

Digital Publishing and Open Access for Social Science Research Dissemination: A Case Study

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INTRODUCTION

This case study focuses on the development of a new publishing strategy for a large social science research council in South Africa, the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), and is presented as a practical example of the implementation of a parallel electronic Open Access and print publishing programme in an African research institute.

THE HSRC

The Human Sciences Research Council is South Africa's statutory agency dedicated to the social sciences. It is the largest social science research organisation in Africa and plays a leading role in the fourteen SADC countries and elsewhere in Africa. It currently employs around 150 full-time researchers in 10 research programmes. The HSRC undertakes both contract and grant-aided research for a range of users, including:

- Government departments at national, regional and local level;
- National and international funding agencies; and
- The private sector and universities.

At the commencement of the consultancy intervention, the HSRC had appointed a new President (later renamed CEO), the prominent sociologist, Mark Orkin, with a brief to continue and complete the process of transforming the organisation from its Apartheid past. This was an uncomfortable legacy, as the HSRC was perceived during the Apartheid years to have all too often been a mouthpiece of the Apartheid government. Transformation, therefore, required not just a change in the demographics of the organisation, but of its image and its research integrity. One of the questions this paper will address is the contribution made by a renewed publishing programme to the success of this transformation exercise.

As a result of financial constraints in the higher education section and of the demands of neo-liberal market approaches being promoted in higher education policy in South Africa (Kraak

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2000; Subotszky and Cele 2004; Moja 2004), the HSRC needed to move from reliance on predominantly state-funded financial support to much greater reliance on contract research. The target that had been set was for 60 per cent of the HSRC's research projects to be generated from contract research, something that required high levels of entrepreneurial skills not always present in academic institutions. At the same time, this entrepreneurial requirement was clearly articulated within a developmental framework requiring the HSRC, as a national research body, to be responsive to the country's critical needs and to national policy imperatives. This is an interesting nexus and an important one, as Subotsky and Cele articulate it:

Given the new democracy's dual development challenges – addressing the basic needs of its majority poor as well as enhancing the nation's emerging engagement in the new global economy – the question of the appropriate form(s) of knowledge to support these demands is a critical one, as it is for all African and other developing countries (Subotszky and Cele 2004).

This was recognised in the consultancy report for the new publishing structure:

The HSRC's new strategic direction involves 'reshaping itself as a flexible, efficient, sustainable, representative and professional organisation that undertakes independent, collaborative, policy-relevant social research to inform social and economic policy.' Social-scientific knowledge management is seen as a key underpinning function. Any publications policy has to fall in behind this strategy and help to deliver its goals (EG&A consultancy report 2001).

The strategic goals that the HSRC formulated for the transformed organisation under Orkin's leadership reflect this dual challenge:

- To produce research that makes a difference – the measurement of research impact became of primary importance;
- To increase research effectiveness and enhance research excellence;
- To grow research services by attracting new tenders;
- The modernisation of infrastructure and information systems, applying knowledge management systems.

THE CONSULTANCY

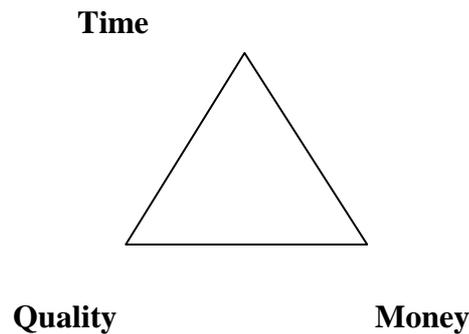
The consultancy undertaken by Eve Gray & Associates for the formulation and implementation of a new publishing strategy was responsive to these imperatives. The approach taken was coloured by the common background of the consultants in commercial publishing, albeit not always in very commercial branches of publishing: university press and anti-Apartheid 'Struggle' (political/conscientising) publishing. What this meant in practice was that the questions asked and the solutions sought were driven by an understanding of the primacy of marketing (in the broadest sense) and the need for financial viability (a nice irony when the solution offered is to give products away free of charge). Moreover, in formulating

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strategy and implementing solutions, our aim would always be to balance the three imperatives of the classic strategic business management triangle:



Our presumptions were, therefore, that there would have to be efficient and professional systems and services to create published products that reached their target market quickly; that production standards needed to be of the highest affordable quality, to reflect the standards of research excellence in the organisation; and that costs would need to be realistically controlled and matched to the benefit to the organisation gained from publication (an interesting challenge in an Open Access publishing model, where the direct benefits are not necessarily financial).

Critically, however, the consultancy team recognised that any new publishing programme had to be responsive to national developmental goals, with the implication that published products had to be readily accessible to their target readership and had to be capable of delivering the real research impact that was so central to the HSRC's mission. While key markets were government policy-makers and local and international clients:

The HSRC's product is research. It is a knowledge generator, funded in part by the public sector. It has the responsibility to disseminate that knowledge to the wider public in an accessible and affordable way. The term 'wider public' is in reality a misnomer. The reality is that the HSRC produces knowledge for a limited niche market comprised essentially of government; the NGO sector, the academic community and business, nationally and internationally (HSRC Discussion Document 2001).

However, HSRC publications also had to reach broader markets, leading to a debate about the extent to which publications would need to be generated that popularised research output.

We were aware at the outset and became even more aware over time that the market impact of a successful research publication programme did not reflect only on the research organisation, but also on the status of South African social science research and, by extension, of research out of Africa.

