

Better Stories, Better Sustainability:

How Authentic Storytelling Can Lead University Presses into the Future

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Abstract

The university press, responsible for credentialing and disseminating knowledge from the university out into the world, faces twenty-first-century challenges that build on the strains that began with the decline of the monograph. Encountering financial pressure, new competition, and the uncertainty of the multimodal digital space and era of fake news, university presses have been forced to take on projects outside their original mission to survive. But they can do better. Through careful examination of their strengths and values, which are often rooted in the Humanities, university presses can take back their stories and enter this difficult marketplace with confidence about who they are and what they hope to achieve. Authenticity and story ownership will allow presses to thrive in this complex, multi-stakeholder environment as they tread the balance between art and business. The strategies and themes explored herewith are applicable to any organization.

Introduction

Established as a charity or department of a university, university presses are silent artists. Their focus is on credentialing new scholars and disseminating knowledge from the university to the world. In contrast to commercial publishers, they pride themselves on their prioritization of quality scholarly

work over financial gain, and they are judged on the character of their content above all else, letting their publications speak for themselves (Dougherty 2017, 15). In fact, the nonprofit status of many university presses and the subsidies drawn from their home universities have meant that business has never had to be at the forefront of how university presses operate.

But the question of how to balance mission and profitability has jeopardized university presses and the art they practice. The decline of the monograph, beginning in the 1970s (Thompson 2005, 93), forced presses to reevaluate their publishing strategies—something they have never quite been able to recover from. Despite best efforts, even renowned presses are closing, like Dartmouth (Office of Communications 2018), or facing the loss of university monetary support, like Stanford (Scott 2019). The past thirty years have seen the consolidation of academic publishing (Thompson 2005, 121), but this declining market, especially in the humanities (Nielsen 2015), faces even more stressors in the digital space. To survive, presses have become protectionist, placing profitability over mission.

A reexamination of a press's mission and values can allow a press to be intentional about its content, process, and audience. Owning their process and the authorship of their content, while exercising a sensitivity to the constraints and possibilities of a modern multi-stakeholder digital publishing environment, allows for better, more sustainable positioning in this volatile market. By effectively weaving this authenticity into their organizational story and crafting a strong, positive narrative, university presses can move from worrying about merely surviving to focusing on thriving in the twenty-first century as both businesses and artists.

Press Context

A Brief History

Founded on the principle of disseminating university knowledge, presses found their beginnings in the Humanities, especially Literature, the first subject in the Humanities. Amid decreasing enrollment and funding, the Humanities have struggled in recent years—and presses alongside them—but the Humanities remain a key discipline, teaching us empathy, critical thinking, and vision. It is the connection to vision and values that can give presses a renewed strength.

Today, the Association of University Presses (AUP) boasts 140 members across the globe, 110 of which are fully accredited presses affiliated with a university. This 110 can be divided into three main groups. The United

Kingdom-based university presses Oxford University Press and Cambridge University Press are in a league of their own, with scale and resources American university presses will likely never reach. The “Big Ten” comprise the largest United States-based university presses (Johns Hopkins University Press, University of California Press, University of Chicago Press, New York University Press, Columbia University Press, MIT Press, University of Pennsylvania Press, Princeton University Press, Harvard University Press, and Yale University Press). These presses, although they maintain a strong connection to their universities, are not subsidized by the universities in any way. They are profitable to the point of being self-sustaining—if only just. The remaining presses receive university support, allowing them to operate at a loss. Theoretically, this loss means they can publish more mission-driven work. Often, these university presses are regionally-based, telling not only the story of their universities, but also of their states, regions, and cultures.

Current Market Dynamics

Since the 1970s, university presses have had to manage the decline of the monograph, which has historically been university presses’ primary revenue stream. Through strategic list-building, presses have come up with two main ways to combat the monograph’s decline: textbooks and trade books.

