

SEMI-FORMAL MONDAY EVENING SESSION

New Directions for STM Publishers

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ABSTRACT

A Publishing Editor with a leading scientific publisher describes the key directions and aims of Scientific, Technical & Medical (STM) publishers in the electronic age, with particular reference to market research within the product area he manages, i.e. computer communications.

Introduction

Many businesses are coming to realize that putting customers first, rather than products, in their strategies and their operations, makes sound commercial sense. For publishers this is an important step as, while leading individuals in subject areas within STM publishing may be well known, often readers and end-users are not even identified (this applies in particular to books and also, to a lesser extent, to journals). Therefore, the need to achieve a good marketing orientation has become ever more crucial over the last decade.

The ideal business defines its market clearly, researches it and then delivers appropriate products and services, although, of course, this is rarely as easy as it sounds. One of the main difficulties to overcome is that businesses usually start from a position based on their previous experience with established products - there is rarely a fresh slate. It would be foolish to simply launch a new venture without building on the strengths of the current business.

One of the most crucial aspects these days is the need to establish relations with customers and build on those (obtaining a new customer can be six times as expensive as keeping an existing one). Hence the term 'relationship marketing' has become popular in commercial environments.

Publishing companies are beginning to take this to heart and the findings of a recent EU report on electronic publishing, recommending that STM publishers, in particular, seek to build loyal end-user groups around their key 'brands,' such as successful journals, came as no real surprise to many within this market. What is more, the new electronic delivery methods provide new ways in which to build better ongoing relationships. Significantly these can be developed for the benefit of both readers and authors alike, the two groups overlapping.

Recently, at Elsevier Science in Amsterdam, a placement student, Rosemary Stockdale, from the BA Publishing Studies course at The Robert Gordon University in Aberdeen, Scotland has, been assisting with market research interviews. These have been aimed at the computer communications research community and related practitioners from various industries, especially the more information-intensive ones. The aim of this market research has been to ascertain precisely how these individuals would like to see a model for electronic delivery of relevant information enriched. The scope of information provision has extended from research

papers to even include possible elements of business information. The difficulty comes in analyzing differing needs and developing integrated product ideas across this subject area.

Two examples are Professor X and Communications Manager Y.

Professor X is convinced that he needs to read less, not more. He would like to select only the key 20 papers in his field and, in particular, not any by Professor Z, whose work he considers to have little value or relevance to him. His key need is to facilitate the search for the strictly relevant information he wants. He does not want "noise".

In contrast to this, Communications Manager Y needs to have a general awareness of trends affecting future investments in communications software. He is also interested broadly in new technological innovations. He wants to browse interesting information and news.

In the parallel field of information security, a high level of success was achieved with the journal *Computers & Security* in integrating tertiary information, such as news and analysis with primary research information. This success depended, however, on a new breed of computer security managers interested in technical issues and applications research. It could be difficult to repeat. However, tailoring packages of information to different sectors of the area may be less relevant in the electronic age if the communication needs of these researchers and practitioners are neglected. The need to develop a good dialogue between researchers and industrial applications people may, in the end, be critical.

The work of Igor Ansoff, and especially his product market matrix, teaches us to be wary of creating new products for new markets. Therefore, the electronic product needs to be developed mainly keeping in mind the researchers who currently obtain their paper journals via their libraries. The extended market into the further reaches of industry may be a bonus, allowing as it does the opportunity to identify some new sources of revenue which could be significant from a commercial viewpoint. It should not, however, be the main focus.

A model of potential electronic services is currently under discussion with interviewees. In our experience, leaving the agenda entirely open for discussion can be counter-productive and cause confusion. It is better to try to elaborate on and enrich a model, and it is particularly important for interviewees to criticize features they feel would not be useful.

In conclusion, the key questions arising in this specific context are:

- What are the advantages of desktop delivery of services and what facilities would be most useful in this area?
- How should services differ for researchers as authors and as readers, respectively?
- How best can Elsevier Science serve both the computer communications and also the electronic publishing research communities to mutual benefit?

I would particularly welcome e-mail responses from prospective users and librarians.

Paul Evans has worked for Elsevier Science and Reed Business Publishing and currently holds the position of Senior Product Manager for computer communications with Elsevier, based in Amsterdam. In recent years he was, for a time, course leader responsible for BA Publishing Studies course at the Robert Gordon University in Aberdeen, Scotland.