This paper places the case study in the context of research dissemination in South Africa and Africa and reviews new publishing approaches, including electronic publishing and Open

Access. It then charts the three phases of the consultancy -- investigation, recommendations and implementation -- and, at each stage, examines successes and failures; the problems encountered; and the way these were addressed. We do so in the expectation that this might shed light on similar experiences in other institutions and might thus help inform further developments in African scholarly dissemination.

BACKGROUND

Scholarly Publishing in South Africa

Although South Africa has a large and well-developed publishing industry compared with the rest of the continent, scholarly and research publishing shares the problems and pressures common across the world and most particularly in developing countries.

At the time of the HSRC investigation, according to a parliamentary report by the Council on Higher Education, the predicted growth in the tertiary sector in South Africa had instead turned into a massive decline, with more than 100,000 fewer students in the system than predicted in 1995. Instead of a 4 per cent growth in student numbers, from 570,000 to 710,000, student numbers had dropped to 560,000. At the time of writing, in 2004, the South African government had just announced the imposition of further deliberate reductions in the numbers of students in the tertiary institutions because of financial constraints.

As a result of such trends, the higher education sector as a whole was at the start of the consultancy, and remains now, under severe financial pressure, something that has affected scholarly and university press publishing. While the essential mission of a university press is to publish works for and by academics, and to keep alive scholarly debate in the community, this had become increasingly problematic in the absence of real markets for university press books. While South African academics were keen to publish, they seemed much less keen to buy locally produced academic books. This might well have been part of an international trend, in a market that had become over-traded with university press books. But the major problem was, and remains, that the markets are simply too narrow (Molteno 1997: 49). There are not enough universities and colleges, not enough libraries willing to purchase such books; nor enough serious readers in the community with enough interest to buy serious books to make such publishing projects economically viable.

This decline in demand for locally produced scholarly works was, and continues to be, aggravated by a steady trend in academic bookshops away from stocking anything other than mainstream undergraduate textbooks. This has meant an equivalent decline in the clientele of academic bookshops, as academics are less and less likely to visit a campus bookstore that does not stock the titles they are looking for.

In a 2001 publication, Eve Gray summed up the situation as follows:

There has been a movement, therefore, towards a more and more general market for university press books, rather than a specifically scholarly market. This has been accentuated by the inability or reluctance of the universities to subsidise scholarly publishing, in the face of a steady decline in government funding. As a result,

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university presses have sought markets among more general readers. Over the last fifteen years, therefore, as a result of a combination of causes, there has been an ever-decreasing market for purely academic writing. The specialist academic monograph, in traditional book format, given its small print run and the particular resistance in South Africa to high prices, cannot be published without subsidy, and the under-funded universities are reluctant to put any subsidies into making African research available. The academic monograph in Africa is under siege, probably ahead of the rest of the world, where it is becoming a threatened species, probably killed by the 'publish-or-perish' syndrome and its resultant market glut (Gray 2001).

South African university press publishing had, therefore, been taken over by a rhetoric that preached a commercial market approach with concomitant demands for commercial viability. While South African universities were responding in a number of ways to the demands of the marketisation of higher education policy by attracting private funding to ensure their own survival, they had apparently failed to appreciate the power of scholarly publication to profile the organisation and ensure competitiveness, locally and internationally. This lesson had been better understood by a number of scholarly NGOS that were using a research funding to distribute scholarly information -- either self-publishing or using commercial publishers to produce subsidised research publications.

Because of these trends at the time of the consultancy and to date, scholarly publishing in South Africa has become marginalised and scattered, with university press output reduced, journals struggling for survival in university departments or outsourced to overseas publishers, and research publication spread across a variety of research units and NGOs, mostly with limited distribution capacity.

The question that arose in the HSRC consultancy was how the organisation could break out of this negative environment to ensure effective dissemination of its research output to its local and international readers and stakeholders.

African Scholarship in the World

The Great Divide – African consumption of scholarship

The broad backdrop against which this study plays out is that of the ongoing struggle to get the voice of African-based research heard across the continent and in the powerful countries in the North that dominate academic discourse. It is well known that the distribution of books and the dissemination of online content are heavily skewed towards the North, with African countries playing the role of consumers of content rather than disseminators. For example, African countries consume around 12 per cent of the books produced in the world, but produce only 2 per cent themselves (Wafawarowa 2000).

Scholarly publishers are very familiar with the geographical, commercial and cultural barriers that have in the past inhibited the flow of African scholarship to the rest of the world. The cost of distributing printed books; transport costs and tariff barriers; slow delivery caused by the vast distances to reach market; the difficulties of finding a toe-hold in markets geared to

dominant local products – these are all too painfully familiar to South African and African scholarly publishers.

Paul Zeleza sums up the situation cogently:

The marginality of African knowledge is evident even in the Africanist intellectual system, which is firmly rooted in a western epistemological order and an academic culture driven by a ruthless ethos of ‘publish and perish’ and consisting of multinational publishing houses, university presses, peer review networks, citation and bibliographical conventions, and has little room to accommodate the alien views, voices, and visions emanating from Africa itself. In this scholarly treadmill, Africa appears nothing more than a research object to verify faddish theories that emerge with predictable regularity in the channel-surfing intellectualism of Northern academics. And so we get the strange spectacle of books and articles being churned out containing no reference to the scholarship produced in the countries and regions concerned ...It is work that often contains the latest bibliographic references to Africanist research and rather dated facts, while the work of African scholars may contain dated bibliographical references and the latest facts (Zeleza 1997b).

Electronic distribution of scholarly content, therefore, offers a seductive alternative, given the ease and speed with which content can now be disseminated right around the world. The creation of virtual communities with an interest in African studies could very well provide a route to more effective dissemination of African-based scholarship, with at least some potential for reversing the dominance of African studies by publications emanating from the USA and Europe.