“List-building” first emerged as a term in the 1980s (Thompson 2005, 58) referring to acquisitions editors taking a more active role in crafting their discipline lists. Editors began to question how broad or specialized a list should be now that libraries, in response to budget constraints and larger spending in information technology (Thompson 2005, 98-99), were no longer purchasing monographs in the same way. Widening the book format that a press could publish seemed like an easy and responsible way to hedge against risk.

Compared to the monograph, textbooks seem a much more reliable and predictable revenue model. With lower prices coupled with the fact that students buy textbooks every year (especially in large survey courses), a textbook can sell much more volume and have a higher net profit margin of 15-20% versus the more typical 5-10% of a commercial trade title (Thompson 2005, 62).

Still, the allure of trade books has long attracted publishers across the publishing industry—university presses are no exception. However, by their nature, trade books carry more risk than academic publishing. A trade publisher will often rely on the sales of a single title to carry the entire list (Thompson 2005, 146-148). Furthermore, trade books function on the notion of selling

to the general (or non-scholarly) reader. This vague and amorphous reader is difficult to market and sell to; in fact, the general reader may be nothing but an illusive industry myth.

Shrinking enrollments in the Humanities and Social Sciences and the rise of professional schools also contribute to these list shifts (Dougherty 2017, 5). PubTrack data shows that between 2011 and 2014, English experienced a 37.5% drop in discipline performance with the market size dropping from \$330,952,430 to \$206,739,177 (Nielsen 2015). This trend is consistent across both “Big 5” publishers (Penguin Random House, Hachette, HarperCollins, Macmillan, and Simon & Schuster) and university presses in this space. This hits university presses especially hard because many were founded in the Humanities, particularly Literature (Dougherty 2017, 56).

Over time, a schism has formed between university presses’ original Humanities values and the need to stay afloat. Publishing leadership wrestles with the question: How do we balance our mission as a scholarly entity with the need to be profitable?

Content and Audience

To consider a solution for university presses—both in terms of performance and organizational storytelling—it is important to understand the book-making process. This process is upheld by two central pillars: content and audience.

Composition: Content is King

While a book is a tangible object, what university presses—and indeed all publishers—really trade in are ideas. Never has this been felt so acutely as in the twenty-first century, where the book takes many formats, from audiobook to ebook to multimodal text. Regardless of medium, what makes a book sell is its content.

The problem is that it is not always immediately evident what makes good content. It is subjective. This is what has led publishers to adopt a “frog model” wherein they sign many titles and hope that a few will make it and pull in sales. Typically, about 20% of the titles on a given list will pay for the remaining 80% (Thompson 2005, 44). Even if an acquisitions editor feels confident a title will be in that 20%, it is very difficult to estimate exactly *how* well that title might do. Because scholarly publishing relies on a low-volume/high-price model with some monographs around the \$95 mark (Thompson 2005, 223), content commissioning becomes crucial—the material has to merit the price tag.

The changed market has forced acquisitions editors to rethink how content fits into their portfolios. The University of Pennsylvania Press operates within a ranking system to show how important a title is to the list (Eric Halpern, pers. comm., April 18, 2019). Greg Britton, Editorial Director at Johns Hopkins University Press, asserts that presses are narrowing their focus towards niches within the discipline in order to be “the leading press in the field... if we’re not leading in the field, we don’t want to be in it” (Greg Britton, pers. comm., April 5, 2019). It is a technique that has worked well for Hopkins, which dominates in spaces like *History of Medicine*.

Content is integral to a press’ identity because it makes up their symbolic capital. It is the scaffolding of a press’ identity and must be managed very carefully. A manuscript rejection might occur not because the content itself lacks academic merit but because “publishing it would be like putting the wrong character into a novel, a figure who might throw the whole thing off balance or radically change it” (Calasso and Dixon 2016, 11). Like a mismatched stroke of color in a painting, a wrong book can affect the whole list. Commissioning is a process where one acceptance affects another. For lists to be as strong as they can be, they must be representative of a press’ strengths and values.

