

04. Brand building and reputation

Connecting with your communities and gaining trust

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Key issues

Many smaller or scholar-led publishers may have mixed feelings about engaging with questions of branding – in many ways, it may feel incompatible with scholarly ideals. Nonetheless, for these publishers, establishing a presence amongst the audiences and communities that it wishes to engage becomes an important priority. Branding, in this sense, can be less about revenue and more about reputation. Reputation can take on a particular importance in Open Access publishing, as in some academic circles there remains considerable scepticism about the quality of Open Access publishers – and this can be an even greater issue for smaller publishers.

Often Open Access presses address these by demonstrating how they are delivering academic texts of the highest quality, including excellent production quality (e.g. books that are professionally typeset, copy edited and proofread, with excellent design) and high standards of peer review. The [OAPEN Toolkit](#) provides additional resources useful for publishers wanting to challenge many myths about Open Access. The [NUP Toolkit](#) also addresses this topic, drawing on OA workshops and discussions with authors. A particular recommendation is that publishers can obtain a competitive advantage over commercial and established publishers by their individualised approach to authors – for example by offering a dedicated service to early career researchers.

However, addressing concerns about quality, and offering added services, may need to be supplemented with broader strategies to communicate to relevant authors and audiences that the press has, or could acquire, the reputation for being a key actor in the relevant scholarly field.

In some cases, this can mean not simply trying to emulate the practices of mainstream publishers but to use the full potential of digital publishing opened up by the Open Access movement. As we explore in our case studies, exploring experimental publishing solutions may help publishers create a highly unique identity. [COPIM's Experimental Publishing Compendium](#) provides an excellent resource in this respect.

In the [Cookbook](#), in the “Creating prestige” section, Nordhoff argues that one strategy is to attract well-known academics to publish with the new press. An endorsement from a senior scholar can confer credibility and prestige. Some prominent scholars are keen to be seen as advocates of Open Access and bibliodiversity. Scholars at later career stages are also often not under the same publishing pressures as their more junior colleagues, which can be potentially used to the advantage of a new press. Likewise, “brand borrowing” (when the press “borrows brand” from an eminent scholar) can be achieved by receiving an endorsement from prestigious associations or societies that might decide to launch a book series with the new press.

Another strategy mentioned by Nordhoff is creating and publishing supporters’ lists to showcase the interest from the academic community, which is also connected with the concept of building a community of followers supporting the press, including early career scholars, who in [Language](#)

[Science Press](#) are engaged in various ways in the editorial process as volunteer proof-readers, reviewers and ultimately authors.

Finally, more generic marketing questions should be considered, including creating a distinctive brand identity and clear visual language that is potentially consistent in different parts of your work.

Case studies

- [Language Science Press](#) undertook a direct outreach campaign, as a way of generating support for the press. As Nordoff describes: “[o]ne of the current press directors (Stefan Müller) started emailing over 100 prominent linguists and asked them for their practical and moral support. Supporters could sign a public webpage. They could also pledge to publish books or found a series” ([Jisc Interviews](#), Nordhoff).
- [Open Humanities Press](#) combined an appeal to the quality of their texts, inserting themselves into a relevant community, and using established scholars as markers of prestige: “Our strategy for building brand awareness is to publish outstanding humanities scholarship, to actively foster and link scholarly communities, and to empower scholars to achieve their intellectual vision. Authors seem to be attracted to OHP firstly because of the calibre of the people involved, and only secondarily because we publish [Open Access]” ([Jisc Interviews](#), Open Humanities Press).
- A number of presses have built their brand around producing unique content and/or content that mainstream publishers reject as too unconventional. Examples include [punctum books](#) or [Counter press](#). This can also extend to employing avant-garde or experimental approaches to publishing, for example, [Hyperrhiz Electric](#), [MediaCommons Press](#), [meson press](#), [Goldsmiths Press](#).

Questions to guide good practice

- What makes your press distinctive? Does your branding express your values and/or the interests of your target audience?
- Have you considered whether using unconventional or experimental approaches to publishing might help communicate the distinctiveness of your press?
- Could you "borrow reputation" from other existing organisations -- academic associations, for example?
- How can other scholars in your academic community support your work, for example, via endorsements, or publishing with you?
- How might you offer your authors a publishing experience that is richer or more personal than offered by mainstream academic publishers? Do you have the capacity to do so, consistently?

Resources

- [NUP Toolkit](#), Attracting authors to your press
- [Cookbook](#), Chapter 3.13
- [OAPEN Toolkit](#), Common myths about open access