The State of Digital Media: ALA, Publishers, and Vendors

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Important Lessons & Themes

• From corporate entities to real people
  – Publishers are far from monolithic

• Transition/revolution is in the early stages
  – Why, in terms of technology and services?
    • Ebooks often digital equivalents of print books
  – Addressing misconceptions; publisher meetings as valuable learning experiences
    • “Libraries don’t work like that!”
    • The valuable backlist
  – Expect continued complexity and chaos
Important Lessons & Themes (2)

• From library ↔ publisher to publication ecosystem
  – All entities are experiencing profound change
  – Opportunities and challenges for libraries to redefine their roles and relationships
  – Demand for data is really high, but its supply is sparse

*Focus on the ecosystem is a key learning point and the organizational basis for this presentation*
The Publication Ecosystem (from the Library Lens)

- Libraries
- Publishers
- Distributors
- Authors

- And yes there are even more stakeholders, such as retailers and agents… and regulators and legislators…
Perspectives from the Library Point of View

• Basic access to ebooks
  – Some publishers won’t sell to libraries at all
  – Other publishers only allow selected sales or access to previously-purchased titles
  – Even if sales are permitted, pricing can be onerous

• Limited rights, such as archiving and preservation, privacy, access to accommodate disabled people
Perspectives from the Library Point of View (2)

• Technical problems
  – Interface to access ebooks is clunky
  – Multiple formats and technologies

• Increasingly open-minded on business models
  – But no on-site download requirement
  – Interested in a menu: For example, purchase/perpetual access and limited term options
  – Models that include ebook marketing/sales features are discussable
  – Don’t rip us off
Perspectives from the Publisher Point of View

• The oft-stated issues
  – Concern about the loss (displacement) of near-term sales
  – Cybersecurity

• Replicating features of the print world
  – We (publishers) love friction

• The long run: The library with an extensive collection of ebooks will come to be an effective substitute for a best seller to many premium customers
Perspectives from the Publisher Point of View (2)

• Pricing should be higher than for a print book: higher value to the library
  – More turns
  – Doesn’t wear out
  – Lower processing costs
  – Economy of scale
  – Ongoing costs for publisher

• Print is not going away so fast…
Perspectives from the Publisher Point of View (3)

• Libraries key in discoverability
  – Traditional role of libraries even more important because of declining number of bookstores
  – Libraries really need to push/leverage this point

• Revolution in the publishing industry – scary
  – Competition at the “low end” (e.g., evolution of “self-publishing”)
  – Bigger immediate concern is competition at the high end, such as companies that begin with an “A” (but others too)
Perspectives from the Publisher Point of View (4)

- HarperCollins 26 blowback left scars
  - Lesson: Easier to enter library market than to leave it (or change the terms)
Perspectives from the Distributor Point of View

• Rapid growth means market opportunity
  – New/re-energized participants

• Competition with OverDrive
  – Intention of having better products/services, such as interface
  – Not necessarily one on one competition
  – “Ownership” of ebooks

• Non-profit possibilities?
Perspectives from the Distributor Point of View (2)

• Complex relationship with libraries
  – Some common goals: increase number of publishers, titles available, streamlining interface/customer service
  – Profit motive
  – Business model based on capturing customers (publishers and libraries), creating and maintaining dependence
Perspectives from the Author Point of View

• Authors love libraries
• But love doesn’t pay the bills
  – Similar concerns to publishers
• Dealing with publishers
  – “Less power than libraries”
  – Agreements: purchase vs. license
    • Between authors and publishers vs. publishers and distributors/end users
• Who gets what
Perspectives from the Author Point of View (2)

- Control of works
  - Concern about centralized control of the bits
- What about author ↔ library systems
  - Can and should libraries develop such systems?
Some Implications

• The problem of focusing on any feature in isolation

• Upheaval of the system causes people to become fearful about their futures
  – Squeezed further in already difficult economic circumstances (authors)
  – Disintermediation (pretty much everyone else)
Near-term Activities for ALA

• Continue discussions with publishers and distributors
  – Pilots
  – Recommendations on business model characteristics from ALA

• Increase profile in public sphere
  – Op-ed
  – Authors
  – Tools for libraries to use locally
Near-term Activities for ALA (2)

• Publications and educational initiatives
  – Another American Libraries digital content supplement?
  – Continued work throughout ALA’s divisions and offices
  – (your idea here)

• Data: Pew study, OverDrive

• Clarify ALA’s role relative to other players
  – At least try
Longer-term / Strategic Activities

• Under discussion now
• Ideas include
  – Ebooks more broadly
    • Fragmentation of our cultural heritage
    • Issues in higher education
  – Digital content more broadly
  – Content production in libraries
  – Digitization, archiving and preservation
  – ?
Some Resources

• **American Libraries E-Content Blog:**
  http://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/e-content

• **E-Content: The Digital Dialogue, the May/June 2012 Supplement to American Libraries:**
  http://viewer.zmags.com/publication/f8ac9caa#/f8ac9caa/1

• **ALA Transforming Libraries Portal:**
  http://transforming.ala.org/
Thank You!

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