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Promoting diversity and sustainability in the scholarly publishing ecosystem

The University of Michigan's MPublishing redefines the role of libraries in publishing

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Abstract: MPublishing, the primary academic publishing enterprise of the University of Michigan, has united the various publishing activities of the university, all of which serve the needs of scholars and the university by fostering new publishing models that cannot exist where profit is the primary value. This article provides a brief description of MPublishing's principle areas of activity.

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While technology is often credited with increasing the speed at which information travels in our society, we don't as often think about how it has lowered the cost of transmitting information. Thanks to computers, we can make a perfect copy of any form of digital data, and thanks to the Internet, we can transmit it around the world. In fact, the costs of copying and transmitting data are not even worth counting in most situations. Still, while this has given us the €99 song on iTunes and the \$9.99 e-book from Amazon, we have not seen a corresponding drop in the price of your average scholarly journal article or book.

In fact, academic library expenditures on journals rose 273% from 1986 to 2004 compared with a Consumer Price Index rise of only 73%¹ (with no signs of slowing) due largely to consolidation of the industry into an oligopoly of commercial publishers dominating the most profitable sectors of the industry. In response, libraries have had to scale back their acquisition of books, disrupting university presses and scholars left with fewer traditional publication venues. In an effort to fight back against unsustainable costs, academic institutions are taking on new roles, often through their libraries, to try to rebalance the scholarly communication ecosystem to better serve the needs of authors, readers, and institutions.²

¹ <http://www.arl.org/sparc/pricing/index.shtml>

² <http://www.ithaka.org/ithaka-s-r/research/university-publishing-in-a-digital-age/university-publishing>; <http://www.arl.org/sparc/partnering/11-1101.shtml>

MPublishing, the primary academic publishing enterprise of the University of Michigan, has united the various publishing activities of the university, all of which serve the needs of scholars and the university by fostering new publishing models that cannot exist where profit is the primary value. A brief description of MPublishing's principle areas of activity follows.

Monograph publishing

When you think about a university as a publisher, the first thing that comes to mind is a university press. The University of Michigan Press, like most other North American university presses, acquires book-length manuscripts in the humanities and social sciences from scholars around the world and producing polished versions of these for sale mostly to academic libraries. This genre of scholarship, in which only a few commercial publishers are active, is rarely profitable, so the Press subsidizes its service of scholarship with a titles for a popular audience, especially those of regional interest, for which sales tend to be more profitable.

Since readers are reluctant to read long-form scholarship in media other than print, and since humanities monographs often present significant challenges for presentation in digital form, university presses continue to publish primarily in print, though their experimentation with e-book platforms and sales channels has increased. In addition, the University of Michigan Press is in the process of making all of its scholarly titles available to read freely online ("open access") through HathiTrust.

MPublishing also has a few monograph imprints published outside the University of Michigan Press. MPublishing hosts Humanities E-Book, a collection of university press titles online available by individual or institutional subscription through the American Council of Learning Societies, and distributes the Michigan Historical Reprint Series, which includes thousands of titles in the public domain (no longer in copyright) from the Library's collection. More recent activities include the Faculty Reprints, by which U-M faculty members request that the Library digitize and sell copies of eligible previously out-of-print titles, and our partnership with Open Humanities Press, an international publishing collective whose mission is to make leading works of contemporary critical thought freely available worldwide. MPublishing serves as the distributor of both online and print editions of OHP's monographs.

Journal publishing

Since the cost of journal subscriptions has risen much faster than that of scholarly monographs, libraries have focused their efforts on effecting change in this domain. The University of Michigan Library made its first foray into being a publisher with the establishment over ten years ago of the Scholarly Publishing Office, which

leveraged the library's digital infrastructure and expertise to provide an alternative publishing venue for scholars, especially journal editors, whose publishing needs were not being met by the market. Though no longer using the brand "Scholarly Publishing Office", this operation now publishes nearly 25 scholarly journals in a customized online publishing system. Some are online editions of print publications, whereas others exist only online. Most are made available to readers as soon as possible, though a few have an embargo period for the online edition and two are available only to readers at subscribing institutions. MPublishing also incorporates or links to back issues when available through various channels. Aside from occasional referrals from the Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition (SPARC), publishing partners have found our journal and book publishing services almost entirely through word of mouth and web searching.

Furthermore, MPublishing's expertise in standardizing content for online publishing is creating a side business in converting publisher's PDFs into the preservation-quality formats necessary for inclusion of these titles in HathiTrust, a digital library built and governed with other major research libraries around the world.

Finally, the University of Michigan Library is funding a two-year project to develop a package of tools called mPach to allow MPublishing and eventually HathiTrust member institutions to publish journals in the HathiTrust repository.

Archiving of gray literature, author preprints, and postprints of university-affiliated authors

The University of Michigan's institutional repository, Deep Blue, is a massive archive of the scholarly and business products of the university. It includes not only preprints and other gray literature like technical reports emanating from individuals and departments at the university but also theses and the email archives of university administrators, as do many institutional repositories. Deep Blue also includes copies of published versions of articles by university-affiliated authors from certain publishers, acquired through licensing arrangements with these publishers.

Advice to scholars on publishing

MPublishing staff advise university faculty, students, and staff on a number of matters related to publishing. Today there are two formal outreach services: the Author-Publisher Liason assists faculty members in finding a suitable publisher for their book manuscript, and staff in the Copyright Office provide guidance to those with questions about copyright law. Informally, various staff members provide advice and give conference presentations to those interested in establishing a journal and digitizing previously published material. While there has not yet been a concerted marketing campaign for MPublishing as a whole and none for some of our

services, thanks to recent staff growth we expect to expand our outreach and advocacy of new models of publishing to the university community.

Maximize access to content by asserting institutional rights under copyright law

In addition to providing guidance to the university community on copyright issues, Copyright Office staff work on a number of projects that assert the university's rights under copyright law. Mass digitization brought about by the university's partnership with Google has created an enormous body of digitized material, so systemized, scalable approaches to investigating copyright status are worth developing in order to maximize the amount of material available to users.

The first such project was the Copyright Review Management System, established for use by technical services staff to determine whether copyright in a work published in the US between 1923 and 1963 had been renewed with the US Copyright Office, as was then required. If it was not renewed, the work has since entered the public domain. By November 2011, staff at the University of Michigan and select other HathiTrust member institutions made available almost 87,000 scanned volumes to the public through HathiTrust.

The second project, which began in mid-2011, is the Orphan Works Project, named after "orphan works" for which no copyright owner can be located. This project has developed methods for documenting due diligence in determining whether the rightsholder for a work can be located; if not, the project posts the bibliographic information for the works for 90 days, after which the content will be made available to readers at HathiTrust member institutions which have joined the project. A rightsholder of a work mistakenly identified as an orphan who does not wish the work to be made available may contact the project at any time to have access restricted.

The third project, which began in late 2011, expands the Copyright Review Management System, in conjunction with partner institutions, to investigate the copyright status of foreign works that might no longer be protected by copyright.

Conclusion

Clearly MPublishing is involved in a range of activities that at first seem entirely unrelated to one another. However, the scholarly publishing ecosystem is complex, with many competing stakeholders, business models slow to change, and production and supply chains that are slower to change. Single acts of ecological virtue are not enough; proper incentives need to be established to effect broader change, and stakeholders need to cooperate when possible. By focusing on openness

and copyright reform, MPublishing hopes to yield great benefits for scholars at the University of Michigan and around the world.