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Scalable Library-Based Publishing Services at the University of Michigan

The University of Michigan Library's [Scholarly Publishing Office](#) publishes scholarly literature in a variety of genres and formats: nearly 20 journals and conference proceedings; monographs (a small monograph series of our own imprint, and an imprint in collaboration with the University of Michigan Press, [digitalculturebooks](#)); and projects that are created expressly for online delivery (i.e., document archives linked to scholarly essays about those documents; a collaboratively translated 18th c French Encyclopedia) – materials that often do not have a place in the traditional market.¹

We also run a robust reprints service, with over 9000 titles on Amazon repurposed from the library's digital collections. This reprint service is beginning to grow into a service for faculty to reprint their out of print books and make them available as print on demand items. We build delivery environments in partnership with nonprofit scholarly publishers. The majority of our content is open access -- that is, online for free to the public -- but we also provide hosting services for some subscription-based resources, among them the ACLS Humanities E-book Project.

Organizationally and physically, we are located within the University of Michigan Library, with a staff of seven full-time employees and a range of part-time help for text conversion and other duties. At the moment, about 40% of our activity is funded through base commitments from the Library's collection budget; the other 60% is funded by various revenue-generating activities.

While our core principles as a library-publisher include a dedication to preserve our digital publications for the long-term, and an attention to technological standards and best practices, I would say that our energies are primarily devoted to make scholarly publishing more sustainable and scalable in a variety of ways. Here are several ways in which we aim to achieve sustainable publishing methods:

1) We operate at the margins of library activity by organizing the available resources and infrastructure in a new way to provide publishing services. The raw materials are there – it's a matter of rearranging them to support publishing.

We rely extensively on other departments:

- Digital Library Production Services (DLPS) - software development, some content conversion
- Core Services - network and server administration, as well as authentication

¹ Links to all of our publications are available in the [Publications](#) section of our website.

mechanisms

- Cataloging - for a good portion of our descriptive metadata
- Finance dept for support for our more complex financial transactions.
- IP rights consultation from our IP specialists, and General Counsel for complex legal or contractual issues

Being located in the library means that they keep the lights on, the computers running, and the carpets vacuumed. And there are intangible benefits of being located in a library – where there is a great deal of aggregated expertise about the lifecycle of scholarship, books, and user needs; not to mention creating and managing digital text, image, and bibliographic collections. Our staff participates in working groups on usability and communications, helps to staff the reference desk, assists with technical support, and sits on hiring committees for positions in other units – all of which help to create a strong alliance between our unit and the rest of the library. I say this not to praise our altruism, but to flesh out a bit better how we are a cohesive part of a whole rather than a satellite office merely “doing publishing.”

2) We do a lot of work ourselves, but in order to extend and supplement our services, we create partnerships with entities outside the library. In particular, we get:

- revenue from hosting for subscription-based resources
- quality content from collaboration with scholarly societies, and our university press
- publication referrals from our participation in a non-profit publisher's assistance program
- print services from on demand and short run printers (Lightning Source and BookSurge)
- backlist conversion from vendors when necessary

3) We offer author-friendly rights agreements because we believe authors should retain robust rights to their scholarship and ask for a non-exclusive right to publish content. The author is free to circulate, distribute, republish, or remix her content in any way she sees fit.

4) Just because we're running a lean operation does not mean that we're restricted to one way of doing things. Because we're a new model—one that has come up in the world as an electronic publisher—we're not tied to the gold standard of The Printed Book. This allows us to be open to experimentation and to scholars' curiosity and willingness to try new forms of disseminating their work. For example, we have mounted work in CommentPress, the WordPress theme from the Institute for the Future of the Book that allows comments in the margins of texts, and we have published an article in one of our journals that was developed inside CommentPress. We employ a learning-by-doing approach, control our growth, and take small risks that make sense.

5) Finally, we articulate and provide a flexible array of core publishing services that are responsive to the needs of scholars. I've touched on a lot of them, but let me run them down once more:

- Conversion of content to structured XML from a variety of native formats
- Electronic publication and distribution of journals, monographs, and other scholarly content
- Robust search and navigation
- Long term preservation and archiving
- Collecting and reporting item-level usage statistics
- Support for multimedia
- Access control options (open to the public/restricted by subscription)

Notice that I don't list marketing, editorial, copyediting, and design as our core services. True, these are areas in which libraries have no strong tradition, but these are areas where we are negotiating and developing all the time. We have begun to build some basic in-house design capabilities that build on a variety of free, open-source resources, but rely on a stable of freelancers on an as-needed basis. Copyediting for many of our publications is done by the editors of journals themselves, which is typical, as scholars perform a lot of unpaid labor in the form of review, editing and copyediting for both commercial and non-commercial publications; however, we can refer them to professional copyeditors as well. We now do marketing on a small scale, and almost exclusively in electronic form (sending e-mail to listservs, creating relationships with bloggers, sending press releases, and the like). Our acquisitions strategy has always been opportunistic – we're not invested in building a particular kind of list, but rather provide a home to publications that aren't viable in the traditional scholarly marketplace, or in the traditional formats. Partnering with scholars who are willing to take on some of the editorial duties is an attractive way to build on and extend our core services.