Audience: Stakeholders in a Book’s Life

In the post-monograph world, university presses are faced with an increasingly multi-sided marketplace and a myriad of external stakeholders, partially due to a broadening audience: authors, faculty, librarians, students, university staff, and the ever-elusive “general reader.”

The textbook requires publishers to consult students, a constituency who, with the internet and the advance of the rental model, have more agency than ever before (Alanya Harter, pers. comm., April 8, 2019). Students take to Amazon, Chegg, and publishers’ own social media pages to express their frustrations about the rising prices of textbooks and other course materials. Most potently, students speak with their wallets—many simply don’t buy their course books (much to an instructor’s chagrin). University presses with burgeoning textbooks on their lists have to ask the question: How do we tell students these books are worth buying? Securing a book as a required text (rather than optional reading) is a great start, but this is something that publishers cannot greatly control.

Just like students and their textbooks, the “general reader” may not pay attention to a trade book’s publisher, but that does not mean they do not engage; they will seek more of an author’s content if they resonate with the author’s

work. The problem is that the general reader is amorphous and difficult to market to, especially from a list-based approach (Thompson 2005, 125-133). Rather than trying to contort to please the fickleness of the undefinable general reader, a press may be better off knowing and owning who *they* are regardless of who a general reader may be.

University presses are balancing a complex audience arena. When press identity has traditionally been established through content and process, how do presses maintain consistency about who they are across this expanded stakeholder landscape?

Balancing Market and Mission

The 1970s crisis of the monograph caused the prioritization of mission to erode in favor of economics. Though necessary, the response to the crisis compromised university presses' integrities, which has affected how their organizational stories are perceived by authors and readers. Rather than list triaging to stop the dollar hemorrhaging, university presses can find a healthy balance between market and mission, beginning with storytelling and authenticity.

Organizational Story

What makes a good organizational story? The answer lies at the birthplace of most presses: Literature. As the first Humanities discipline, Literature teaches its students about narrative, imagery, composition, and empathy. Written or oral story illuminates the values of the society from which it originates. However, the greatest teaching of "good story" is connection. A successful story opens a dialogue between writer and reader—or, in the case of an organization, between the organization and its stakeholders.

According to Bolman and Deal (2017, 254), the effects of a strong organizational story include "sparking action, communicating who you are, communicating who the company is, transmitting values, fostering collaboration, taming the grapevine, sharing knowledge, and leading people into the future." To produce these effects, attention must be paid to narrative. Narrative grounds and orients a reader, providing a space for a reader to step into and creating an empathy associated with Literature. "Likability" has been identified as one of the steps and defining factors of persuasion (Cialdini 2001, 76). Empathy and likability cultivated by story are among the most powerful tools to define an organization's sense of self and establish connection and trust. In the absence of a strong narrative, stakeholders become unsure who an organization is and what it hopes to achieve.

Building on empathy and likeability, a press (or other organization) should focus on positive storytelling. This is not to say a press cannot acknowledge challenges, but it should focus on what has gone well in the organization and the possibility of the future for the organization and the industry. The way an organization talks about itself shapes that organization's behavior; positive stories about the future create excitement, build trust and understanding, and generate ideas (Krattenmaker 2001, 5-6). The way a press weaves its story affects its own future in the same way that an author's attention to their work molds it into what a reader sees on the shelf.

Authenticity and Vulnerability

To establish empathy, likeability, and trust in an organization, unrelenting authenticity must be established. An authentic leader is aware of their own values, strengths, and limitations; they show up exactly as they are, no matter the setting, professional or otherwise (Kruse 2013). Used appropriately, authentic leadership builds trusting relationships, creates organizational integrity, and a cultural norm of curiosity (Lencioni 2002). What underpins authenticity is something perhaps even more difficult to achieve: vulnerability.

Vulnerability can be defined as “uncertainty, risk and emotional exposure” (Brown 2017, 274). Vulnerability is well-known by those in creative fields; creativity and innovation are born out of vulnerability. Vulnerability holds a curious tension, however: while the creative process can be insular, almost selfish, the act of sharing work is a gift, allowing others to connect with both the work and the author. In other words, vulnerability shows the audience that they are not alone (Sakasegawa 2019).