The question is whether such efforts have any chance of surmounting the digital divide. The figures are daunting: probably around 33 million Internet users in Africa, compared with 233 million in the US and Canada, 314 million in Europe, and 97 million in Latin America.¹

Just as stark is the balance of content on the Internet:

While researchers studying ICT use in developed countries may not identify content as critical, it cannot be ignored in our context. The African continent generates only 0.4% of global online content, and if South Africa's contribution is that excluded, the figure drops to a mere 0.02% (UNECA, in Chisenga, 1999). English remains the dominant language of publication for African producers, despite the fact that English first language speakers comprise no more than 0.007% of the whole African population (Boldi et al, 2002). (Czerniewicz and Brown 2004)

However, this may not necessarily mean that scholarly communities would be unable to access digital content. The findings of the UK House of Commons investigation into scientific journals are instructive in this regard:

1 Internet World Stats <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm>

There is some concern that digital journals are inaccessible to developing countries, which may not have the technological infrastructure to receive and distribute them effectively. Sir Crispin Davis told us that moving to a digital-only environment "would have the result of reducing accessibility to scientific research because it is only available on the internet. [...] globally it would exclude over 50% of scientists". We are not convinced that this is the case. The distribution of paper copies of journals is expensive and requires extensive logistical infrastructure. Digital provision may, in fact, be more suited to the needs of developing countries because it is cheaper and more immediate. Dr Harold Varmus, of the Public Library of Science (PloS) told us that, "while not every worker may have a desktop computer, every institution has a desktop computer and you can download the appropriate articles. [...] in a place like Bamako in Mali [...] where there is almost no access to papers unless you travel to France or the States, this is a revolutionary change which they welcome with open arms"... The relatively low levels of ICT in the developing world comparative to the West is not an argument against digital journals, rather it highlights the need for further development of ICT capacity to fully exploit the potential of digital technologies. **The digitisation of journals has the potential to greatly increase access to research findings for researchers in the developing world.** (UK House of Commons 2004 – their emphasis)

(Note, however, in this discussion, the all too common perception of Africa as the consumer of research knowledge, rather than as the producer of its own knowledge systems.)

NEW PUBLISHING MODELS

Open Access

If electronic publishing offers opportunities for African scholarly publishers, then the potential for the expansion of African research output and consumption could well be enhanced by the adoption of Open Access models of publication or 'author pays' model of journal publishing, in which content is disseminated freely and investment is shifted to the author, research body, or institution sponsoring the research concerned. As Open Access publishing will be dealt with in other papers in this publication, a short summary of the issues will suffice here.

The Open Access publishing model arose from protests in the US and UK scientific communities at the rapidly escalating price of scholarly journals, the stranglehold of the large corporate journal publishers, and a copyright regime that demands cession of copyright, effectively putting the Intellectual property rights to much scholarly knowledge in the hands of commercial publishers.

The Open Access model is promoted primarily by the Public Library of Science (PLOS) in the US and Biomed Central in the UK. The aim of this model is to reduce costs for the end user, thereby democratising access to scientific research. There has been particular emphasis in discussion of Open Access publishing of its suitability to situations in which publication is the output of publicly funded research.

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In the last few years, the Open Access model has gained increasing international attention from policy makers. The UK government has just completed an inquiry into scientific publication and the availability of scientific knowledge (UK House of Commons 2004); the JISC higher education consortium in the UK is surveying Open Access journals and is offering financial support to conventional journal publishers wanting to switch to Open Access. A number of international protocols have been formulated on the topic - the OECD Declaration on Access to Research Data from Public Funding; the Max Planck Society Berlin Declaration on Open Access to Knowledge in the Sciences and the Humanities; the Declaration of Principles of the World Summit on the Information Society; and the Bethesda Principles agreed at the Howard Hughes Medical Institute in 2003.

The Open Access model is, therefore, one that we would argue needs to be considered by any publicly funded research organisation, particularly in Africa, where development goals are of primary importance. It is an increasingly accepted view that where public monies are the source of research funding, the imperative to ease public access is even greater.

Open Access journals are for the moment largely scientific journals and there is debate about the suitability of the model to humanities and social science journals (Sparc 2004). It looks as if 2004 will be the year that the Open Access debate in the US turns to social science journals and it would be apposite for African scholarly publishers to debate the potential for 'author pays' publishing of other scholarly publications, as well as journals, as is witnessed by the debate initiated recently among US university presses about participation in funding scholarly publications (Monaghan 2004).

What needs to be understood, however, is that the adoption of an Open Access approach is not a decision simply to give content away free – in other words it is not free of control, or free of good financial sense. As US copyright lawyer Lawrence Lessig puts it:

... we come from a tradition of 'free culture' – not 'free' as in 'free beer' (to borrow a phrase from the founder of the free-software movement) – but 'free'; as in 'free speech', 'free markets', 'free trade', 'free enterprise', 'free will' and 'free elections'. A free culture supports and protects creators and innovators. It does this directly by granting intellectual property rights. But it does so indirectly by limiting the reach of those rights to guarantee that follow-on creators and innovators remain *as free as possible* from the control of the past. A free culture is not a culture without property, just as a free market is not a market in which everything is free. The opposite of a free culture is a 'permission culture' - a culture in which creators get to create only with the permission of the powerful, or of creators from the past (Lessig 2004: xiv – author's emphasis).

Such ideas have obvious relevance in Africa, which is so powerfully disadvantaged by prevailing traditions of academic discourse.

