn our attention to doing those things which secure our existence. But what are these activities, these functions?

Those of our colleagues who are members of the “*Arbeitsgemeinschaft wissenschaftlicher Verleger*” (Academic Publishers Club) have been thinking about this and have compiled these thoughts in a catalogue of keyword by keyword factors; factors to which publishers make a contribution which is important or maybe even indispensable for the authors (and the readers). I would like to present the essential features of this catalogue to you here, along with some initial thoughts, and I hope that I will be able to take some suggestions for improvements with me from this conference.

1. The Market for Scholarly Information

Authors want to achieve the optimum for their works in several areas: the best design possible, the fastest publication possible, the largest range of readers possible, a lasting presence and the highest proceeds possible, just to name a few. The priority of these wishes will vary depending on the author’s situation. But the fulfilment of these wishes always involves costs which someone has to pay. If the author has to pay for all this, we may never have the ideal publications for the readers and the users. If the author’s institution bears these costs, we may never hear anything from intelligent authors who come from poor countries or teach at poor institutions. During the past centuries it has therefore proven to be worthwhile to let the readers or the users, or the libraries on their behalf, pay for those publications which are ideal for them. This has created a market for publications which indicates by accepted prices how much time and effort is to be put into optimizing various kinds of works. Nowhere does this concept of competition as a discovery procedure make as much sense as it does in the multidimensional, highly fragmented market for academic publications. The publishers are the intermediaries on this market and have to consider the interests of the authors and of the readers.

The wishes of scholars as authors and readers apply not only to printed works; they apply similarly to the field of digital services. Some technocrats want to make us believe that everything should be easier or cheaper in the digital world, but this is in fact unrealistic. It is here in particular that it has turned out to be important to have professionals in charge of production and sales, and these professionals are anything but cheap. In a world without publishers the authors, readers, and librarians would have to do with hardware and software specialists; and for their „contents“ they would have to do all their work themselves or to hope for help from state infrastructures. I think it is doubtful that one or the other is more effective than publishers who are competing for authors, good manuscripts and acquisition funds, all of which are always in short supply.

2. What Publishers Achieve in Various Fields

a. Building the Setting or “Infrastructure” for Publications

Broadly speaking, the achievements of publishers are in four dimensions. They play a part in ensuring that there is a legal and economic order for high-quality publications and that this quality continues to develop at prices most people can afford. As far as the honest (and dishonest) users of the works are concerned, they represent the interests of the authors; with regard to the authors, they represent the interests of the readers. Without the multitude of publishing companies competing with one another, the authors would not have as many publishing opportunities as they do, to say nothing of active sales and promotional activities. A more detailed description is given under the keywords: advocate of the authors and the readers, training, process efficiency, accumulation of experience, encouragement, structuring, coordination, market development, networks, alternative decision-making body, originality and integrity, platform, presence, quality assurance, shaping the law, reputation transfer, protection, trust transfer, diversity.

b. Advising Authors, Editors and Institutions on the Planning of Publications Publishers accumulate experience and knowledge in regard to organization, implementation and market opportunities for publications and bring this to bear in the planning stages. In doing so, they contribute to the effectiveness of their publications before the entire procedure has started.

A more detailed description of this is given under the keywords: encouragement, training, advice, development of large-scale projects, coordination, alternative decision-making body, quotation standards.

c. Completion of Actual Publications

Publishers support the actual completion of planned publications. They make sure that the products have a high utility value for the buyers and the readers, and they often make decisive contributions to the editing and the structuring of the texts. A more detailed description of this is given under the keywords: advocate of the readers, didactics, financing, royalties, design, illustration, coordination, mixed calculation, product quality, quality assurance, quality improvement, standardization, structuring, references, economic efficiency, quotation standards.

d. Impact and Sustainability of Publications

Publishers provide their publications and thus their authors as well with a wide (international as well) and long-lasting visibility; they blaze a trail for the acquisition of new (and therefore unknown) publications. A more detailed description of this is given under the keywords: availability, attention, authenticity, market development, media transfer, sustainability, originality and integrity, presence, quality assurance, quality signal, reputation transfer, protection, trust transfer, references, advertising, quotation standards.