Connection is a function of vulnerability; we become more trusting and united through experiencing the truest versions of ourselves and our experiences. High self-awareness and self-concept must be manifested by individuals. Those who do are in a unique position to lead an organization in a more positive way. Authentic leaders are set apart by taking the role not out of selfish ambition, but rather as a way of promoting a goal they care about deeply (Shamir and Eilam 2005, 397). This notion can be applied to organizations: a successful organization executes its mission as a function of its authenticity.

Johns Hopkins University Press is an excellent example. It was founded in 1878 as the first United States university press. The university itself was built on the German model as a research institution with the press as an extension of itself, trying to garner the greatest reach for scholars (Greg Britton, pers. comm., April 5, 2019). Unlike many publishers, Hopkins has embraced digital

media as an extension of their purpose. They created a seamless process where everything is published both in print and digitally, pioneering Project MUSE, a digital aggregator for libraries and a dominant player in that market. The platform creates collaboration between 250+ university presses and libraries in a digital space; the platform itself is embedded in Hopkins' mission of achieving greater reach. In fact, Project MUSE feeds them data which allows them to better analyze their lists, acquisitions, and branding. It is an authentic step for them to take, and by taking it, they reinforce their organizational story, crafting an image of a sophisticated global publisher committed to moving scholarship as far out into the world as possible.

Strengths and Values

Authenticity allows leaders and organizations to gain clarity about their values, getting to the heart of their true selves (Shamir and Eilam 2005, 396)—that is, to develop an awareness and understanding of their organizations' strengths and values. This awareness is particularly important when navigating a difficult climate and other challenges. In contrast to Johns Hopkins University Press, small regional presses, such as the University of Missouri Press or the University Press of Colorado, are subject to the same difficulties as their larger press counterparts but without the same resources; they have had to learn how to do more with less. How does a press maintain a clarity of values in light of this constraint? Perhaps the answer lies further south than Hopkins' Baltimore.

The University Press of Mississippi is unique even amongst regional presses because it is the truest consortium (Steven Yates, pers. comm., May 1, 2019). Founded in the 1970s, the press was a joint venture staked by eight universities in the state. Based on enrollment, each of these universities paid (and continues to pay now) a set contribution to the press' annual operating costs. From birth, the press was a deliberately collaborative effort, in part because Mississippi is a small state with scarce resources. Their mission was two-fold: to contribute to the scholarly publishing conversation, especially by recruiting top academics, and to tell the story of Mississippi as a state.

The second piece of their mission has become a key strength and fuels their story as a press. From the beginning, they valued authenticity, not wanting to let a New York publisher tell the state story. As a southern state, Mississippi has its fair share of grave historical sins, and the press wanted to grapple with that as only a local publisher could. This has led to a strong list in Black Folklore, the Civil Rights Movement, and African American Literature as the press explores

questions of “who was left out, who was left behind and who was lynched” (Steven Yates, pers. comm., May 1, 2019).

Additionally, Mississippi has developed a world-renowned comics list, which grew organically from the press’ focus on the Humanities. The list started with Charlie Brown and blossomed to include titles like *Of Comics and Men*, a French translation covering the entire American comics industry. The press recognized they were developing something strong under editor Walter Biggins, so when he left, they continued to develop this list not only because it sold but because it was representative of where the press came from and what it could be.

With consistent sales in their key lists, the University Press of Mississippi places a strong value on the people and culture it represents. It is their honesty and commitment that shines through across their lists: From a collection of Eudora Welty’s photographs to books on Mississippi’s renowned blues festivals, the press tells the story of who they are through its publications. That is why comic scholars and southern historians flock to them, further perpetuating their organizational story. By understanding and leveraging who they are, the University Press of Mississippi has become known for its areas of strength.