Print on Demand

Given the low levels of hardware availability and internet connectivity in Africa, as well as the short print runs that characterise the African scholarly market, the availability of print

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copies of publications in local markets is a distinct advantage. The book remains authentic communication. With the exponential increase in the media, where individuals have to deal with a bewildering number of messages, there is some resistance to inauthentic communication – that is communication that is ‘losing trust’ – and books provide a profound connection and a certain tangibility of knowledge.

But the issue of access to knowledge remains the conundrum. It might well be that a purely electronic future for African scholarly publishing might be more viable than print (Teferra 1998:54). This would, however, require a revolutionary rethink of the traditions of scholarly publishing.

Given the distances that have to be covered by African publishers in a thinly-spread market and the difficulty of shipping books in Africa, perhaps the industry should be looking at digital text storage and on-line printing as a key solution to its problems of the physical distribution of scholarly dissemination. Internationally, the rapid growth of POD businesses like Lightning Source (which reports high levels of business from scholarly publications) suggests that this could be a workable model facilitating broad reach dissemination in Africa.

Print on demand offers considerable advantages for African publishers. As Hans Zell puts it: ‘For African publishers, POD promises benefits that are immediate and cost effective, among them decreases in shipping costs, elimination of the need to maintain large inventories, the ability to keep backlist titles alive, and the means to deliver titles rapidly to other countries’ (Zell 2003).

The case study – restructuring research publishing at the Human Sciences research Council, South Africa

The Consultancy

In early 2001, Eve Gray and Associates was approached to conduct a survey of the publishing operations of the HSRC and to make recommendations for a reorganisation and revival of the HSRC’s publishing structures and strategies. The research brief was for a thorough review of the HSRC’s publishing programme, past and present, together with a strategic planning process to establish likely future needs. This would be followed by careful planning to identify available skills and expertise and put in place the structures and resources needed to manage the publishing programme effectively, using in-house staff and outsourced services.

The desired outcome of the research would be a coherent and sustainable strategy for the development of the HSRC’s publishing programme, together with a comprehensive operational programme for its delivery and management. The consultancy wanted to ensure that the HSRC took maximum advantage of technological advances that might allow it to meet its information dissemination needs more effectively and cheaply and which could give it greater market reach.

A key underpinning of the research brief, for both the consultants and the CEO, was the acceptance of an integrated market approach to the publications function, so that publication

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efforts would fall in behind the strategic goals of the organisation, supporting and enhancing its research efforts.

The methodology of the intervention was based on interviews with key informants and analysis of financial and other records, backed by a review of local and international trends and best practice.

The lead consultant was an experienced academic publisher, who had worked in university presses and in commercial academic textbook publishing. She, therefore, brought to the investigation an understanding of the professional standards, production values and commercial approaches of the publishing industry, as well as an appreciation of the dynamics of South African higher education in a transformative phase.

The findings

The state of publishing in the HSRC

The survey revealed that publishing in the HSRC had become decentralised and fragmented after the disbanding of a central publishing department, with individual departments taking on responsibility for producing research reports and publications for their own research area. There was little or no institutional coherence and the impact of publications was dissipated by a lack of overall institutional profiling or market image.

Reviewing the history of publishing at the HSRC, the consultancy found that in the more distant past, publication had not been seen as a moneymaking function and internal research reports used to be given away to libraries and government departments in print runs of about 100. In the 1980s, however, a new approach had been developed and a university press model adopted, with publications being targeted at a more general audience. The organisation began to view the publication function as at least semi-commercial, but without peer review processes, nor a thorough understanding of the commercial viability of publication, in place. As a result, a publishing department was built up, with a publishing manager at the head. This publisher was, however, seen as an administrator rather than someone with a contribution to make to the development of scholarship. A bookselling and distribution department was created to handle sales of its publications, largely dependent on direct sales to end-users. The HSRC had its own print facilities and handled all functions in-house.

In the process of the organisational restructuring that had begun in the 1990s prior to the consultancy, the publishing function had been considerably reduced and its centralised function dismantled. Publishing was delegated to the individual research departments, with few controls in place. The distribution department remained, but reduced in staff numbers. There was a 'bookshop' department, which was intended to be a wholesaler and retailer of HSRC publications.

The bulk of the titles sold fewer than 50 copies a year, often in single copy or low volume invoices. This added considerably to the HSRC's distribution overheads, as the cost of processing these invoices certainly exceeded the profit margin on the books. In these

circumstances, print runs were difficult to manage and there was a high level of stock wastage. This was aggravated by the lack of any centralised control over print buying. Given the sales volumes, the consultancy found that most publications would appear to be candidates for print-on demand print management rather than conventional printing, where print runs under 500 are not considered viable.

Attitudes to publishing

Interviews with research groups revealed that, overall, in the HSRC, publications were seen as the necessary outcome of the research process; a visible manifestation of the project concerned. This would suggest that there was implicitly a non-commercial, yet strategic approach to the publishing functions of the HSRC. However, there was not a coherent approach to funding publications from research grants; rather, the production of a report or book seemed to be ‘tacked on’ at the end of a project, with some confusion over funding mechanisms and cost recovery.

Further probing revealed that the arguments and motivations from HSRC staff for publishing particular reports and books were often phrased less in marketing terms – the need for the publication in a particular market sector, or the need for the HSRC to project itself in that sector – than in terms of the internal staff evaluation needs of the HSRC and the ambitions of individual researchers. There was a pervasive sense that publishing was a numbers game – researchers and units were judged by and promoted according to the number of publications that they produced and there was considerable store placed on the size of the print run for books published, as a large print run was seen as a sign of a successful publication, whether or not the books sold. As a result, there was considerable over-stocking. This was coupled with an explicit or implicit assumption, which seemed deeply entrenched, that publishing projects should recover their costs from sales.

