Digital Library Futures: pressures on the publisher-librarian relation in the era of digital change

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IFLA Conference, Milan, 25 August 2009

Introduction

The International Publishers Association (IPA) is an international federation of national publishers associations representing book and journal publishing, based in Geneva. IPA's mission is to promote and protect copyright and to raise awareness for publishing as a force for economic, cultural and political development.

Talking about institutional strategies for the digital future: Publishers still believe that quality content is crucial, but that the manifestation of the delivery (shape, form, place, context, links) to the end user will be the challenge for the coming years. Not as a push (publishers broadcasting), but as a pull with the end user 'in the driving seat': today's 'user behavior's discussions.

We further believe strongly that we as publishers need the assistance of the library community: the so called convergence between strategic partners.

I have my whole active working life spent in book and journal publishing. Much of that time was spent talking to and working with librarians, notably as one of the founders (and co-chair) of our joint IPA-IFLA working group. The idea behind establishing this joint working group goes back into 1998 when the Executive Committee of IPA (under the Presidency of Alain Grund) met in Paris with at that time the president of IFLA, Madame Christine Deschamps.

These were turbulent times when both publishers and librarians experienced in their day to day life the first introductions of on-line products and we were both trying to find out whether or not our relations could be the same as they were in the past. Subjects like licensing, copyright and its exceptions in a digital world divided our constituencies. In addition, the notion of 'users rights' and 'the debate surrounding journal pricing' created a seemingly unbridgeable divide between libraries and publishers.

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However, by identifying issues of common interest the members of the IFLA IPA Working Group have been engaged in a series of very interesting and useful dialogues with, at the librarian's side as co-chair, Ingrid Parent and Claudia Lux respectively. No issue has been spared, and discussions have been loud, sometimes even slightly aggressive (at our side), emotional (at your side) and controversial, but we have discovered that even in the areas of greatest controversy there is more that publishers and librarians have in common than what divides us.

Controversy but still good relations

We have been 'fighting' many times in the last decades, and believe it or not, there were at that time even ideas about the disintermediation of the library and of the publisher... There were both publishers and librarians who thought they could finally take on the other's role. Would not all the advantages of the internet and the local area networks on the campuses, allow direct access to the desktops of the students and researchers? In other words: why do you need a library if the publisher could provide direct access to users? Today some recent developments seem to confirm these ideas. Some publishers are now offering subscriptions that are the equivalent of access to a virtual library. The digital revolution has moved from only e-journals to e-books and these are now being offered in bulk deals just like journals.

And could libraries not become themselves the publishers? Equally some libraries have become the owners or partners of digital repositories and these repositories have the potential of becoming dynamic databases in their own right. Like for example Europeana, where libraries supply their content to what 'in the past' would have required publisher's involvement (such as the Encyclopedia Britannica).

Such convergence isn't necessarily new. Librarians have traditionally been on the boards of university presses. In recent times library and university publishing arms have been moved together. MIT made a start a number of years ago. Since then Penn State, New York University and others have moved these parts of their organization together.

Towards global, virtual libraries?

Important however is in this context that the globalization of the internet now allows some libraries to provide such excellent digital services, that they are serving clients outside their own community. Nothing special to hear a scientist explain that he/she no longer uses only his/her own university library but has also has seamless online access to all the content needed from foreign libraries. That

is what we call: user driven, de-coupled from the traditional information base: her or his local library.

From there, it is only a small step from national cooperation and file/document sharing between academic libraries to a global marketplace for virtual libraries, in which libraries, just like publishers, compete on a global scale for the attention of the readers.

Just another example to show the ease of globalization for both the rights owner and content user in the field of rights clearance: The American Copyright Clearance Centre (CCC) has developed business- and service models that follow their vision of becoming, 'the global hub for rights clearance'. A fast, easy and intuitive global web based (micro) payment system with many front end features. This will help all rights holders (authors and publishers) to deal with their IP centrally and with consistent policies all over the world. More importantly in this context it allows the individual user to obtain any document easily, without institutional hassle 24/7. This can in part replace the certainly not user friendly current system of collecting societies with their largely national solutions which transfer the monies from country to country, taking 'their fair share' and distributing revenues on spurious metrics rather than actual usage. A burden for content owners and users alike.

So, what we see here is that publishers, libraries and collecting societies follow their patrons or customers into the digitally borderless world and we only then discover how our international partnerships relied on an assumption that we do not compete on the same ground, but complement each other.

Closer cooperation

Rather than replacement, we find ourselves in a situation of increasing entanglement, so much so that it is becoming hard for outsiders to distinguish where one's task begin and the other party's end. Archiving and preservation used to be the role of libraries. With the digital subscription model it has moved to the publisher. But at the same time, because of the dynamic and ever-changing databases, archiving and service and 'solution' providing, move closer together. Large science publishers like Elsevier now back up a number of its servers in the Royal Library of the Netherlands as well as the library-supported Portico and CLOCKSS programs.