Framing and Narrative

Framing aids in an organization’s transformation and narrative. Lee Bolman and Terrance Deal in *Reframing Organizations* (2017, 10) explain, “A frame is a mental model—a set of ideas and assumptions—that you carry in your head to help you understand and negotiate a particular territory. A good frame makes it easier to know what you are up against and, ultimately, what you can do about it.”

Princeton University Press, unlike Hopkins, which embraced the digital space from the get-go, or Mississippi, which held its ground, actively grappled with the changing industry dynamics of ebooks and digital products. As a primarily Humanities publisher, Princeton struggled to adapt to shrinking enrollments and changes within the disciplines. It considered how it might positively reframe and, taking a cue from its home university, the press began to integrate emerging fields within its already established lists, such as Graphic Design within the Art and Art History fields (Dougherty 2017, 25). This collaborative approach reinforced its identity as an innovative scholarly press as it became known for work in this new sub-discipline within the Arts.

Princeton also approached the trade book through a new lens. Instead of seeking out titles “on a particular important topic written by an authority,”

Princeton editors sought out potential trade titles that “draw a drop of emotion from readers.” Shiller’s economics trade title *Irrational Exuberance* did exactly this by drawing on real questions the public had surrounding the stability of the stock market in the early 2000s. In this way, Princeton was able to carve out a trade list that made sense for them, one where they didn’t feel like they were veering far from their original mission of “enrich[ing] the global conversation” (Dougherty 2017, 37).

Through reframing and acknowledging the failures of many post-monograph era responses, university presses will be able to re-envision their own possibility and rise to the challenge of authentic list building in the twenty-first century.

Ethics and Authorship

The university press world is a cyclical industry, dependent on stakeholder feedback. Crafting an authentic organizational story within this circle raises questions about ownership. Presses are, after all, in the business of ideas. More than a physical product, ideas and creative material are highly sensitive and highly personal. When so many people work on a manuscript, who really owns it? A press’ identity is dependent on the books it produces, but is that book property that the press can use freely for its own story? How can a press use a book to benefit all parties—namely, the author and the press?

Messaging and Interdependence

Princeton University Press Director Christie Henry asserts that, “As books can’t be marketed without author’s names, it is hard to decouple authors from press promotions initiatives” (Christie Henry, pers. comm., April 18, 2019). As such, what emerges is a highly interdependent relationship, where the press and the author lean on each other on the climb to success. Working with respected authors increases a press’ symbolic capital; likewise, an author can improve their reputation by publishing with a reputable press (Thompson 2005, 71). Novelist, professor, and textbook author Michael Kardos (pers. comm., April 22, 2019) comments, “That’s certainly one way I evaluate a press: by seeing whom they publish.”

Material and Ownership

If material is not the exclusive property of the artist, or in the case of the author or researcher, whose is it? Erwin Glikes (2001, 52), in his essay “The Editor

in the Marketplace,” has a very simple answer: The manuscript belongs to the acquisitions editor, not only because the editor found the manuscript and saw potential in it, but also because they are the advocate for that manuscript and that author. While the book-making process is touched by many people, it is the acquisitions editor who builds “a house within a house” (Glikes 2001, 51), creating that initial enthusiasm that then ripples out to the discipline team, the larger organization, and even the world. In this way, the manuscript belongs to everyone.

Author and Press Values Alignment

When an author’s work reflects the press’ mission and values, they can integrate into a press’ organizational story exceptionally well. Take the example of Princeton University Press and Albert Einstein. *The Meaning of Relativity*, published in 1922, put Princeton University Press on the map when it was less than twenty years old (Dougherty and Bertrand 2016). Since then, the press has established a whole suite of titles concerning Einstein. These titles are not confined to Physics but also represent Einstein as a person, both scientist and humanist. The titles include a collection of love letters, books on his politics, a modern English translation of five critical papers he published in his “miraculous year” of 1905, and *The Ultimate Quotable Einstein*. Princeton embraces Einstein not only for his greatness but also because he and his work represent much of what the press believes. His scholarship brought fields together in a liberal tradition just as the press strives to create “an ongoing conversation between those two fields [the Arts and Sciences] in the form of books, which uniquely serve to synthesize, connect, and nurture cross-disciplinary discourse” (Dougherty and Bertrand 2016). Princeton honors Einstein in an authentic way, paying tribute to their core values.