In this context, the presumption that book sales were a revenue source was to be treated with caution, particularly as any hard-headed financial analysis would conclude that the sale of publications was not a revenue source, but was certainly losing money, when all overhead costs were taken into account.

Researchers were particularly keen to see their books in mainstream bookshops (in the circumstances, an unrealistic ambition) and wanted to be profiled through launches and promotional mailings. There was a conflation of genres, with researchers wanting to produce ‘books’, which were, however, often research reports produced in book format. Quality standards were very variable, with some excellent work being produced, but also a proliferation of publications that would not have passed muster in a rigorous peer review process.

There was thus a mixed approach to the publishing function in the HSRC, with the semi-commercial motivations that were being articulated often hiding personal or bureaucratic needs. In general, the idea seemed to be that publications had to be sold and that sales had to cover the base production costs incurred. The HSRC was certainly losing money overall on the maintenance of a sales infrastructure for very small volumes of sales.

Publications were conceived of as print publications – there was no strategy in place for the electronic dissemination of information; this in a context in which all predictions of the future of the academic knowledge market globally forecast a very rapid growth in electronic delivery of content in the academic sector, and electronic content management for flexible delivery had been identified as a key strategic thrust for successful niche publishing.

The market focus of the publishing programme

Books and research reports were being produced in print with production values that differed greatly from department to department. Production of books was for the most part managed through MS Word templates by in-house editors, with the result that they lacked professional quality standards in editorial and production values. Some departments worked with publishing houses to produce high quality and professional publications, but the marketing of these publications did not always profile the HSRC effectively. The publishing programme was completely fragmented, with no coherent centralised marketing focus, no articulation with the research priorities of the HSRC and little strategic impact for the organisation.

The publishing web site

Publications were promoted on the HSRC web site and in fact occupied a prominent place on the home page. There was no coherent strategy for the management of online content, although one or two research programmes were, on their own initiative, managing online projects, such as the donor-funded Southern African Regional Poverty Network (www.sarpn.org.za).

When it came to evaluating the HSRC website, it was clear that it had, as commonly happens in larger organisations, been created in a void. In other words, the website starkly revealed that it had been created without asking some basic market-orientated questions: Why does the HSRC need a website? What does the HSRC hope to achieve by creating a website? Who is the website aimed at? What will visitors to the HSRC website gain by coming to the site?

The result was a website that tried to be too much to too many; a website that was slow and cumbersome to navigate; a website backed by no marketing or communication strategy; and, not least of all, at a time when the HSRC was trying desperately to cast off a reputation as a finger-puppet of the Apartheid state, a website dressed in the colours of the old South African flag!

In the absence of a clear strategy and objective for the site, a solid architectural basis was lacking, aggravated by myopic design and inadequate hosting infrastructure. All this would hamper the development of the site into one that would reflect the strategic shifts taking place at the HSRC.

There was a total lack of centralised strategic thinking about the web site. Its development was delegated to the IT department, with loosely controlled input from various research departments and design outsourced to a company with historical links with the HSRC.

THE RECOMMENDATIONS

The strategy

An integrated market approach was recommended as the cornerstone of a new publishing strategy, with publishing seen as an integral part of the research function. Publishing strategy – what was published and how it was published – needed to promote the research reputation of the HSRC, to establish the value of its research among stakeholders and in the community and to enhance its reputation. The HSRC also needed publications as a marketing tool to attract donors and new clients. The financial rewards earned would not be measured in turnover from book sales, but rather through the contribution made to attracting research funding and contracts and key dissemination measures, such as media outreach.

There would be a three-way publishing strategy, in which the HSRC would continue to provide printed books, but all content would be stored in a digital database/library, which would be fully searchable. The reader would have the choice of perusing documents on screen, downloading it at no cost, or ordering a POD book that would be supplied on a cost-recovery basis. Creative Commons licenses would be used to manage online content, allowing for free downloads and the right to use content for non-commercial purposes.

The publishing process proposed was, therefore, a flexible Open Access publishing model, based on digital content management and print on demand. Content would be stored in a publishing content and marketing site (provided by an outsourced provider with substantial server capacity, high bandwidth and guaranteed levels of up-time) linked to the HSRC web site in such a way as to provide seamless movement from one to the other, from the perspective of web site visitors.

The consultancy recognised the need to move publication planning back so that it was dealt with in the early stages of research project planning, with the published output of any research project identified at the start of the planning process. It was intended that publication funding be built into the research programme and be carefully planned with the assistance of in-house publishing staff with professional publishing knowledge.

Electronic publishing

In motivating for electronic publishing, the advantages were perceived to be:

- International reach – links to a global readership and international research sites;
- Access to the research and policy development market, which is wired – even in Africa;
- Lower production costs;
- Greater flexibility – potential for the use of colour and interactivity;
- Appropriateness for highly specialised, low volume products;
- The capacity for updating content;
- The potential for links to abstracting services and research indexes;
- Strong control over branding.

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Although some researchers expressed reservations about the digital strategy, fearing that it would exclude readers on the African continent, the general findings were that the academic and research community in Africa is ‘wired’, while there are substantial barriers to the distribution of printed books between African countries. There is a lot of African Studies information on the Web, but most of it is managed by US universities and the HSRC felt that the time had come for it, as an African institution, to take charge of its own online content. In this way, the HSRC felt it could add weight to Africa’s own online research presence.