3. What publishers do, from A to Z

Accessibility. Books in stockrooms or texts on servers are of use to no one: these have to reach the reader. The publisher’s marketing or sales department is in charge of this. In many publishing companies, this is the largest department. Those publishers who are geared to making a profit will certainly have the strongest incentives for doing what the authors want the most, which is everything they deem necessary to see to it that their books reach the readers.

Accumulation of experience. Publishers accumulate experience with skills and organizational structures which are important for a smoothly functioning publication system.

Advertising. Publishers do advertising for their publications and thus indirectly for their authors, whose “market value” increases considerably as a result of this. In his own interest, the

publisher tries to make his advertising as effective as possible, and the costs as low as possible. These are also a result of the combined advertising for a large number of titles in one field. This type of advertising is indispensable in digital distribution as well.

Advocates of the authors. Publishers supervise the faithfulness to the original and protect the author's copyright and his right to privacy, not only in connection with the original publication but also in countless secondary rights.

Advocates of the readers. If publishers are financed by selling their products, they are the advocates of the readers in the publishing process, especially in regard to the authors. They function as a filter (editing out those parts which are irrelevant for the reader) and as educators (promoting a style of writing geared toward the reader) at the same time.

Alternative decision-making body. In the disputes which often take place among the various branches of the humanities and the sciences, publishers are often a necessary independent decision-making body. As a rule, they are interested in the entire field, and not in just one certain faculty or school of thought.

Assessment. Through internal and external assessment of the manuscripts which they have been offered and acquired, publishers ensure the quality of the works selected for publication.

Attention. Publishers ensure that their publications receive as much attention as possible. They are resourceful in using those worthwhile opportunities which present themselves, and will save costs by leaving out those opportunities which do not seem worthwhile.

Authenticity. Publishers ensure the authenticity of the texts by defending the exclusivity of the right of distribution which has been given to them exclusively.

Availability. Publishers live from the sales of their works, in whose editing and production they have made a large investment. As a consequence, they ensure they these are available on a long-lasting basis. This is done in a "list" or "catalogue" which shows all the works available, making ordered easy and ensuring a steady stream of business transactions.

Coordination. Publishers coordinate the many different abilities which combine to make sure that a publication will be good and successful: authors, editors, anonymous experts, graphic artists, designers, typesetters, printers, reference linking services, providers, booksellers, librarians, readers – and to keep all this going, they bring in investors as well.

Cross financing. Publishers are able to invest the proceeds from successful publications in publications which have not yet been successful, thus ensuring that there will be a steady supply of new books on the market.

Design. By giving the publications and their promotional neighborhood an attractive design, the publishers ensure that the products and the production will have an appearance which is suited to their contents.

Development of large-scale projects. Encyclopaediae, scholarly editions of classical texts, collected works of one author, large anthologies, journals – these are things which a scholar does not plan very often in his or her life. In cases such as these, the publisher's organizational and financial experience is important in order to use the resources available to achieve the objectives.

Didactics. Since publishers always want to sell their publications beyond the small circle of those who are already well informed about their contents, they make sure that the didactics are suitable for the target audience.

Discovery. There are publishing companies competing against each other in all fields. This competition fosters the discovery of new authors, new ideas, new procedures and organizations of production and distribution. At the same time it increases the authors' chances of publication in comparison to those they would have with centralized public organizations.

Distribution. Publishers ensure that their publications are as widely distributed as possible, since as a rule they are financed by proceeds from sales. Any restriction which at first sight seem to hinder the distribution, such as for example restrictions on copying, are actually in the

best interest of the readers, who would run out of reading material very quickly without those who invest in publications.

Diversity. Especially in those areas in which large research institutions are particularly influential, publishers ensure a diversity of opinions and styles which is necessary for the evolution of knowledge. The competition among the private publishing companies is one of the main reasons for this.

Division of labor. Technical progress and increasing international networking have led to a steady increase in the demands for professionalism and the latest specialized knowledge in the areas of production and sales. Publishers “bundle” this into complete solutions, thereby taking the pressure off the authors in this regard and enabling them to concentrate on their real abilities: research and teaching. Consequently, publishers are efficient elements in a complex economic system.