Authors are part of a press’s story, just as presses are part of an author’s story. Presses often highlight award-winning authors on their websites, absorbing them into their identity. Though the ownership of a manuscript is contested—author, acquisitions editor, publisher, or perhaps no one at all—it is clear that where books and presses align, they can become powerful advocates for each other.

Author Care and Inspiring Evangelists

The press-author relationship can be symbiotic, where their joint ownership over the manuscript supports both parties, reinforcing one another’s credibility. Senior Editor at the University of California Press Maura Roessner explains,

“Authors and publishers often seek each other out because their ‘brands’ are mutually enforcing.” The press “often says” that they publish “authors,” not just “books,” and likewise, authors say that they are not just an author, but a *University of California* author. (Maura Roessner, pers. comm., April 24, 2019). This is a positive, cyclical relationship between press and author, balanced fundamentally on author care.

Author care is how a publisher treats an author, making them feel like a valuable part of their list. Even authors with lower revenue titles require attention because all authors can become strong advocates for their press within their disciplines. Author treatment greatly affects a press’ image and future commissions. “While smaller presses can have marketing issues,” explains Professor Samuel Cohen, “my bias against the very big presses outweighs it, because my sense is that with some, you’re not getting enough development, copyediting and other kinds of attention” (Samuel Cohen, pers. comm., May 7, 2019). Moreover, how a press supports its authors, large and small, is a tangible reflection of its organizational values.

Supporting Key Authors

At the Association of Writers and Writing Programs (AWP) in 2016, Professor Janet Burroway was vocal about wanting to move her book, *Imaginative Writing* (the leading Creative Writing textbook), to a university press for a more supportive environment than what she received at Pearson. Many authors sought better author care after Pearson cut 4,000 employees, including its entire English team (which is now being outsourced to a single editor at Ohlinger) in 2016 (Cavanagh 2016). Burroway believed in the value of her textbook, which suggested that “teaching writing is teaching failing,” something intrinsic to a student’s learnings; she sought a publisher that agreed, believing the answer was a university press (Janet Burroway, pers. comm., March 15, 2019).

In 2018, Burroway moved to the University of Chicago Press and gained access to a dozen-strong team, from publicists to financial planners. An off-site launch party at AWP formally announced the book to the community and publicly cemented the partnership between Professor Burroway and the press. Since then, Burroway has become an evangelist for Chicago UP, speaking out about her positive experience to her colleagues and students. With this new wave of support and excitement, it seems likely *Imaginative Writing* will continue to dominate the market, lending Chicago UP credibility in Creative Writing, building on its strong list in Literature and Literary Criticism.

Engaging authors like this can be a game-changing resource for presses. But not every author is a big name like Burroway.

Supporting Smaller Authors

How do presses support authors with smaller titles and make them feel like they are valued? A good example might be James Turner's *Philology: The Forgotten Origins of the Modern Humanities*, published at Princeton University Press. Recondite in subject matter, Turner's manuscript was initially rejected by several editors at the press. To commission it, Acquisitions Editor Peter Dougherty (Peter Dougherty, pers. comm., May 7, 2019) developed an editorial strategy tailored specifically to the manuscript; he "came up with an effective title and subtitle, commissioned a strong design, priced it well, and guided it towards reviewers who found its argument compelling." The result was not only strong reviews, but sales. Care, a fundamental press value, paid off for Turner. However, for regional presses like the University of Colorado Press, where the marketing department is two people strong, this carefully developed editorial strategy may seem like a leap (Beth Svinarich, pers. comm., May 12, 2019). Perhaps embracing the digital age makes sense.

