

MITE to Study University Press Marketing

The Monterey Institute for Technology and Education is currently studying marketing practices and strategies for university presses. This study has been funded by a generous grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. The principal investigator is Joseph J. Esposito (miteupressproject@gmail.com). Participation by university press personnel and other interested parties (librarians, book wholesalers, online bookstores, etc.) is invited.

Background

It is widely acknowledged that university presses have, as a publishing segment, been struggling. Many presses have been forced to scale back their operations. Most presses have not had the means to enter new areas of activity (e.g., list expansion, digital publishing) to the extent that they would like. The question this study is attempting to explore is, Is there a way to assist the presses to sell more books, which would in turn improve their financial picture and thus help to fund other projects?

Scope

While the questions under examination potentially apply broadly to academic publishers in general, this project, at least in its initial phase, will focus exclusively on university presses with American operations.

The project is narrowly focused on press books; journals, data sets, and other forms of publication are not part of the study, except insofar as the other forms of publishing are explicitly linked to the sale of books (e.g., an author's Web site that provides information that may lead an individual or library to purchase a copy of a press book). While the project is agnostic as to medium (an ebook can be as valuable or more than a printed text, provided that it has gone through the same editorial process), the primary focus is on print books (including print on demand) for the simple reason that this is the primary focus of most university presses. The investigation is not intended to lead to editorial determinations--that is, the aim of selling more press books will not lead to recommendations for the press to publish different kinds of books because they are believed to be "more saleable." The key question is, Can a press sell more copies of books that it already publishes?

All presses sell books in bricks-and-mortar channels and through various online venues (e.g., Amazon). The study will be weighted toward the use of online sales channels to sell printed books, but will include a review of traditional "physical" sales methods and the marketing of electronic formats.

Principal Questions

The study will focus on three primary questions:

- What are the current practices for the presses in the marketing of books? How are these efforts divided between bricks-and-mortar and online bookselling?
- If the presses were to compile a “wish list” for marketing, especially for online marketing, what would be on it?
- What do the presses think about the feasibility and effectiveness of creating a shared online resource to assist in the marketing of books? Such a resource would be, at a minimum, a comprehensive catalogue of press titles, customizable by the individual presses in various ways, including the assertion of the individual presses’ brands, and optimized for effective Web marketing (e.g., search-engine optimization).

Methodology

The study will primarily be conducted as a series of telephone interviews with senior press personnel, supplemented by discussions with other interested parties.

Contact Information

All communications concerning this project should be directed to Joseph Esposito at miteupressproject@gmail.com.