A content web site

It was intended that the content web site would contain current publications – research reports, articles, and discussion documents. Access would be provided to archival material and discussion forums and debates would be set up to attract clients to the site. The site would also contain press releases and promotional articles and links to other research sites worldwide.

It was recommended that promotional materials and marketing content be provided in HTML and publications in PDF format for download for printing.

The control and management of the web site was an important issue. Karen Bruns reported:

If the HSRC is to consider digital delivery of publications and integrate these publications into the central marketing strategy of the organisation, then the design and function of the web site becomes crucial. There is an opportunity to explore just-in-time data provision as well as attractive marketing opportunities.

Web site management is notoriously difficult in organisations and within the organogram and line-function is often incorrectly allocated. Web site development should report to Marketing, for the imaging and design of the ‘look’ of the site. The IT department should take responsibility for architecture, capacity, software, etc.

However, there remains a lack of clarity about responsibility for managing, maintaining and updating the content on the publishing web site.

Product design and marketing

The imaging and design of publications (online and print) needed to be linked to the branding of the organisation as a whole and products designed to meet the needs of the HSRC client base, reinforcing positive perceptions of the HSRC. The design of publications needed to be linked to a corporate design policy so that publication design, if not identical to corporate design, would have a ‘family’ identity and/or convey professionalism, credibility and quality.

Marketing and promotions of publications were to be integrated into an overall market strategy for the HSRC. The recommendation was that there should be a close relationship between the publishing department and corporate communications, preferably in twinned directorates reporting to the CEO as key players in the delivery of the HSRC’s corporate image and delivery on its research mandate.

The financial model

A new financial model was proposed, with most reports published free of charge and only information with high market value charged for on a subscription basis. If the HSRC wished to earn revenue from its content, it was recommended that it could license HSRC content to online business information providers. In the latter circumstance, the motivation for paying for content that would otherwise be available free of charge would reside in the value added by the selection and targeting of information for specific client needs.

It needs to be recognised that, in good part, the recommendation for an Open Access distribution model came not only from a recognition of the marketing advantages of free access and the need to provide free access to information developed from public funds, but from a recognition that the conventional publishing model actually cost more than it earned and effectively provided a barrier between the HSRC and its market. Moreover, the democratisation of knowledge offered by the Open Access was in line with the HSRC's mission as a national research council.

Given that the HSRC was also involved in the development of data banks, the consultancy advised that there would be room for the development of interactive data provision to enhance some products.

Print and CD-ROM costs shifted to the customer and these products were to be sold on a cost-recovery basis.

The publishing structure

It was recommended that a centralised publishing department be (re)created, with a Publishing Director and a small staff to manage outsourced services. In establishing a new publishing department, the consultants were aware that a common misconception that would have to be fielded was the presumption that a publishing department was a service department, rather than a professional resource adding value to the research activities of the organisation.

The potential role of the Publishing Director was little understood in an environment where publishing had come to be seen as a matter of getting content printed – a purely production function. As it turned out, a lot of time was invested in explaining to researchers that the publisher was a strategic decision-maker, who would work closely with the research teams and would combine knowledge of research and publishing environments. The Publishing Director would need to be a quality gatekeeper, ensuring that all publications adequately reflected the research reputation of the HSRC. While the head of the publications department in the HSRC had previously been a production facilitator in the main, the new approach would be that the Publishing Director would assist with the conceptualisation of publishing projects and the framing of research output in professional product development. There was some resistance to the idea that research directors would lose complete control of their publications and it was, therefore, important that the Publishing Director appointed would be someone who earned the respect of the research community and could not be seen as an administrative functionary. The Publishing Director would have overall responsibility for

functions such as the content web site and print products and for marketing and promotion of the publications web site and print publications.

The publishing decision on what would be published, in what format, would be the responsibility of the Publishing Director. There would be peer review of all publications except client reports, unless requested by the client. The publishing decision would combine academic considerations with market considerations. The Publishing Director and Research Directors would work together to build a market-focused publishing list that delivered the HSRC's strategic goals.

The marketing of publications within the organisation's overall marketing strategy

A separate report on the marketing function in the new publications department by Karen Bruns, drew the distinction between services marketing and product marketing, but concluded:

Where the marketing of the publications as product dovetails with this corporate marketing function is that, notwithstanding intangibility, heterogeneity and perishability, products marketing is not that different from services marketing. The HSRC is in the business of information. Clients and customers are buying solutions to problems by purchasing information from the HSRC. They are buying both a product and a service component and where the one begins and the other ends may be viewed as seamless by the client.

Based on this analysis I am suggesting that the HSRC is moving towards promoting a hybrid – a percentage of products (publications) and a higher percentage of service (research services or products). This is common in service industries today in that there is a move from pure service towards a hybrid of services and product in order to better position the organisation in the minds of the clients and to create strategic advantage within the service sector as a whole.

I would thus envisage that the Corporate Marketing Executive is focussed entirely on future business – on procuring research accounts and on representing the HSRC as the best candidate for such contracts.

The Publications Marketing Manager is, however, dealing with what currently exists and is looking for ways of packaging, presenting and selling existing product in order to promote the activities of the organisation as a whole.

He or she is therefore dovetailing with what the Corporate Marketing Executive ultimately seeks to achieve.

Karen Bruns pointed out that if publishing were to be seen as part of the marketing of the HSRC and its research, this would mean that the financial contribution should be seen 'holistically' – perhaps uncomfortable in that the measurables for the marketing team are not as obvious as financial return. The marketing position within Publishing is both that of line executive and of boundary role player – that is, representing the organisation to the outside

world by liaising with stakeholders and especially with customers. So too the published information becomes the face of the HSRC to the outside world. It is, thus, vitally important that this be done with strategic intent.