Encouragement. It is the publishers who encourage the authors to write, especially for a certain audience, since due to their many and varied activities they have recognized a certain demand on the market for books dealing with a specific subject.

Financing. Publishers prefinance the costs of publication, and are able to do so since they are not bound by any administrative rules and can thus act more freely and intuitively than a research institution is usually permitted to do. If there is such a thing as a pluralistic publishing scene, this is an invaluable advantage when compared to central institutions who sponsor such projects .

Hybrid structures. The expectation that printed information would largely be replaced by digital forms has not proven to be true. For a long time now, librarians have been talking about the hybrid library, which has to provide services in both fields. On the production end, publishers are certainly the partners best suited to link and take care of both fields.

Innovation. One of the things that distinguishes publishers from other industries is the fact that they are not tied down by a production, decision-making or sales structure. They do of course observe and operate in all directions, but it is typical for them that they also do outsourcing in all technical aspects. This makes them especially open for innovations suggested by the authors and readers as well as technical innovations in the fields of production and sales, and enables them to implement these innovations quickly.

International sales. Publishers ensure that their works are sold in as many countries as possible either through their own sales organization, by cooperating with international booksellers or through licensing agreements with foreign publishing companies. It is in doing business with foreign countries in particular that the individual author has to be able to rely on a partner who is good at negotiating.

Market development. Publishers are not only observers, they are also active on the markets they deal with. They develop and test new projects, new publishing concepts, new types of offers, new price structures

Market efficiency. Due to his presence on the market and his knowledge of the market, the publisher will as a rule have the highest print run possible and, due to cost depression, will be able to offer the readers the best possible prices, the authors the highest royalties possible or, if required, will be able to manage with a relatively small subsidy towards production costs.

Media transfer. Publishers also ensure that their publications are reviewed in other media as well. They arrange interviews, readings and other appearances by their authors in public, thus giving them additional possibilities to make themselves known and to have some influence on the way their books are received.

Networks. Through the publishers, the authors are given access to completely different networks than those they normally have at their disposal. These can transcend national, language and in particular subject boundaries.

Orientation. A publisher’s list shows a high concentration of content, and it gives signals which stand for a certain quality. Thus it ensures that the authors will be “in good company” and that the readers will be aware of this (see also Quality signal).

Originality and integrity. Publishers ensure the originality and the integrity of the works they are offering – otherwise no one would buy anything from them.

Perseverance. Publishers encourage the authors and editors with whom they have signed long-term contracts (very often longer than their employers!), to persevere in publication projects, even under difficult conditions, and to complete them.

Platform. Through journals, handbook series or monograph series, publishers create platforms with which the authors can be certain of having the immediate attention of a target group. Often this gives an author or an idea the very first chance to be seen and heard.

Presence. Publishers make sure that their publications are present in all the appropriate bookstores and are on display at all events held for those members of the public to whom they are of interest (fairs, conferences).

Process efficiency. The intense competition forces the publishers to work efficiently. They have to keep their production costs down and their sales figures and distribution as high as possible. In order to attain these objectives, they have well-trained employees with special knowledge in all areas of work.

Product quality. The concentration of the many titles on their list means that publishers are able to accumulate a great deal of conceptual and technical knowledge and, in accordance with this, a large volume of orders. As a consequence, they can force the firms doing the technical part of the production to offer high quality at a low cost.

Production. Publishers do all the work necessary in order to create a finished publication out of a manuscript. For this, they use the printers and other technical firms best suited to the task at hand (see *also* Division of labor).

Protection. Publishers protect the content of their publications from being used by those not authorized to do so or from being used in inappropriate contexts (see *also* Shaping the law).

Quality assurance. Publishers ensure quality assurance which is completely separate from the internal academic safeguards. The value of their trademark (and therefore their whole enterprise) is at stake. This is similar to, but different from, the reputation of an individual scholar. It is much easier to punish the titles which don't fit in with the others: they either won't be ordered at all or the orders will be cancelled quickly.

Quality signal. Publishers give signals for a certain quality in their publications, even those written by unknown authors or on previously unknown subjects. A large number of publishers dealing with specific subjects can give more subtly diversified signals than one central place where all publications are done.

Quality improvement. By having the editors and the editorial staff work together with the authors, publishers improve the quality of the content in their publications.

