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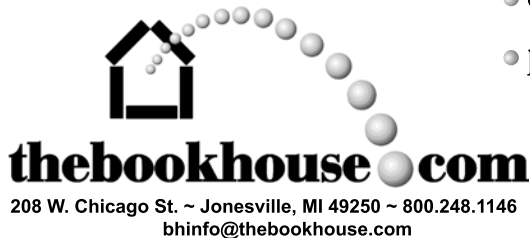
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Self-Publishing: A Bibliographic Essay

by **Joseph D. Grobelny** (Reference & Instruction Librarian, Front Range Community College, College Hill Library)
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As institutions, libraries have relied on publishers to act as bellwethers for the building of collections; and, as a result, publishers and their distributors have been tightly integrated into our workflows in a highly efficient system of physical and intellectual bibliographic control. This has left the relationship between authors who self-publish and libraries somewhat fraught with difficulty. With the rise of eBooks, significant disruptions to the publishing industry have opened up the field for authors to self-publish titles at such rates that libraries can no longer ignore them. While the current trend of self-publishing is not entirely driven by eBooks, research presented in 2011 by **Kelly Gallagher**, VP of Publisher Services for **Bowker**, suggests that while eBooks make less money, they move the most individual units.¹ **Gallagher's** research also provides insights as to the content of the self-publishing market, with the unsurprising result that, while fiction also moves more units, it makes less money than non-fiction. In short, while self-publishing has always been a problem for libraries and publishers, the ease of self-publishing eBooks has made it impossible to ignore the vast increase in the number of titles.

To get a better sense of the self-publishing market, a good place to start is **Jana Bradley**

et al.'s *Non-Traditional Book Publishing*,² which defines and roughly measures a number of non-traditional publishing avenues from self-published eBooks to publisher-supported "non-traditional" publishing. To support the idea that self-publishing is currently driven by eBooks, they found that the sales of self-published print books averaged in the hundreds per year (with a handful of exceptional titles) and that only 27% of the sample were held by libraries. Of note, in the self-published eBook section, libraries are not mentioned as these titles tend to be sold through a platform directly to the consumer. The idea that libraries are being bypassed in the self-published eBook market is supported by another article by the same group of authors using similar data:³ In a 348-title sample from 2008, they found only 102 that were held by at least one OCLC member library though 98% of the sample was still available for purchase in 2010. At the very least, it is clear that libraries are not large buyers of self-published eBooks. The impression given by **Bradley** and her co-authors is that, since self-published books are often overlooked by the library/publisher dyad, it will take new kinds of discovery tools to make them accessible. This conclusion may miss the crucial point: discovery, along with production, is largely happening elsewhere.

Publishers

If libraries have generally overlooked the self-publishing trend, the book industry as a whole has been incredibly responsive. Anecdotal evidence of traditional publishers being bypassed by authors, as in the case of best-selling thriller author **Blake Crouch**,⁴ understate the fact that he started out publishing four books with **St. Martin's Press** before becoming a DIY (Do-It-Yourself) published author. eBooks were the primary driver of his move away from traditional publishers. The anecdotes continue to support the idea that having some kind of institutional support is desirable. A number of children's authors, after beginning in self-publishing, signed deals with major publishing groups.⁵ Such support comes not only from traditional publishers, but also from their biggest competitor, **Amazon**. The **Amazon** Kindle Direct Program gets several mentions in *Publisher's Weekly's* "Select" section, which focuses on self-publishing and also shares success stories for self-published authors⁶ and for such groups as *Lulu.com* and others. To compete in the new self-publishing marketplace, members of the "Big Six" publishers have been acquiring smaller self-publishing groups that expand their own technological reach as is the case of

continued on page 36

the Penguin Group's acquisition of Author Solutions Inc.⁷

The proliferation of self-published titles has largely been a marketing-driven move to capture the "long-tail" that eBooks provide. Bradley and others have lamented that this expanding volume of works is not easily searched by librarians' discovery tools, especially since self-published books provided a wealth of information by non-academic experts.⁸ Again, the self-interest of librarians has caused libraries to miss the point that publishers will continue to cash in on the self-publishing markets and will become increasingly ineffective at being the gatekeepers libraries were used to relying on. Those roles are left to the market itself, alongside the increasing importance of other groups. Ann Haugland, of the University of Iowa, in a great essay on traditional royalty publishers, print-on-demand subsidy publishers, and wholly self-published authors, applies the lens of cultural production (Howard Becker's *Art Worlds* and Raymond William's *Sociology of Culture*) to find that new gatekeepers such as Mystery Writer of America have begun to take over the function traditionally left to publishers of validating these amateur forms of cultural production.⁹

Public Libraries

In the meantime, public libraries have led the way on dealing with self-publishing. Given that fiction tends to drive self-publishing and eBooks, Juris Dilevko and Keren Dali's 2006 paper on self-publishing and libraries contains few surprises but many illuminating facts. It begins with a comprehensive literature review of self-publishing in the 20th century and focuses on the growth of three self-publishing houses: AuthorHouse, iUniverse, and Xlibris, all print-on-demand services that got their start in the 1990s. Their literature review of libraries and their relationship with such services reveals a consistently skeptical stance towards the products of these services.¹⁰ More importantly, it provides the earliest data on library holdings. Among the types of libraries, public libraries were twice as likely to hold self-published titles, largely in fiction, U.S. History, and the Social Sciences, especially for titles from the above-mentioned services.

