03. Starting a new publisher

Getting going as a new small or academic-led Open Access publisher

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Key issues

Among all the pressing demands associated with getting a new publisher going, a fully developed launch strategy may sometimes not be a top priority. However, if time allows, a fully thought through approach to getting up and running and presenting the work of the press to relevant audiences can help provide some key early momentum.

As we document in our case studies, the impetus for a press' launch is often deeply entangled with a particular set of questions or contexts – perhaps intellectual curiosity, an unmet need, or a funding opportunity, for example. Further thought and planning may, however, be required in order to feed these sometimes idiosyncratic questions or contexts into a more fully formed idea for what a press wants to do and how this can be achieved, in a way that is relevant to the audiences the publisher wants to engage.

A key goal for a new press will be launch of the website that eventually will either directly host, or link to, its Open Access titles. However, even before the launch of a press' website, a new publisher may want to complete a range of preparatory areas of work. A useful timeline is provided in the Cookbook (p. 41), which includes a checklist of activities that need to be performed two years before the official press launch. This timescale provides an indication of the amount of work that can go into a successful launch.

A different perspective is provided by Eileen Joy, from punctum books. For Joy, a crucial first step is a vision: what the new press will want to achieve, how it will communicate this vision to the academic community and who in that community will be prepared to endorse it, coupled with a well designed digital presence:

> I always tell people, the first thing you need is a mission statement. A 'vision statement' is a better way of putting it. 'What is the niche you want to address, and how do you want to address it? What kinds of authors would you like to attract?' Write that up. Step number two, put together a fabulous website. It can't be cheap looking. It can't be WordPress out of the box. It can be WordPress but it needs to be modified by a real web developer. Step number three, get an advisory board put together, of people whose names are well recognised and who support your vision. Number four, before you even announce the press, get between three to five authors and book projects lined up. Get them lined up in advance (Jisc Interviews, Eileen Joy).

The NUP Toolkit lists some helpful resources for new university presses, many of which have wider relevance. This includes advice on how to persuade a university that the new press is a good

investment, how to set goals for the press, and write a mission statement that will outline how the press' business model will be sustained and evaluated (University of Westminster Press's mission statement is given as an example of good practice). It also presents resource and budget requirements and lists costs and overheads that need to be considered in advance, such as staffing, and costs related to platforms and publishing services, both commercial and open source, to disseminate publications. It touches upon the importance of designing good governance structure (UCL Press is provided as an example; we explore governance questions in more detail later in the toolkit). And it discusses setting up workflows, outsourcing and some provisional solutions like using repositories for dissemination.

Case studies

- **Ubiquity Press,** an academic-led press and a publishing platform was launched in 2008 to support one small society-owned journal which could not find a sustainable provider to go online and flip to Open Access. Initially, they were focused on journals and used the OJS system (Jisc Interviews, Brian Hole).

- **punctum books** was launched by a group of academics who saw a need for a "fringe" press that would publish work that was not very popular with universities and mainstream publishers "cultivating the avant-garde, the weird, the misfit, the vagabond" (Jisc Interviews, Eileen Joy).

- **MediaCommons Press** is an offspring of **MediaCommons**, a community network for scholars, students, and practitioners in media studies, promoting exploration of new forms of publishing within the field. MediaCommons was founded in 2006 in collaboration with the **Institute for the Future of the Book**, and was relaunched in 2008 with support from the **National Endowment for the Humanities** and the collaboration of the **NYU Libraries Digital Library Technology Services**. (Jisc Interviews, Kathleen Fitzpatrick).

- **meson press** also grew out of a project – the **Hybrid Publishing Lab**, which was a research lab looking into digital publishing and Open Access, funded by the European Union (Jisc Interviews, Mercedes Bunz).

- **Open Book Publishers**, the largest independent academic-led press in the UK, was launched and run by a group of academics disillusioned with costs of books published by commercial presses (Jisc Interviews, Rupert Gatti).

- **Language Science Press** was established with a subsidy from the **Freie Universität Berlin** and transferred to the **Humboldt Univeristät zu Berlin**, which offered to continue sponsoring the press. Both institutions are linked to one of the founders and directors, Prof. Stefan Müller (Jisc Interviews, Sebastian Nordhoff).

- **Counter press** evolved from the **Critical Legal Thinking** blog after the editors realised that their content was highly popular with readers and could be easily turned into a book format (Jisc Interviews, Stephen Connelly).

Questions to guide good practice

- Have you identified an unmet need, a niche in a publishing environment that your press may fill? Are you participating in a project or community that has content, or could produce content, that could benefit from wider circulation?
- How does the 'start' of the work of the press differ from the press' 'launch'? What is the point at which you plan to publicly communicate that the press is launching?
- Ahead of a public launch, have key resources been put in place and needs met? How will you manage the timeline towards your launch?
- How will momentum be maintained in the weeks and months after launching?

Resources

- NUP Toolkit, Setting up a press
- Cookbook, Chapter 5
- Business Models for OA Books