Quotation standards. Publishers have their works formatted permanently, thus enabling the readers to find individual passages and to quote texts. In the digital field, publishers have developed new quotations systems such as for example "CrossRef", which increase the efficiency of scholarly work enormously.

Recognizability. To establish their own trademark, publishers wishing to change the institutional surroundings and the appearance of their publications, and the publications themselves as well, will, as a rule, do so gradually and not abruptly. In doing so, and in keeping their works in print for a long time, they ensure the sustainability of these publications and of their utilization.

References. Publishers ensure that the manner of making references within individual publications, and beyond these as well, is logical and rational. Thus they have developed the DOI (Digital Object Identifier), which has been generally accepted, and which enables convenient reference techniques such as the "CrossRef" (also developed by publishing companies). Even the current ISBN (International Standard Book Number), without which we cannot imagine the book trade or libraries today, was developed by publishing companies, and its development is continuing. These activities, which transcend the normal duties of a publishing company, have nothing to do with politics or hegemony; they are implemented in a practical and economical manner, and in an international framework.

Reputation transfer. Publishers build up publication formats which manage to have the reputations of well-known authors and editors transferred to young authors or editors who are not so well-known (see also Platform, Quality signal).

Reviews. Publishers see to it that their publications are reviewed, and that these reviews are passed on to the authors. This means that more reviews are written, and that they are written sooner than they otherwise might have been. The fact that the publisher acts as an intermediary and partner of the author makes life easier for the reviewer as well as for the reviewee.

Royalties. Publishers pay royalties for creative work to authors and others who had a part in completing the work. In doing so, they motivate the authors to continue writing publications which interest the readers, or to improve publications already in existence by revising them.

Shaping the law. Publishers take part in developing the legal systems which pertain to publishing. They develop copyright, do the wording of contracts with the authors, the editors, the editorial staff etc, and they ensure international legal security for their authors by setting up and enforcing international licensing agreements.

Standardization. Through editing and the layout, publishers put their publications into standardized (printing and data) formats, thus making their arguments easier to compare or making them comparable in general. In doing so, they improve the usability of publications.

Stimulation. Publishers stimulate the creation of works, especially those works which require the collaboration of many authors (journals, manuals, textbooks, data collection, dictionaries, encyclopedia etc.)

Structuring. Publishers provide their publications with an inherent textual structure and its visual presentation, thus enabling quick access to these, even if this is only for consultation purposes.

Synthesis. Publishers are interested in works which will sell for a long period of time, and thus they encourage authors and editors to risk doing a synthesis of larger areas of one subject.

Training. Publishers are continually looking for, motivating and advising young authors and editors in literature and science. In their own companies, they train young people to enjoy carrying out the many tasks and activities on which a smoothly functioning publication system depends. They also ensure that their employees are given further training on a regular basis, since this makes them competent and qualified partners for the authors.

Travel. Publishers save their authors the trouble of travelling by having their editors and their project developers do the travelling. In many cases, they do organize and finance trips for authors or editors if these are necessary. In their own interest, they are careful to see to it that the time and money spent on these are used meaningfully.

Trust transfer. Publishers organize a transfer of trust in two directions: What they convey to the readers and the users is that they can expect that new and unknown authors and subjects will be promoted along with the already known authors and subjects, if these are published by the same publishing company, in the same series, in the same journal, in the same collection. What they convey to the authors is that if they publish their works in the same publishing company, series etc. they will be looked after in the same way that their colleagues were and that their work will be handled in a manner with which they are familiar from already having been a reader and a user.

Utility value. Since publishers as a rule are financed by the sales of the publications, they make sure that the utility value for the readers is as high as possible.

4. Conclusion

Publishers need authors, authors need publishers; this seems to me to be indisputable. The crucial point is whether the readers, the users and their agents want to have authors and publishers. It is our job to work together to motivate them.

Abstract

It seems to be forgotten in recent discussions that academic publishers (1) provide the market infrastructure that ensures efficiency, (2) provide organizational expertise to authors and institutions, (3) take care of all factors involved in publication, (4) insure a broad and sustainable impact of publications. This is explained by keywords highlighting special aspects.

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