Another important point was the need for market alliances:

The ability to work with customers, suppliers, government and competitors for profit is crucial – there is a strong case within the product marketing scenario within less developed countries for managing strategic alliances. Here the HSRC and other organisations or firms could unite to pursue agreed upon goals – such as B2B information provisioning or co-publication – yet remain independent within the alliance. The partners share the benefits of the alliance and the performance of the tasks in key areas, possibly on an ongoing basis. Within the context of publications marketing, the pursuit would be largely for joint marketing opportunities and shared databases, as well as faster response to market needs and the flexibility to do so.

Outsourced services

The recommendation was made that the HSRC should seek a single outsourced publishing and production services partner, with the aim of building a long-term relationship that would meet the HSRC's specific needs.

The company appointed, Compress, is a digital publishing services company focused on leading the development of organisational publishing through technical innovation. Compress provided a comprehensive range of tools and services for preparing, reproducing and disseminating publications in both paper and digital formats. Their multi-channel publishing partner strategy was a total-solution service offering, aimed at saving organisations time and money, and ensuring publishing excellence.

Compress was founded in 1999, partly in reaction to the lack of technological innovation in the South African publishing industry. The company's initial strategy was to create revenue streams by offering parallel print and digital publishing solutions to publishers as well as what they came to describe as 'accidental publishers', that is, commercial and not-profit organisations who produce and disseminate significant levels of information but whose core business function is not publishing. While pursuing this goal, Compress was invited by the HSRC to tender.

Compress tendered for the management of HSRC publications in September 2001:

The HSRC's publishing needs were identified as follows:

1. A full pre-print service that could take the raw electronic documents of its authors and researchers and turn them into high quality, print-ready manuscripts.
2. The creation and maintenance of a digital library of HSRC publications, as the logical storage solution for the HSRC. This aimed to make all titles accessible, in an intuitive structure, with links to other appropriate sites

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3. The provision of a consumer interface with e-commerce facilities: the HSRC needed a web site that would function as a consumer interface for distributing free information, but there also needed to be the infrastructure for e-commerce transactions to take place if necessary. This included ordering capabilities, as well as facilities for customer registration, maintenance of customer information, and records of customer interaction and transactions. The e-commerce infrastructure could also facilitate the ordering of print-on-demand and electronic products (including order processing and invoicing, distribution and delivery, and payment collection).
4. Print-on-demand and electronic products: the HSRC required a print-on-demand service that allowed for the provision of digital files for print-on-demand; estimating and ordering; quality control; as well as order processing and delivery to the client. This service would also include the option of processing and distributing other electronic products.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NEW PUBLISHING STRATEGY

The new publishing strategy received the full endorsement of the CEO and implementation started with the appointment of a Publishing Director with publishing experience, but who was also a respected academic – the political scientist John Daniel. He later handed over to the Publishing Manager, Garry Rosenberg, who came from an academic publishing background.

In her review of marketing functions, Karen Bruns had recommended a three-phase internal marketing process to get buy-in from the HSRC research community. This would consist of consensus building; the identification of gaps in knowledge; and then agreement on the suggested supporting activities and financial budgets. In the event, probably as the result of the pressures on an organisation in transformation, only the first step was tackled in any depth and even this lacked coherent follow-through. A full implementation of all phases would have required an established level of internal resources and the recruitment process in the production and marketing functions was slow. A lesson learned is that a more comprehensive and coordinated implementation strategy might have speeded up the process of establishing the new publishing strategy within the HSRC community.

The new publishing programme, therefore, found its own way in the organisation, overcoming various barriers and gradually establishing its reputation and the quality of its products and services. It has to be said that there were some stormy encounters at the outset, and continuing resistance for some research directors who felt that they had the competency to continue handling their own publications, but a mere 18 months later, the lead consultant found herself being told by a number of research department staff that the publishing department was ‘the most effective department in the HSRC’.

Certain resource tools were developed to support publishing services, such as the costing calculator – an online tool that allows researchers to create dummy budgets for publications stemming from research projects. Tools such as these obliged and/or assisted researchers to consider publication as part of research planning, rather than as an afterthought or post-research supplement.

The Open Access model was a victim less of open opposition than of diversionary tactics and different agendas. This, too, therefore took a few years to ‘take’. While the HSRC profiled itself as an Open Access publisher, for quite a while there was little content on the website and, for financial reasons, the digitising of key backlist titles has not yet been implemented, except for a few titles. There are now some 46 titles with full-text online in an impressive list that has contributed a great deal to the HSRC’s reputation.

Barriers to implementation

Academic (and publisher) conservatism

The major barrier to the implementation of a digital, open access publishing model turned out to be academic conservatism – the desire for ‘things as they are’ in the form of conventional books sold through trade bookshops; book launches; and personal profiling of authors, as opposed to an organisational marketing model. Researchers feared that the bookshops would not support print products because of online availability. However, this turned out not to be the case. The result was the lack of wholesale buy-in because of these niggling concerns.

This was not a shallow resistance, but was built on the researchers’ understanding of the way their own job market works: prestige (and, therefore, promotion) is still built around books on a bookshelf, with the author’s name prominently on the spine, preferably published with a reputable overseas partner. Likewise, the HSRC publishers realised that their own prestige depended to a great extent on their ability to prove themselves by operating in a traditional publishing milieu, publishing ‘university press’ books alongside research reports and negotiating co-publications with overseas publishers. Once this reputation had been established, it was easier for the Publishing Department to get buy-in from the research community and to move forward to full implementation of an Open Access publishing model.

