



The Effect of Digital Publishing on Technical Services in University Libraries

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The past decade has brought enormous changes in scholarly communication, leading many libraries to undertake large-scale digital publishing initiatives. However, no study has investigated how technical services departments are changing to support these new services. Using change management as a theoretical framework, the investigator uses content analysis, surveys, and interviews to analyze how libraries at the cutting edge of library-based digital publishing are utilizing their technical services departments to support these new initiatives and how these changes are being handled. The findings indicate that while many technical services departments are actively supporting library-based digital publishing to some degree, many functions traditionally provided by technical services are being handled by other units within the library. This leads to a discussion of how these change processes will progress and their ultimate effect on library structures and user services.

Keywords: Technical services; Change management; Digital publishing

There have been enormous changes in scholarly communication in the past decade. Distribution methods for publishers, for instance, have been radically altered by the fast and inexpensive dissemination of scholarship made possible by Internet-based digital publishing and decreased sales of printed books. While digital publishing was first associated with digitized versions of print resources such as books and peer-reviewed articles, the capabilities of electronic modes of distribution are increasingly being exploited to publish new forms of resources including datasets and multimedia. Digital publishing changes not only the nature and distribution of published resources, but also the production and editing process.

Publishing in any form remains a complex process. To engage in digital publishing requires expertise in areas such as technical infrastructure, metadata and markup, organization of content, design and graphics, accessibility, content management, web publishing, archiving, and digital rights management.¹ Further, digital publishing has eliminated many of the financial barriers to publishing such as costs associated with the production and distribution of physical volumes. As a result, many academic libraries have entered the digital publishing arena by involving themselves in initiatives including fostering open access content, digitizing library materials (e.g., those in their archives), and maintaining institutional repositories. In many cases, academic libraries have embraced digital publishing to respond to changing information-seeking behaviors of faculty and students, new opportunities and needs related to advancing scholarly communication, and unsustainable journal pricing models.²

Academic libraries began to expand their role in publishing at the same time that many university presses struggled under a business model that typically requires presses to recover 90 percent of their costs while continuing to publish original scholarly monographs.³ In some universities this has contributed to a breakdown of the traditional division of labor between these two entities, often leading to partnerships between or merging of libraries and university presses to distribute content in a digital environment. While these partnerships are often inhibited by difficulties encountered in merging the sometimes different cultures of libraries and publishing, developing sustainable funding models, and proper alignment with the university's mission, there are numerous benefits including providing access to unique collections and providing online publishing channels for faculty and, at some institutions, graduate and undergraduate students.

The changes brought on by library-based digital publishing have the potential to affect every unit in the academic library, including technical services, which, according to Tauber, encompass "those services involved in the acquisition, recording and preserving of materials".⁴

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Godden extends Tauber's definition to "those services involved in the acquisition or collection, preservation and organization of information in any form or medium for the purpose of eventual dissemination".⁵ Although both definitions predate the advent of Internet-based digital publishing, the fundamental mission of technical services remains essentially the same, namely to facilitate access to information through the collection, organization, and preservation of information.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

As university libraries become increasingly involved in digital publishing initiatives, technical services departments face both new opportunities and new challenges. No study has investigated how these departments are adapting to support library-based digital publishing initiatives and how university libraries manage those changes. More precisely, are technical services departments assuming new roles and responsibilities, and what is the impact on departmental operations and their organizational structures?

The ways in which digital publishing efforts are supported has broad implications for the future of technical services work in academic libraries. The findings of this study will provide important perspectives on which library directors and managers can reflect on as they integrate their digital publishing initiatives into the workflow of the library. By better understanding possible future functions and structures of technical services departments in relation to supporting digital publishing initiatives, library managers should be strategic in their hiring and training to ensure a staff that is qualified and prepared for both present and future responsibilities. Furthermore, library directors and technical services managers will be exposed to different strategies to transform technical services departments to support library-based digital publishing initiatives.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature has numerous examples illustrating the growing involvement of academic libraries in digital publishing. A report sponsored by the Association of American Universities, Association of Research Libraries (ARL), Coalition for Networked Information, and National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges states that, while universities have until recently relied on very traditional means of distributing scholarship, digital technologies have changed both the possibilities for dissemination and the ability to share entirely new forms of content.⁶ The report asserts that much of the needed infrastructure for these endeavors exists, most often in libraries. Brown, Griffiths, Rascoff, and Guthrie found numerous examples of successful projects involving collaborations between university presses and libraries, including Project Muse and Columbia International Affairs Online.⁷ However, in the course of conducting interviews at selected universities, they found university administrators to be generally detached and press directors to be ambivalent, though librarians were excited about digital publishing collaborations. While there are high profile success stories, their report indicates that general acceptance of the library's role in digital publishing is far from secure.

