

Promoting the Use of E-books by the Use of Electronic Enrichment

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PROMOTING THE USE OF PAPER BOOKS

Book publishers and booksellers have always had a vested interest in the successful commercial distribution of books. Over time, publishers and booksellers have developed a number of techniques to promote the successful distribution of published material. The techniques have concentrated on ways to get their books noticed and to circulate information about the contents of the books to the widest possible audience.

A lot of effort is put into the design of the dust jacket of hardback books and the covers of paperback books. Specialists are involved in the design process to develop images that are at the same time eye catching and invoke a sense of what can be found in the book itself. As well as the image on the cover, there is generally a brief summary saying what the book is about or what information the book contains. In addition to this, there will often be information about the author, presented in a manner to make that author relevant and interesting.

It is relatively easy to see that a lot of work goes into the process of designing and coming up with a good cover for a book. One would be forgiven for imagining that there are occasions when more work goes into the design and contents of the cover than into the actual text that is wrapped inside it. Most of us have come across publications where we have been left with the feeling that the successful selling of the book owed more to the cover than the contents.

However, pretty much anyone who wants to sell a book in a bookshop has a colourful cover. Publishers have therefore needed to resort to other methods to differentiate their new titles from those of other publishers. These techniques include, but are not limited to, arranging for the authors to visit a

bookshop and sign copies of their books and arranging for authors to be interviewed on television and radio to talk about their books.

Getting readers interested in a book by letting them read part of it can be very successful for some works of fiction. The opening chapters of a new book sometimes appear in national newspapers. The first chapter of one book will appear at the end of another by the same author. Either way, if you want to read the rest of it, you have to get a copy of the book. The extent to which this technique can be used for technical books or other books used in research is more difficult, however, this concept is expanded and discussed in context at the end of this paper.

PROMOTING AND SELLING PAPER BOOKS ONLINE

Since the arrival of the Internet and, so called „*dot com*” companies embarking upon *e-commerce* on the *information super highway*, we now see books being sold online. *Dot com* companies setting out to sell books online have to achieve the same result as the conventional bookshop. It is not surprising, therefore, that they have also begun to develop techniques to promote the sale of books in their particular environment.

Clearly when you enter the web site of an online bookseller, it is different from walking through the door of a bookshop. You cannot take a book off the shelf and look at it. Instead of books on shelves, the online bookseller has a catalogue of metadata records that describe the books for sale. The metadata record has entries that include author, title, publication information, physical description and price. The catalogue of metadata records is held in a database that is indexed and the online users can search the database to find the books they are looking for – a facility that is still not available in most conventional bookshops.

Online booksellers have not failed to capitalize on the effort that was put into designing the cover of the book, it is not surprising, therefore, that the metadata description is usually supported by an image of the cover of the book that can be seen together with the metadata. Often the cover image can be enlarged for better online viewing.

Where the publisher of the book has provided a summary of the book, online booksellers generally make the summary available either with the metadata description or associated with it (for example „*click here to read a sum-*

mary"). Where the book has been reviewed in the press, the review (or selected parts of it) are also presented.

It is in the area of reviews that the online bookseller has an advantage over the conventional bookshop. It is not unusual for the online bookseller to solicit reviews from its own customers and those opinions are made available in addition to the professional reviews. The principle here is that the independent opinion of another online shopper, who is „someone like you”, can be perceived as having more credibility than the reviewer from a newspaper or other publication who can be perceived as proffering an opinion for commercial gain.¹

All of these concepts will be well known to anyone who has visited the web site of Amazon, Barnes & Noble or any of the many other online booksellers.

PROMOTING THE USE OF PAPER BOOKS IN LIBRARIES

The similarity between a library and a conventional bookshop is that they both have books on the shelves that their patrons take down and take away. The difference, obviously, is that in the case of a bookshop the patrons are supposed to pay for the books and in the case of libraries they are supposed to bring them back.

The other difference between a library and a conventional bookshop is that most libraries now have their catalogue in a computer database of metadata records that describe the books and an OPAC facility whereby the patrons can search the database and discover what is in the collection and where it can be found on the shelves. In this regard, there is clear similarity between the library and an online bookseller.

It is not surprising therefore that libraries who want to keep up to date with current trends, have approached the suppliers of their automated library systems and asked for their OPACs to be made *to look more like Amazon and other online booksellers*. When libraries were the only people with databases of metadata descriptions of books, it was sufficient to offer access to the database via an OPAC to promote the use of the collection. Now that online booksellers have logically equivalent databases that they have made more eye catching with the addition of *enrichment* such as cover images, summaries and reviews, it is reasonable to expect library catalogues to be *enriched* in a similar way.

