

Digital Darwinism

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INTRODUCTION

Digital communications have undoubtedly changed our lives—most would say for the good. External drivers such as e-mail, instant messaging, voice over IP, smartphones, and social networks have altered how we communicate. Today, everyone's a publisher.

The term "bridging the digital divide" could not be more poignant than within the publishing industry. Traditional practices were predicated on well-defined structures and team building with specific expertise. This remains true today; however, the advent of digital has forced us to rethink how to proceed and prosper in the digital world we live in.



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One's opinion regarding the value of digital publishing usually depends on how technology affects our role in the industry. Regardless of the consequences, one must accept the inevitable; evolution is a constant.

UNDER WHAT CONDITIONS SHOULD WE EMBRACE DIGITAL INNOVATION?

The value proposition associated with adopting digital varies based on the publisher's field of interest and expertise. Therefore the question is: "Would my audience of readers prefer digital over print?"

Let's face it; print touches our senses in a way that digital cannot provide. And a well-written story does not require media to enhance the plot. Our minds fill in the blanks, thereby providing a personal interpretation. However, genres beyond, suspense, thriller, romance, et cetera will most certainly benefit from visual media. Among all genres, there is one that stands out to benefit the most: education.

Education encompasses all aspects of digital innovation, and the demand for instructional content goes far beyond the classroom. Government agencies and international corporations profit from what is known as "e-learning." The subsequent value for such publishers' is comprised of three significant components: economics, the capacity to refresh content, and the inclusion of multimedia.

CURRENT/FUTURE DIGITAL PRACTICES

Digital textbooks have proven to substantially reduce cost while increasing reten-

tion rates as a result of media enhancement. The most common means to produce e-textbooks involves outsourcing to third parties (e.g., e-book programming operations or online production platforms). And the use of software solutions is frequently applied for “in-house” usage. All of which are either expensive and/or require technically savvy personnel.

The global online learning industry is growing at an accelerated rate. Over the last 5 years the market has experienced a compound annual growth rate of approximately 9.2%. However, as most learning courses are based on a webinar approach (e.g., recorded videos, slides, graphs and text), statistics suggest the retention rate derived from such programs remains low.

The future of e-learning is all about automation and mobility. Automated end-to-end production technology is clearly the way to reduce costs (human resources, software acquisition, training, etc.). And mobile curricula must be compatible with smartphones and tablets—the platforms of choice among students and employees.

Furthermore, due to the increasing capacity of mobile devices, the next generation of media-rich mobile learning (m-learning) will no longer be dependent on an Internet connection.

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

The integration of educational technology can be a hard pill to swallow. Educational publishers must be prepared to restructure content in order to optimize digital production processes established by solution providers. However, the following preparation statements have proven to soften the pain.

Reexamining internal production workflows is a must. Determining what cannot be changed provides the foundation of what is needed.

Identify how digital versions of print may be structured (e.g., multicolumns, footnotes, preferred media formats, target e-readers, and output formats [ePub, Mobi, etc.]).

Try to avoid app-based solutions due to the constant need to update coding to comply with device operating system updates (e.g., iOS and Android).

Evaluate third party production solutions with a keen eye on cost and internal development requirements.

As third party providers apply technology in various ways, that is, outsourced, software, or software as a service, select the most convenient and reliable source. Service providers that offer free evaluation and consultation is considered a plus. Basically, look before you leap.