The change that comes with digital technologies means that e-publishing process no longer ends with the sale to the library of a physical issue, book or even a license, let alone the journal subscription. With backward and forward linking 'on the fly', journals are now dynamic databases with a significant amount of daily updates. Where this storage and 'archiving' was the role of the

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library it is now almost impossible for a library to host these dynamic databases on site. They are now the responsibility of the publisher and the linking to other publishers databases is organized through metadata by pre-competitive standards agencies like Crossref ® [2]and because of the technology used, no longer in the domain of librarians.

A new player which sets its own rules…

Whilst we were squabbling, Google was founded and began to pursue its mission to organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful. And Google *has* of course created a vast content database that is de facto very difficult to match by any individual library or any single publisher because of its clearer views of aggregation. What libraries could not (money) or were not allowed to (copyright) did Google.

So, is Google a threat to libraries and publishers[3]? I understand that the debate is raging among librarians. Is Google the first commercial partner that shares the values of the library community, or is it the final commercial partner that will gradually make libraries and librarians superfluous? The same questions arise for publishers: is Google there to help market our books or replace us?

The danger of Google is that all its strength is built on a specific business model that is extremely clever, but nonetheless parasitical[4], as an editor of the Wall Street Journal put it… It needs content, verified quality content with authority, but it will not pay for it.

Google relies on access to virtually all content for free.This puts Google in a huge and singular competitive advantage because it has far greater resources to discover and unlock new content sources than any of its competitors, public (the library) or private (the publisher).

Clever cooperation with a series of libraries, spread around the world, means that Google will provide faster access to more content, selling it back into the libraries, competing with the shrinking library budgets. So: 'for free' at what a price in the end?

Quality search with the end-user in mind?

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[2] See http://www.crossref.org/

[3] Today, business sectors that consider Google to be an actual or potential competitor include advertising, financial services, TV networks, telephone companies, Internet retailers and software houses. It also includes publishers and ibraries. http://www.strategy-business.com/media/file/sb49_07404.pdf

[4] http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/business/story/0,28124,25293711-7582,00.html

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And what about quality, and especially quality the end user expects from libraries? Does Google really delivers what the end-user requires and expects? The Google library project started in Academic Research Libraries. Are their end-users -researchers and scientists- waiting for the rough content (without illustrations, graphs, etc) and rough search algorithms Google delivers?

We heard today: users look at the first 25 hits and trust that the search engine made the right selection… Where the libraries considering this trust, bestowed on their shoulders or did they only want to make their content available in digital format, ripe and green? Is the size of the corpus really so important to sacrifice the quality of the displayed content and the search?

The publishing community is flabbergasted: honestly, publishers like me are really puzzled and certainly do not recognize these decisions at all from all our 'quality of content' discussions over the years with the same librarians who signed these contracts with Google. Some of the same libraries participated in many of the user behavior studies between publishers and libraries, staring with programmes like Tulip[5] and stressed the need for efficiency and quality of the search results.

So, what went wrong? What went wrong in our relation to sincerely serve the end-user at the best of our knowledge and possibilities?

Adding value around the digital copy

Beside the serious concerns we have as publishers about the legality of those libraries who agreed to cooperate with Google, we cannot fully understand why his form of 'sale' of content, acquired over so many decades and sometimes centuries, with Government money (!) is digitized at such a poor quality (rush-rush) just because the libraries involved would receive a 'free digital copy' (wow!) of their holdings! Why were those libraries not prepared to lobby with their publishers for solid solutions financed by their governments and Science Foundations and support the publishers, who are still digitizing at high quality levels (PDF, XML with proper metadata) their backlists, first in journals and now in books?

Both IPA and IFLA have committed themselves (and especially Claudia Lux, your president this term) to lobby governments to support the digitalization of our library heritage.

Publishers like Oxford University Press, Wiley, the American Chemical Society, WoltersKluwer, Springer and Elsevier have invested since the early nineties in the quality of their products; specifically dedicated to the wishes of end-users:

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[5] Karen Hunter (ed), Tulip final report 1996, Elsevier Science ISBN 0-444-82540-1

scholars and scientists, than any generic Google or other search engine can and will offer. McGraw Hill, Springer and even smaller publishers like Brill, Cambridge- and Oxford UP are now investing and have invested heavily in book databases which are so superior in quality, search ability and dedication to the specific whishes of their respective users, that it pays off to pay for these products.

Let's be fair: can society rely on Google Book Search algorithms as the only guides through the jungle of published information? Are the amount of quality hits in Wiley InterScience, Springer Link and Science Direct and the like not far better than any Google outcome?

And what about all the projects and investments at the library side? The access-projects of the British Library, the archiving investments of the Dutch Royal Library and the ongoing investments in content and accessibility of OCLC. They cannot be matched by Google products now and in the near future, and why then support these as professionals? Only because they are 'for free'?

