Business models

If a monograph is to be offered as freely downloadable, editing, production and marketing costs must be covered by some means. Costs can be minimised: Open Access means that marketing is cheap since the book will be findable through Web search engines, and if a publisher wishes to keep production costs low there are open source solutions available (see, for example, Willinsky, 2009). Cost recovery can be by means of:

Subsidy

This model is a possibility where a press has a parent organisation willing to subsidise operations. Some university presses enjoy this kind of model (Wasserman, 1997) and scholarly societies may also work in this way if the society is large enough to be able to support some of the costs of dissemination.

Sponsorship

Not many academic publishers are lucky enough to find sponsorship for their publications. It is possible to do so for the occasional volume, though, where a sponsor wishes to support the publication for philanthropic reasons or to increase the reach of a particular message.

Print sales

Many publishers permitting Open Access for the digital version of books are earning the revenue on the book from print sales. A number of university presses have already begun operating this business model, apparently successfully, and some commercial publishers are also experimenting with it. Sales of the hard copy can support a book’s production and editing costs, especially with the use of modern POD (print-on-demand) technology. Book publishers no longer have to include substantial inventory in their calculations, because there is no need anymore for sizeable print runs and the concomitant warehousing of the copies waiting to be sold. Remaindering is old hat - part of a past that required substantial forward investment in production and the application of the art of prophesy by publishing editors. Copies can be printed and bound on demand and bookshops are rapidly installing machines that provide this service so printing and distribution of single copies it does not even have to be an overhead for publishers. See these university press case studies and a commercial publisher case study and examples of how some presses make this model work.
Licensing Open Access books

Monographs that are to be offered free to download in digital form must have a licence to control how they can be used. A publisher needs a licence to cover terms of use (including copying and further distribution) and re-use (whether in full or in part). The most convenient way to do this is to select a Creative Commons licence. There is a range of these and there will be one to suit the needs of publisher and author in every instance.

References and further reading