A common form for library based publishing to take is that of the institutional repository. In a survey of research universities, Lynch and Lippincott found that approximately 40 percent of universities reported having an institutional repository and 88 percent of those that did not have one were taking steps toward creating one.⁸ For those universities that have an institutional repository, almost 80 percent reported that the library had sole administrative responsibility. Content in the repositories varied, but electronic theses and dissertations, preprints, working papers and digitized assets from special collections were the most common digital objects.

In much of the literature predicting the future for libraries, digital publishing is seen as a natural fit for libraries. Wittenberg notes the

need for collaboration and "the creation of new kinds of hybrid organizations and staff"⁹ to support digital publishing, but that traditional skills found within libraries including the organization, storage, preservation and delivery of information are important skills that will help position libraries at the forefront of digital publishing. Simmons-Welburn, Donovan, and Bender state that one of the key roles for libraries will be to integrate digital publishing into their core services by curating digital collections and supporting institutional repositories.¹⁰ Lewis predicts that within 20 years, over half of libraries' investment in collections will be represented by activities related to curating digital content.¹¹

Related to the more general predictions for future academic library roles, digital publishing is a common theme when visioning future scenarios for libraries. Carpenter, Graybill, Offord, and Piorun found support among directors of libraries with membership in ARL for one of their scenarios in which the library takes on many roles formerly filled by university presses, with the economics of publishing acting as a driving force in moving these operations to the library.¹² Staley and Malenfant paint a less optimistic picture as a possible future scenario, positing that, while libraries may take an active role in digital publishing, the inertia of conventional publishing will continue due in large part to promotion and tenure guidelines while digital publishing initiatives stay on the margins.¹³ These studies demonstrate the important role that libraries are likely to play in the future of academic digital publishing, and help to establish the need for a more formal investigation of the structural changes likely to be associated with digital publishing initiatives.

While the literature clearly demonstrates the perceived importance of digital publishing to libraries, there is relatively little written on how these changes are managed. There are indications that while there are many traditional library skills that can be leveraged to support digital publishing, such support will also require skills not currently present in most libraries. Thomas describes successful library led digital publishing initiatives at Cornell University, including Project Euclid (math and statistics journals), arXiv (e-print archive initially created to facilitate the exchange of preprints in high energy physics), and DPubS (open source content management system).¹⁴ Thomas notes that the library's role is becoming less passive and more active in leveraging existing areas of library expertise, but notes a need for organizational development of non-traditional skills including "content acquisitions, editorial management, contract negotiation, marketing and subscription management".¹⁵

The need for close collaboration between library units in supporting digital publishing is an important theme. Walters, who writes about the many ways in which library skills were leveraged to support digital publishing at the Georgia Institute of Technology, notes the need for collaboration between units to utilize the different strengths of a diverse library organization.¹⁶ Ma notes a very similar collaborative workflow to support digital projects at Penn State, utilizing the strengths of many library units including technical services.¹⁷

The literature specifically looking at technical services' involvement in digital publishing reinforces the idea that collaboration between units is fundamentally important, with technical services librarians often in an advisory role for metadata creation. Fleming, Mering, and Wolfe note that metadata creation has become the domain of many units across libraries and that catalog librarians typically play the role of overseer or advisor to maintain metadata quality.¹⁸ Mitchell, Thompson, and Wu document a similar situation at the University of Houston, where individuals from technical services act as advisors to metadata contributors.¹⁹ In her analysis of three institutional repositories, Kurtz notes that from a sample of user contributed metadata, only the submissions that had been vetted by a metadata librarian were of consistently high quality.²⁰

In terms of staffing in technical services to take on new roles related to digital publishing, Banush writes that Cornell created a

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