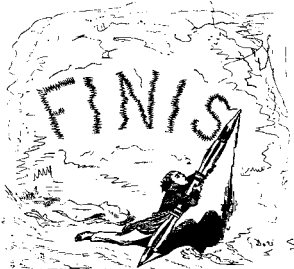
Like much of the discussion around self-publishing, economics are of primary concern for publishers and public libraries alike. In a column for *The Digital Shift*, Jamie La Rue, director of Douglas County Public Libraries (Colorado), examines the economic strains put upon public libraries by the Big Six publishers (*All Hat, No Cattle*).¹¹ He addressed the issue by making eBook deals with twelve groups of publishers (800+ companies).¹² In addition to this model of finding smaller publisher partners who are willing to provide eBooks directly to

libraries, public libraries have been leaders in implementing print-on-demand (POD) publishing services through the availability of Espresso Book Machines.¹³ This step ties public libraries to the spirit of Maker Culture where locally produced goods are highly valued. This trend is echoed in the sentiments of the 3D printer crowd in academic libraries and is tied to the move from traditional academic libraries to the Information Commons in the early and mid-2000s. Nonetheless, looking at the list of locations that provide POD services, public libraries are in the minority compared to independent booksellers and university bookstores. Outside of a higher rate of collecting and occasional forays into POD, the story of self-publishing and public libraries is largely unresearched, albeit widely discussed.

Academic Libraries

If one piece of writing should be considered representative of the directions that academic libraries have and will continue to take in regards to self-publishing, it is Carpenter et al.'s "Envisioning the Library's Role in Scholarly Communication in the Year 2025."¹⁴ In a survey of selected library directors, this study found that a number of them saw an important role for the academic library as publisher and facilitator of scholarly publishing. A majority of them saw the economics of scholarly publishing as a driving factor. Such concerns were, however, less important than defining new subject-specialized and faculty roles for librarians and aligning libraries more closely with the pedagogical interests of MLIS programs. This viewpoint might reflect either the surrender of libraries to the goal of increasing market forces in collection development or the arrival of a much more service-oriented institution in both teaching and knowledge creation services and facilities.

In the survey article "Research Library Publishing Services: New Options for University Publishing,"¹⁵ a high number (70-80%) of libraries published journals, proceedings, and monographs. They also saw great demand for hosting services and much demand for publishing consultation services. In light of limited resources, academic library publishing tends to be simple, open access, and volunteer-run to avoid the higher costs of providing subscription services. The authors noted that "(T)here appears to be no dominant sequence of service evolution, but publishing services are co-managed and often integrated with a range of new services such as digitization initiatives, digital humanities initiatives, digital repository deployment, development of learning objects, digital preservation activities." Similar and more recent research can also be found in Walter's "The Future Role of Publishing Services in University Libraries."¹⁶ Because of the "pay-for-it-twice" model that academic libraries operate under, issues of copyright in the publication of journal articles have had interesting effects that influence the ways that academic authors self-publish.



Copyright & Self-Archiving

Kristin Antelman's "Self-Archiving Practice and the Influence of Publisher Policies in the Social Sciences"¹⁷ found that, in a group of select social science journals, more self-archiving happened for articles in journals that prohibited it than those that did not. Clearly, some academic authors feel the need to rely on their home institution's services rather than a publisher's. Such outright disobedience (willful or not) is interesting in light of the increasing opportunities for authors to legally participate in self-archiving. The clearest discussion of why this occurs is found in "Communication Regimes in Competition: The Current Transition in Scholarly Communication Seen through the Lens of the Sociology of Technology,"¹⁸ which found in 2001 that 68-83% of preprints in arXiv were later accepted by traditional journals. The authors contend that self-archiving is primarily used for distribution and traditional venues are used by authors for credit-allocating and quality control. A later study by Denise Covey at Carnegie Mellon University¹⁹ examined the publications listed by faculty on their Websites combined with faculty interviews to determine faculty views on self-archiving. Covey notes that faculty tended to favor self-archiving recent works. She also discovered disconnects between the breadth of adoption by faculty in various disciplinary departments and the depth (number of works archived) by individual faculty members with only 11% of the faculty doing so habitually. She also found that only a minority of publisher policies forbid self-archiving, both pre- and post-print. In addition, many faculty either were unaware of the publisher's policy or disregarded it in self-archiving.

When it comes to self-archiving, two clear points emerge: first, although it runs in concert with traditional publishing avenues, the total savings to higher education could be substantial, depending on which system of open access publishing and archiving is used even if there would be a loss in net benefits in the short term²⁰ and, second, open-access articles of any kind have significantly higher impact rates.²¹

Conclusion

A lot of the discussion and research on self-publishing and libraries focuses on eBooks and how they will disrupt "business as usual" for large, slow moving institutions. But, in truth, we as librarians are largely invested in those same institutions. Models focused around "disruption" are useful as catalysts for change, but rarely focus in practice on long-term goals. While many readers who look at the literature on the relationship between self-publishing and libraries might conclude that libraries will soon be left behind the market, it is worth taking the longer view that libraries will most likely successfully adapt to the changed publishing environment. Given the difficult task of responding to economic pressures while still maintaining the ability to meet our communities' needs with quality and lasting access, incremental experimentation and slow consensus building is not only desirable, but preferable. 🐾

endnotes on page 37