Serials & E-Resources News

Report on the ALPSP International Conference, Oxfordshire, UK

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I recently attended the fourth International Conference of the Association of Learned and Professional Society Publishers (ALPSP). The conference was held on September 14-16, 2011 at the Heythrop Park Hotel in Oxfordshire, UK, and was attended by roughly 275 people. Most of these attendees came from the publisher community, and the conference's primary focus was on the evolving environment of scholarly publishing and issues and challenges within that environment. Below is a report on the conference based on my notes. To access presentation slides and audio recordings, visit the ALPSP website: http://www.alpsp.org/ngen_public/article.asp?aID=335169

The conference began with a keynote presentation by Kevin Guthrie, who is president of Ithaka, the parent organization of JSTOR and Portico. Guthrie's presentation was titled "Will Books Be Different?" and reviewed the key factors that drove the transition from print to online journals, then considering what impact those factors are having on the current format transition underway for books. The six key factors that Guthrie identified were: licensing; consortia; access formats; commercial websites and browsers; the consolidation of publishers; and search engines. When these factors drove the transition of journal formats

that began in the 1990s, funding was relatively robust; Guthrie emphasized that one of the most important differences in applying the factors to the format transition of books is that today funding is, put mildly, not so robust. He then proceeded to consider the bearing of each of the key factors on book format transitions.

Licensing: Guthrie discussed the difficulties of digital rights management and terms for individual versus institutional access. He emphasized in particular the challenges of working with libraries to develop acquisition terms for eBooks that have been adopted in courses as required texts.

Consortia: Here he discussed consortial expectations for sharing among member libraries and the implications of interlibrary loan in the eBook environment.

Access formats: Although there is a widespread perception that young people prefer eBooks over print, Guthrie referenced data suggesting that this is not in fact the case. He discussed iPad and eBook readers and considered what technologies will have a PDF-like impact in the ability to enhance the eBook reading experience.

Commercial web: Today we are in an environment in which a few major companies—such as Apple and Google—set standards and models that determine consumer expectations. Guthrie noted that whereas the primary customer base for journals is institutions, books

have a mixed customer base of both individuals and institutions.

Consolidation of publishers: Today, ongoing publisher consolidations are being accompanied by stronger partnerships among libraries. Libraries are seeking collaboration, sharing costs, and shifting from collection-focused organizations to service-focused organizations.

Search engines: Book digitization efforts such as those initiated by Google make it seem possible that all books will eventually be accessible online. Value in the online environment is tightly bound with use. Effective search and discovery are essential.

In conclusion, Guthrie stated that the transition of books to online formats will indeed be different. The transition is taking place in a more complex environment, and though he thinks the transition will occur more rapidly than it did for journals, he does not think it will be as comprehensive.

The conference's next session, "Waiting for Disruptive Change," consisted of an audience-driven discussion led by Tony O'Rourke (IOP Publishing), Michael Clarke (Silverchair Information Systems), and Nicko Goncharoff (SureChem). The topic of the discussion, inspired by a highly commented-on post on the Scholarly Kitchen blog (http://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2010/01/04/why-hasnt-scientific-publishing-been-disrupted-already/), considered why, amidst significant changes in technologies for the publication, distribution, discovery, and access of content, scholarly publishing has not been transformed. The audience ruminated on topics including:

- Cultural versus technological blocks to transformation
- The appropriateness of the term "disruption" to discussions of changes in scholarly publishing
- Whether we are so far inside the change that we don't see how disruptive it is

- Whether changes occurring in scholarly publisher are evolutionary rather than transformative

The session was also used as an opportunity for the audience to discuss responses to a recent editorial in *The Guardian* that attacked academic publishers for their high subscription costs, claiming that they make "Rupert Murdoch look like a socialist" and that they are "the most ruthless capitalists in the western world" (http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/aug/29/academic-publishers-murdoch-socialist); needless to say, the audience felt (and I agree) that this is an unfair characterization of academic publishing. The session concluded with an informal pool of the audience regarding whether it anticipated evolutionary or revolutionary change over the next five to ten years. Interestingly, the audience was split, with slightly over half expecting revolutionary change and the rest expecting only evolutionary change.

Day two of the conference started with a presentation by Richard Charkin titled "From E-Phobia to E-Phoria." Charkin is Executive Director of Bloomsbury Publishing, and his presentation addressed the changing publishing landscape from the perspective of a trade book publisher. He discussed how trade book publishers' initial stance toward online formats was fear that these formats would make it more difficult to be profitable in an already tight market. Today, however, the rapid increase in sales of eBooks is leading these publishers to regard eBooks are as an opportunity for experimentation.

