

EVENT SUMMARY: May 16, 2011

e-Books 101 (Part 2): How to Publish Books in a Digital World

On May 16, 2011, a panel consisting of Betsy Kulamer, Director of Books at the American Society of Civil Engineers; Laura Leichum, Intellectual Property Manager at Georgetown University Press; and Lisa Post, e-Publishing Specialist at ASCD, provided information and advice about e-books within the publishing industry and about how important it is to keep up to date with this quickly growing, increasingly popular field.

At the beginning of the discussion, each speaker detailed her personal experiences with e-books. All three speakers stressed how useful digital asset managers are in this new world of e-publishing. Laura Leichum and Betsy Kulamer had particular experience with CodeMantra, which is a web-based service that collects a publisher's book files, converts them to e-book format, and distributes them to third-party vendors. It also collects metadata and keeps track of what those vendors are seeking so you, the publisher, know what type of files and metadata to send to them.

Each speaker also spoke about various distribution methods that are available through e-publishing. Lisa Post discussed ASCD's online membership, which allows users access to all member content on the ASCD site as long as the users maintain a paid membership. Betsy Kulamer provided some interesting information about a new system that libraries are using called "patron-driven access." Through this system, some libraries will purchase only electronic copies of certain books and will keep track of how many pages are read. Once a certain number of pages are read, proving that the book is popular, they will purchase a physical copy to keep on their shelves.

Various other distribution issues were brought up as well. Lisa Post mentioned that certain distributors apply their own DRM (digital rights management) technologies to e-books, which takes away some control of user access from the publisher. Betsy Kulamer cautioned that some distributors will offer horrible royalty deals to publishers, such as 10 percent in some cases.

Laura Leichum commented on the importance of developing e-content alongside e-books. She specifically mentioned mobile apps, direct links to web materials, and audio content as being potential complementary items to e-books that can increase sales.

One topic brought up toward the end of the presentation is the fear that the popularity of e-books gives authors the power to develop and distribute their works independently through the Internet, which could potentially drive authors away from publishers. However, Laura Leichum pointed out that publishers have a very definite brand name power that helps to draw authors who want that power to boost sales of their books. She also brought up the fact that, particularly in academic circles, there is a tendency for up-and-coming authors to want to associate themselves with established, influential authors in their field, which results in newer authors wanting to work with organizations that have published works by those established authors.

As a whole, the evening's discussion was incredibly enlightening and entertaining, with more information than could possibly be contained in a brief summary. But the main takeaway from the night was that becoming involved in e-publishing is a must for any publisher who wants continued success in the industry.

—David Becker