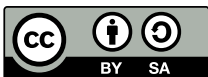


Interview

TRENDS AND CHALLENGES IN THE PUBLISHING INDUSTRY

JOCIS interviewed Angus Phillips, the editor-in-chief of the prestigious publishing journal “Logos” and a consultant to the publishing industry.





Professor Angus Phillips is Director of the Oxford International Centre for Publishing. He has degrees from Oxford and Warwick universities, and before joining Oxford Brookes he ran a trade and reference list at Oxford University Press. He works as a consultant to the publishing industry and is often invited to speak at international conferences and events. His books include *Is this a Book?* (with Miha Kovač), *Inside Book Publishing* (with Giles Clark), *The Oxford Handbook of Publishing* (with Michael Bhaskar), and *Turning the Page*. His books have been translated into eight languages. He is on the European Advisory Board of Princeton University Press and was a judge for the *Bookseller* industry awards for four years in a row. He is the Editor-in-Chief of the premier publishing journal *Logos*.

His research interests include: publishing statistics, the future of the book, digital publishing, international publishing, book covers, literary agents, corporate social responsibility, economic history of publishing, publishing in China.

TRENDS AND CHALLENGES IN THE PUBLISHING INDUSTRY

1. You attended the “By the Book 8” conference. What impressed you most about this year’s conference? Was there a study or a topic presented that you found particularly disruptive in the publishing industry?

We were delighted to be hosted by the University of Porto and we were honoured by the welcome from Paulo Faustino and his colleagues. Porto is a beautiful location and all delegates enjoyed the conference venue and the city, including the very special tour of Livraria Lello.

The papers presented were of good quality and the discussions ranged across many topics. We had delegates from all over the world. Of special interest were papers on topics connected to diversity and inclusive publishing.

We had three plenary speakers covering the value of reading, book data from different countries, and the impact of literary prizes. They were Anne Mangen from Norway, Andre Breedt from the UK, and Gisèle Sapiro from France.

There was no particular paper covering a notable disruptive factor but everyone was very conscious of the impact of AI, and this was mentioned in many discussions.

2. As editor-in-chief of “Logos”, what are the most intriguing or innovative trends you’ve seen in the industry recently?

I was recently at the Frankfurt Book Fair and all the talk is of AI and its likely effects, and possible disruptive impact, on the publishing industry. Generative AI can create stories and images, and LLMs are being trained on published content from books and other media. There are many questions raised alongside an existential threat to the whole industry.

There is also a lot of interest in the area of sustainability and in *Logos* we are starting to see more papers in this area. Publishers are keen to show they are aware of the climate emergency and are making commitments around the impact of their operations and the target of being carbon neutral across the supply chain. There are solutions using distributed printing, recycling, and minimizing returns and waste books going into landfill.

3. What are the main challenges that publishers are currently facing due to the rise of digital platforms and online retailers such as Amazon?

Online retail offers some advantages as, for example, smaller, independent publishers (and self-published authors) have a route to market, and accessing high street stores is more difficult for them. But readers still appreciate the browsing aspects of physical stores and there is a welcome trend of a revival in independent bookselling.

Publishers remain committed to physical bookstores as an aid to discoverability of new and different books and authors.

Digital platforms that use a subscription business model, for example in the area of audio, pose a possible threat to author and publisher incomes – publishers are keen to negotiate favourable trading terms.

4. How important is training or master's degrees in publishing?

A significant trend is the growth of publishing degrees around the world, at both undergraduate and graduate level. Employers can see the value of the graduates for the industry, and it is good to see the growing professionalization of the industry in many countries. We continue to see strong demand for our programmes at the Oxford International Centre for Publishing.

5. What are the main challenges and opportunities that students and professionals wishing to enter the publishing industry should consider in such a dynamic and ever-changing landscape?

As said earlier, AI offers a significant challenge but it also offers opportunities for streamlining publishing operations. All parts of publishing are keen to maintain the drive around diversity, from authorial voices through to the personnel who work in publishing houses.

6. In your book “Is this a book?”, you address the evolution of content formats. How do you see the future of publishing formats, especially with the growth of digital media?

We presented in this volume the argument for a tripartite model of the book that operates across its information architecture, its position as a carrier for the communication of knowledge and information, and a distinct business model. We wanted to take account of new formats such as the ebook and the audiobook. The latter is seeing strong sales growth alongside the success of podcasting.

The vanilla versions of the ebook and audiobook operate within the same information architecture as the print volume, often within the same copy

sale business model. Focus on the book business model allows us to separate out books from products such as magazines and academic journals and to conclude that fiction online is not a book. Similarly audio-first productions and podcasts are not books, operating with a different information architecture, although they may migrate to publication in book form.

7. What is your view on the future of physical bookshops and how they can adapt to the changes in the market?

Many shops have to offer a wider range of stock, not just books, to survive. But there are encouraging signs after the pandemic that consumers value the experience of shopping in a physical store. The successful shops work on a wider offer to customers including other types of product, such as games and stationery; as well as the holding of author talks and other events; and coffee!