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Academic publishing and the research ecosystem

What is the value of academic publishers?

Why are commissioning editors important?

Where will innovation come from?

KATHARINE REEVE #acbookweek

Extending open access to books is not easy. From licensing and copyright to business models and quality, the issues that must be tackled are thorny and numerous.
Crossick, 2015

Academic publishing is shaped by two concerns: quality and scholarship; and commercial viability.
Thompson, 2005

Added value: academic publishers are not the enemy

**40+ years of expertise building international academic publishing
+ infrastructure investment**

Publishers add value to the processes of monograph production ... editorial activities, the design of the book and the management of peer review). Crossick

But

At the start of the 21st century there remains a lack of transparency around publishing practice and processes with 'the many things that publishers do ... [being] taken for granted. Campbell, Pentz, and Borthwick, 2012

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We've been too passive- we can do a better job as publishers to clarify what value we add.
Publishing Director

Added value: the commissioning editor

Editors who have the right combination of intellectual creativity, social flair and financial nous are highly-valued assets.

Thomson, 2005

There is a 'real skill here that involves a blending together of intellectual creativity and marketing nous, and that distinguishes outstanding editors.

Thompson, 2012

Editors tend to form the engine room of a publishing house – they select the books we publish, and ensure the quality threshold is met consistently.

Publishing Director

What does the commissioning editor do?

Outside the academy, but understands it

Identify new and emerging areas within subjects

Skillfully manage the often tricky quality-assurance process

Breadth of knowledge of their field and extensive networks

Create the case for publication and the strategy

Advocate for authors – selling the title in-house, advising

Expertise in list publication strategy and content development

Understand what readers want

The editor is the ideas generator: is proactive, suggests topics and approaches authors, and shapes ideas and books.

Editors' early input centres on either proactively coming up with an idea for a new book and then finding the best author to write it or working with an author to develop an idea around their expertise and research which would be able to find a market.

Publishers on the added value of the commissioning editor

Someone outside the academy, but who nonetheless sees many manuscripts and is invested in a field, is valuable ... a good editor will use this knowledge and experience to improve a book, working closely with an author to bring out the best material possible.

My main successes working with authors are from guidance on the overall concept and ideas, and an understanding as to whether or not it was better than the competition.

Digital innovation: publisher views

We have experimented [digitally] with the form of the book e.g. disaggregation and presentation in shorter, cheaper versions, but it's been one disappointment after another.

We have been experimental around the edges – but this is expensive and has almost a 100% failure rate.

I, and others I speak to, currently feel a bit at sea. As a member of the 'books' generation, I find it daunting.

I am increasingly having conversations with authors wanting more interactive elements in ebooks... This is really problematic – we're not set up to do this and lack experience

Many opportunities to explore beyond ebooks and monograph collection platforms

Editors on digital: a missed opportunity?

The remarkable thing about commissioning is that the role has changed much less than every other role around it over the past decade.

Editorial Director

**Editors understand how to develop text
and create publications to reach readers**

Editors need access to digital tools and time to play with new ideas

**Why are commissioning editors not working with authors
to drive digital innovation?**

Format innovation: reaching a wider audience

Need relevance and immediately engaging concept

Lively approach, accessible language and structure

Attractive presentation, packaging and price e.g. OUP VSI

Requires editors

Print and digital: searchable ebooks/ online + readable print book – single bundle?

Alternative formats – short books (Macmillan Pivots, Sage Swifts, Yale E-Shorts)

What about serious non-fiction, by academics?

Much hands-on editorial work by commissioning editors to get the text into shape

Highly accessible to wider readership (1000s not 100s)

High design and production values

Raises author (and institutional) profile

Royalty income for authors

I work really closely with academics, often over many years, to get their books in shape. I can do that because I am responsible for relatively few titles, whereas editors at university presses have bigger lists.

I only ever read a manuscript from the point of view of a general reader i.e. is this comprehensible, sequential and clearly written.

Simon Winder, Penguin Press