Digital Storytelling

Organizational storytelling has moved into the digital arena, a great space to engage with all different elements of the publishing community. Social media has effectively replaced the traditional campus call and bookstore work in the acquisitions process. It is much harder to find people on campus—especially adjuncts, who often teach at multiple universities—and harder to justify the costs associated with the in-person sales call.

Twitter (now X) has ironically become one of the most bookish places on the internet. Despite its character limit per tweet, the platform is home to an active community of writers, editors, and agents. Academics flock to the platform as well, particularly those in Humanities fields like Literary Criticism, Children's Literature, and Pop Culture. (Although the recent acquisition of Twitter by Elon Musk has forced many academics to leave and try out other tools, like Mastodon.) Editors can analyze trends in Twitter conversations and even join them to acquire manuscripts. In this way, social media allows both editors and presses to show themselves as active, attentive, and curious about what is happening in the field. If a press' mission is rooted in the dissemination of knowledge and service to the discipline, social media is a cost-effective

way to tap into those values and show commitment to the larger academic conversation.

The University Press of Mississippi's publicist Courtney McCreary recounts how, though she used to only meet with the Book Editor at *The New York Times* and similar publications when the press catalog came through, she now meets with the Social Media Manager as well. "The book review sections are physically shrinking," McCreary (Courtney McCreary, pers. comm., May 2, 2019) explains. "You have to be thinking smarter. Where are people still reading? Where are people getting their information? If you compare *The New York Times* Twitter feed against the book review section, their Twitter feed actually has a lot of information on books." Not only does Twitter have more information; it also provides a space for interaction where a print newspaper cannot. Readers can immediately comment and share—not always in a positive way. As such, publishers must take care of how they monitor these responses, for they, too, play into a press' character.

Book identities—which cumulatively compose press identities—are ripe for social media, especially where the title may not be that high on the discipline list. Social media is an often free or inexpensive alternative to expensive print publicity that achieves trackable reach (Courtney McCreary, pers. comm., May 2, 2019). In 2017, Cambridge University Press used social media to successfully bolster Jared Rubin's *Rules, Religion and Riches: Why the West Got Rich and the Middle East Did Not* (Ellena Moriarty, pers. comm., May 13, 2019). To promote the book, the press utilized both their channels and Rubin's channels, cross-pollinating across the two. Whenever a rave review came in, Rubin tweeted it while tagging key stakeholders in the discipline. This created over 200,000 impressions; the concurrent paid Facebook campaign had a reach of 6,414 and 393 engagements (Ellena Moriarty, pers. comm., May 13, 2019). Similarly, the press created a special hashtag (#DoingCapitalism) for Bill Janeway's *Doing Capitalism in the Innovation Economy*, which helped it reach trending status within the discipline (Ellena Moriarty, pers. comm., May 13, 2019). Links, tags, and hashtags are crucial, allowing both title and press to ripple out to wider communities.

Effective storytelling on social media creates a connection digitally, not unlike the connection forged through vulnerability and authenticity. Online publishers are building a kind of "universal library [where] no book will be an island" (Calasso and Dixon 2016, 47). Indeed, if social media is where people are finding information, stumbling across one book might lead them to another. Acknowledging this connection allows presses to build a network of

values between the books they publish and how those titles fit into the larger discipline story.

Partnership

In this multi-stakeholder landscape, there are other opportunities for collaboration beyond author-press relationships that can further amplify how a press establishes its identity within the scholarly world. When organizations are open and vulnerable to partnership, they can create powerful bonds for enduring industry challenges.

Working with AUP and Home Universities

The 1920s saw a series of dinners emerge after the National Association of Book Publishers meeting. During these dinners, publishers discussed the challenges and opportunities facing presses. This morphed into the Association of American University Presses in 1937 (which has been renamed as the Association of University Presses, or the AUP). Since then, the AUP has served as an advocate for the presses it represents, especially in the latter half of the twentieth century when universities saw an increasing need to corporatize for fear of losing money and libraries began asking for free access to materials.