Following Charkin's presentation came a panel session titled "All Four Corners: Worldwide Scholarly Publishing." The first panelist, Marjana R. Biojone, discussed the state of scholarly publishing in Latin America, particularly the roles of SciELO and RedALyC as disseminators of access to Latin American research. Choon Shil Lee next spoke about scholarly publishing in South Korea, where platforms like KoreaMed and Synapse are providing the world with enhanced access to South Korean medical research. Lastly, Arend Küster discussed how the Bloomsbury Qatar Foundation

Journals' recently launched QScience platform is endeavoring—essentially from scratch—to establish Qatar as a leader in scientific research and scholarship.

The next item on the program offered the choice of attending three parallel sessions. The session I attended was titled "Who Knows Best? Academic Library Book Collections Development in Transition" and featured four short presentations. The first presentation, given by Mark Huskisson (EBL), discussed the shift in libraries toward demand-driven acquisition policies. Huskisson outlined the drivers of the transition as being the transition to electronic formats, scarcities of library space, cuts in library budgets, and a growing culture of assessment in libraries. He stated that, for publishers, likely implications of the shift will be decreased copies sold and an increased need for metadata that will enhance discoverability of publications. Next, Anna Bullard (ebrary) presented on the shift in academic libraries from print to online book formats, and from title-by-title purchasing to patron-driven approaches. Arlene Moore Sievers-Hill (Head of Acquisitions at Case Western Reserve University) picked up the discussion of academic library book collections through an examination of factors impacting purchasing decisions at her library. Lastly, Jill Taylor-Roe (Newcastle University) discussed how low rates of student satisfaction regarding access to book collections led her library to implement a pilot project for patron-driven acquisitions through EBL in February 2010. The library devoted £70,000 to the project and loaded 112,000 records into its catalog. Just a few weeks after the project's start, roughly half of the funds allocated to the project had been spent. Shortly thereafter, the library took steps to decrease the flow of patron-initiated acquisitions, such as displaying the cost to users and eventually mediating the purchases. Taylor-Roe indicated that the program proved very popular with patrons across the university's academic units and that the university increased its 2011 allocation for patron-driven acquisitions to £135,000. The library is finding that titles acquired through the program continue to be used.

Next, I attended the plenary session "What Did the Romans Ever Do for Us?" This session consisted of several short presentations addressing the extent to which academic publishers are still relevant in the evolving information landscape. One of the presentations, given by Jane Harvell (a librarian at the University of Sussex), emphasized new opportunities for library/publisher partnerships based on shared expertise in scholarly communication. Another, by Mark Thorley of the Natural Environmental Research Council, looked at the relevance of publishing from the perspective of research funders. Thorley characterized the value of publishers in their roles as gate-keepers, quality-assurers, and access providers and emphasized that going forward it will be increasingly important for publishers to be responsive to the needs of sources of research funding. A third presentation was given by Huw Morris, Dean of the College of Arts and Social Science at the University of Salford. Morris's presentation identified five reasons why publishers are valued by universities: editorial work, distribution, the investment of resources in metadata, archiving, and metrification. Morris also identified some research-related challenges UK universities face, including fewer international students, decreases in government funding, and a shift in attention of funders from advanced research institutions to institutions providing vocational training.

Day two of the conference concluded with an awards dinner in which ALPSP announced recipients for its annual awards. Categories for the awards included contributions to scholarly publishing, publishing innovation, and best new journal.

The conference's third and final day began with three concurrent sessions. I decided to attend the session titled "eBook Licensing," which featured three speakers addressing issues related to the licensing of eBook content. In "Effective eBook Purchasing," Wouter van der Velde of Springer Publishing considered how patron-driven acquisitions compares with acquisitions of eBooks in packages. This presentation made heavy reference to a recent UKSG presentation by Terry Bucknell (University of Liverpool), which concluded that

package-level purchasing of eBooks has generally proven to be a better return on investment at Bucknell's institution than PDA eBook acquisitions (Bucknell's excellent presentation is accessible at http://river-valley.tv/buying-by-the-bucketful-a-comparative-study-of-how-e-book-bundles-are-used/). The next presenter was Ron Hogan of Electronic Publisher, a trade publisher. Hogan discussed his company's work to develop an eBook app and the lessons they learned about what readers are looking for in such an app; in particular, he highlighted usefulness, consistency, and simplicity. A third presentation was given by Diane Harnish (DH Consulting) and stressed the importance of strong customer service in making the transition to eBooks manageable.

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