OPAC systems installed at libraries in the last year to eighteen months have the metadata records of their OPACs enriched with cover images, summaries and reviews. In addition to this, where publishers have made them available, there are tables of contents and author biographies and sample chapters. In common with online booksellers, these new OPACs also support peer reviews (it is a matter of library policy the extent to which such patron reviews are edited by library staff before being available for public consumption). Most recently, videos of authors discussing their work have also become available.

The relevance of these techniques to a public library environment is intuitively obvious. A good example of such a new OPAC can be found at the City of York library in the UK.²

Research librarians would be forgiven for asking to what extent this has any relevance to research libraries. Those of us in the business of supplying such systems asked exactly the same question. The surprising thing is that the *enrichment* described is as widely available for non-fiction material as it is for more commercially obvious fiction. In fact recent experience has shown that Tables of Contents and more detailed summaries are more likely to be available for textbooks and other research material than for commercial works of fiction.

OPACs with *enrichment* are now installed and in use at academic libraries as well as public libraries. The library at the London Business School, which has an OPAC with enrichment, is a very good example of this.³

Initial findings in this environment show that the enrichment is found to be valuable to students and researchers using the OPAC. Further more, users of the OPAC are attracted to the titles for which there is a cover image. This should not be a complete surprise considering the effort that went into the design of the cover in the first place. However, time alone will tell whether this particular phenomenon can be attributed to the novelty of the cover images being available or their presence is genuinely promoting the use of the titles that have cover images. The initial findings have been fed back to the publishers who supply the images. It will be interesting to see if this causes more cover images to be available for such online use.

PROMOTING THE USE OF *E-BOOKS*

The distribution and use of books in electronic format, *e-books*, is now an established technical reality. Initially the reluctance to take up the technical

potential of *e-books* could be attributed to a combination of the technology of available readers and the ability to control or eliminate the onward dissemination of intellectual property. Software such as Microsoft Reader with Clear Type™ that is available for both personal computers and the most recent hand held computers (now known as Personal Data Organizers (PDA's)) have overcome most of the legibility issues and are getting better all the time. The use of encrypted keys by such software means that copying such material has become somewhat harder than making photocopies.

A simple extrapolation of what has gone before is that if libraries are to encourage and promote the use of *e-books* they will need to employ techniques that are the same as, or similar to, those employed to promote the use of books in paper form. If *e-books* are to compete on a level playing field with their paper counterparts, their promotion will have to be at least as good. Considering the resistance that has been seen, one could argue that *e-books* need promoting more than paper books. Promoting the use of paper books with the addition of *enrichment* to their metadata descriptions has been seen to work. There is no reason to suppose it will not work just as well, if not better, for *e-books*.

E-BOOKS IN RESEARCH LIBRARIES

The technique of making the first chapter of a book freely available to whet the appetite of the audience and thereby encourage them to use or buy the entire book has a clear pitfall when it comes to reference material. A reference book will usually contain a lot more information about its given subject matter than a researcher actually needs to see. Making a single chapter available at no charge has the problem that it may not tell the researcher anything about the part of the work that they need to see and therefore have no value. Worse than this, the sample might be the entire piece the researcher is looking for and eliminate the need to buy the book at all. Neither of these propositions is likely to encourage authors and publishers to make such samples available.

However, the very fact that researchers often only need part of a publication leads to a commercial potential that is unique to *e-books*. A recently established vendor of *e-books* in the USA is offering sections of reference material for sale, online. At <http://learningnetwork.ebrary.com/>, you can pay to print or copy small parts of reference material rather than buy the whole book. The cost per page of buying material this way is much higher, pro-rata, than buying the whole book. For example, if a £50 book has 200 pages, the logical „price per page” is 25p per page. Buying two pages in electronic form might

cost, say, £2. Whereas this is four times per page more expensive than buying the whole book, it is £48 cheaper if you only wanted those two pages.⁴

CONCLUSION

If *e-books* are to realize their potential, their existence and use will have to be promoted. Techniques for the successful promotion of paper books in conventional bookshops and libraries with computerized catalogues are established and working.

While we should not eliminate the possibility that someone will devise ways to promote *e-books* other than the ones discussed here, the techniques discussed here are proven in the environment. It is reasonable, therefore to assume that they will also aid the promotion of *e-books*.

REFERENCES

- 1 This comment is not intended in any way to cast aspersions on the integrity of people who review books, it is an observation of the perception that is exploited by the online booksellers. I have reviewed books myself, so I can attest first hand to the honesty and integrity of people who review books.
- 2 <<http://www.york.gov.uk/learning/libraries/opac.html>>.
- 3 This OPAC can be seen online at <http://www.london.edu/library/Library_Catalogue/library_catalogue.html>.
- 4 Please note the figures here are purely hypothetical and suggested to make a point. They do not reflect any quoted commercial rates.