Alex Holzman (pers. comm., April 18, 2019), former President of AUP, defined the role of the Association as “to reinforce in any way necessary the central role of the university press to scholarship.” This language—*any way necessary*—may sound abrasive, but it is reflective of the severe combative nature publishing has taken to survive. When asked what AUP ought to do in the current moment, Holzman replied that they should “represent university presses to all stakeholders in the dissemination of scholarship (faculty, librarians, students, government and administrators)” and “show how benefiting constituents benefits society as a whole with the acknowledgment that the university press community is a kind of Commons.”

In this spirit, AUP provides a space for collaboration, facilitating relationships between the presses it represents, the presses and the public, and the presses and their home universities. By working closely with their home university, presses can strengthen the bond that brought them into the world and get closer to their mission. Presses work across the university, talking to librarians, administration, and faculty, who often miss out on the bigger picture because of being siloed in their departments. If presses can truly work closely with their home institution—beyond a syndicate or faculty board approving

titles—they will be much stronger for it, crafting a unified and authentic image of the press and university for the world.

Inter-Press Partnership

Presses have an opportunity for partnerships that commercial publishers do not: each other. As Holzman (pers. comm., April 18, 2019) earlier mentioned, “the university press community is a kind of Commons.” Common pool resources are those that are naturally available without real boundaries, but once someone takes some of the resources, there are less for others (Ostrom 2015, 30). It is this story of scarcity that presses have been living with and projecting for decades, but avenues for partnership can reframe the narrative and create an environment where presses are both idiosyncratic and highly collaborative.

Some stakeholders in the press world describe a collaborative environment where editors phone up editors from different houses for help. The University Press of Mississippi’s Courtney McCreary recounts being a new publicist and meeting fellow young female publicists at a conference, sharing strategy with each other, though they were from the University of Texas Press and Johns Hopkins University Press. Sharing knowledge bolsters the success of both the organization and the greater network (Crutchfield and Grant 2012, 147). Additionally, it establishes a press as helpful, caring, and collaborative in character—all key qualities that attract authors.

Presses can take a cue from the metaphor in Jeanette Winterson’s meta-literary novel *Lighthousekeeping* (2004): “Every light was a story, and the flashes themselves were stories going out over the waves, as markers and guides in comfort and warning.” By sharing experiences, presses can help each other navigate both the difficulties and the triumphs, building a collective industry voice. Since the 1970s, presses have been focused on a problem-solving mindset, but drawing on each other’s individual strengths, values, and resources may allow presses to wade through the challenges of the digital age together in partnership rather than fighting to stay afloat.

Conclusion

Modern university presses are faced with a very difficult and complex landscape. In the face of globalization, the digital expanse, and a declining market, university presses have defaulted to solutions like expanding into trade or picking up the textbooks dropped by commercial publishers. These problem-oriented solutions may not be sustainable in the long-term. Instead, university

presses could benefit from pausing to truly examine the current publishing landscape, including its stresses and challenges, and how they fit within it.

Large British presses, blessed with scale and resources, have traditionally had the tools to navigate the transitions in the industry and the academy. But not all university presses have been as lucky with available resources and institutional support. Despite their constraints, smaller university presses and regional university presses have seen success in holding fast to their missions by focusing intently on their strengths, as evidenced by their compact and focused title lists. These presses have built up specialized knowledge in key disciplines and are determined to tell the story of the regions and people they represent; their identities and integrity are evidenced through what they publish, how they engage with stakeholders, and how they market themselves. Some smaller presses have embraced the digital space, particularly social media, to communicate their commitment to the discipline and their authors. Others have begun to reach out to sister presses, embracing a network mindset in which they can still be their authentic selves.

Regardless of resources or current tactics, university presses have a choice to make. They can focus on survival strategies in these demanding, digital times. Or they can pause to examine their mission and values, their Humanities origins, and the best way to tell an authentic story about who they are to their authors, readers, and the world. If publishing is an art, it is a press' integrity, molded through the balance of mission and business, that will allow the press to tell its very best, most authentic stories.

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