And let's not forget the result of all the digitization of archives and repositories, supported by publishers and libraries, for the activities of J-store and other 'aggregators', with the consent of the rights holders (yes, sometimes difficult negotiations, but in almost all cases eventually with mutual consent). Will they not pay off in the end? Why did we both support these activities, projects and investments? Because they all have the end-user in mind and take her/him serious! So, why that impatience?

As said before: time and again we, publishers and librarians, are thrown into each others arms: let's make it work together with our proven skills and proven commitment!

Open access as a solution, but not the ultimate one…

The last subject I would like to only touch upon is open access. Not as a possible business model, but because the full implementation might allow new players to enter our world again with challenging business models and sharp pricing, again, not necessarily prepared to pay for the content itself.

We see this (content for 'free') trend in different forms of publishing coming up again strongly: it is not the user who pays but someone else in the chain, be it advertiser or originator, supporter or funding agency.

The Joint Statement by the IFLA-IPA Working Group symbolizes the new state of debate that we are in today. We have enough experience to move from opinion based politics to fact based policies. Sweeping generalizations are making way for a differentiated approach. We are now doing some proper research together (see the Peer Project [6] with the emphasis on user- and - research). No business model is being ruled out, and no single business model should be imposed irrespective of its impact on that particular area of research.

Because we know that the internet develops too quickly and in too unpredictable directions to force the will of any particular interest group onto its workings. But we also know that in order to see what will work we must try out new options. A lot of publishers, commercial and not-for-profit, have their 'open access'- publishing policies in place and we now wait and see how this idea will be taken up by the scholarly community.

Why this dwelling on open access on a symposium on user behavior? Because it has all to do with securing usage of the published content, and a fair access of any author to the system, poor or rich, irrespectively whether she/he or her/his institution can afford to pay the 'entrance bill'. Eventually any other business model should at least increase the usage of content.

It looks to me as if what used to be a fight of tug-of-war between publishers and libraries is turning into more of a dance. We are twirling around each other, getting closer as the world is turning faster around us. We are still stepping on each other's toes, occasionally, as we are learning this new dance.

Reinventing our centuries-old relations again!

So, coming back to the scientist/researcher who did not fall back on her/his own library alone (anymore), combined with the global solutions CCC-type of organizations offer for access and rights clearance. Just an example of our changing world: indeed why should a user just use her/his own local library service in a virtual world?
The changing publisher-librarian relation, be it dancing or fighting, can easily become under fierce attack again by an outsider as a new player. Like all internet technology companies, Google was able to smash into our world, because they had a great technological solution for a single core element of our work. But the tasks of librarians and publishers are more complex and more sophisticated. This is both our weakness and our strength.

As said: this is not the end. New players will stand up and will be able to change the scene in a very short period again. With the virtualization of existing brick and

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[6] See http://www.peerproject.eu/

mortar relations and increased competition, together with the ease of acquiring and aggregating content (almost for free, certainly if open access gets ground under its feet), it is not unthinkable but almost likely that a new superior global and virtual service may be on offer elsewhere soon.

And let's be fair again: while we were quarreling about rights and the library's lack of funding for digitization[7], Google was able to access 'our world' because millions of orphan works were waiting to be digitized, and because they could smash and pay their way through the legitimate concerns that publishers and libraries had with such bold commercial digitization project.

But there is not only gloom and doom: We can read this week in the press about the re-launch of three e-book readers (Sony Reader, Amazon's Kindle[8] and Borders iLiad [9]) and Google seems to play a positive role by providing works out of copyright to them. Assuming that the rights will be cleared by the suppliers this really is a breakthrough and helps to develop the book market and test the market.

Conclusion

I like to urge our two professions to explore new ways of collaboration: more as public-private partnerships and not only based on a commercial relationship (of sellers and buyers), but on our mutual interest to serve our readers.
The debate surrounding Google has highlighted our joint weaknesses, in particular the lack of funding for digitization and the slow progress of our complicated relationships to create good solutions.
But by focusing on our weaknesses we have forgotten our strengths. In recognizing strengths, libraries should stop to see themselves as victims of the publishing market, but as partners that have more to bring to the table than the, far too meager, library budgets. It is only when libraries are bringing in their knowledge about their users that publishers can develop products that serve these users best.
It is still my conviction that together, libraries and publishers, we can provide an excellent service to the people and the public interests that we both serve: our users, our readers.

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[7] Google seems to speak with the Library of Alexandria to digitize all works (many of those obtained as gifts from publishers at the opening), with a special interest in the Arab language titles and the French National Library (BNF) is according to Mr Denis Bruckmann negotiating with Google to digitize its holdings, because there are no funds available from the French Government (NRC-H 20-08-2009)
[8] Financial Times, August 26 2009
[9] iRex Technologies [info@irextechnologies.com]