In fact, this was one departure from what the consultancy had originally suggested, namely, that all commercially viable products targeted at more general readerships be published through a reputable local publisher or press with international connections in order to maximise reach, allowing the HSRC Publishers to focus on research outputs that were less commercially viable. The new incarnation of the HSRC Publishers elected instead to improve its own production values, as well as scrutinise marketability of product, the marketing communications and channels to market. The support of international distributors of repute in the academic marketplace was enlisted and international co-publication deals were sought in the form of rights sales, while local publishing and distribution rights were retained. Thus, all rights for commercial exploitation locally and abroad were not surrendered – but this was subject to much negotiation among researchers within the organisation, who continued to see the role of the unit as publishing services or facilitation, rather than as a fully-fledged publishing operation.

In the process of brand- and credibility building, the acknowledgement in the broader research communities of the nature of the products, the increasing ease of access and the role of such primary source materials in the research information mix have increased the demand for

HSRC products substantially. At the same time, it has almost negated the necessity for print-on-demand publication, when the increasing print runs allowed litho runs which were more financially viable. It also assisted in convincing researchers from within the organisation of the benefit a professional and responsible publishing unit within the organisation – which goes to show that books do indeed thrive on word of mouth and deeply personal experience.

One lesson learned is that if Open Access publishing is to take off, then research accreditation policies need to be looked at. This is particularly important if African publishing is to shake off the neo-colonial assumption that ‘overseas is better’ even for African Studies scholarship. Also, there has to be someone to champion the open access model. Professional publishers and academics tend to work most happily in traditional models, and need to be persuaded of the advantages of online publishing, or treat it as a separate department, rather than as an additional product type requiring different considerations.

The difficulty of pulling publishing into line with institutional goals

Researchers were initially resistant to the idea that their personal publishing goals had to take second place to institutional goals and this needed intensive negotiation during the transformation process.

It was also difficult to persuade the research departments to build the publishing programme into their research planning at an early stage. This resulted, for the publishing department, in the turbulence of impossible deadlines and funding problems when publications were required but had not been planned for. After a process of negotiation, accompanied by learning from experience, this has now eased substantially.

As mentioned above, one of the mechanisms used, to resolve some of these issues is that the outsourced publishing services provider set up a cost calculator on the HSRC Intranet that helps research directors formulate their product specifications and get a working figure for budgeting purposes. This was a joint effort between the service provider and the HSRC publishing department.

Fear of copyright infringement from free web access

Many researchers expressed considerable fear of copyright infringement of their work and appropriation of their intellectual property if it were to be made available online. Arguments that photocopying provides an equal threat were only partially successful. In the end, it seems that once the idea takes hold that the research function has to fall in behind organisational goals, this becomes less problematic. There is also a much greater understanding now in the HSRC of the benefits that online access provides for research dissemination and much less fear of unwarranted copying. It is beginning to be understood that single-author works and integrated research reports seem to attract sales of printed copies, whereas multi-author works are more likely to be selectively downloaded or accessed online.

The HSRC permits the use of its online materials for non-commercial multi-copying, for example, for classroom use.

The cost of scanning backlist titles

The cost of scanning backlist titles provided a barrier to putting old titles on-line, as was originally intended. These had to be scanned for Optical Character reading (OCR) rather than TIF files, because TIFs are too big for easy download. OCR scanning costs around R7,000 (\$1,000) per title – not an enormous cost, but one that the organisation needs to be persuaded is of value. Particularly in a country like South Africa, there is a need for researchers to have access to out-of-date materials and the HSRC backlist provides valuable insights into the research conducted during the Apartheid period. Ideally, where there is a need for a small reprint, the title should be placed online. What did happen was that pulped or out of print titles were made available through POD when there was a demand, but these have not been scanned for online delivery. It might be that this is a function that could be conceptualised as part of the library's services. The HSRC thought of this service as a trade end, but from a research perspective, everything needs to be made available. It is hoped that a proposal to capture the extensive backlist of research will be finalised within the next 6-8 months, and that donor funding might be sought for the creation of a valuable research resource for posterity.

Financial considerations

The HSRC publishing department receives financial support centrally from the organisation, which supports salary and infrastructure costs for the publishing department. Theoretically, individual titles are funded from the research programme concerned. However, where the money comes from and how things are paid for remains problematic.

More insidiously, institutional attitudes veer between support for the open access model and a reversion, particularly at budget time and year-end, to the standard questions about turnover and profit. As many colleagues may experience within their own research institutions, the Finance Department still tends to regard publishing as a profit centre rather than a cost centre. It clearly takes time to instil an understanding of the value of investment in a publishing programme that furthers the aims of the organisation. The measure should be the cost effectiveness of research dissemination and the measurement of research impact and its contribution to the success and growth of the organisation. These are not easy to calculate, but can be measured through market feedback and customer relations management.

In the mean time, the rhetoric of cost recovery and profits continues. One way around this has been to use spare or additional resources to offer a publishing service to government departments or other research entities. This 'sale of services' has allowed for greater financial manoeuvrability.

Working with outsourced providers

The HSRC followed recommendations to commit to a single service provider for both its paper-based and electronic publishing production needs. The recommendation for a single supplier was based partly on the fact that the Publishing Department initially consisted only of a Publishing Director and a Publishing Assistant. However, the recommendation for a single supplier was also based on the belief that it would, regardless of the future size of the publishing department, allow for the establishment of a relationship between client and supplier where client could, on the one hand, more closely control and predict the level of

service and, on the other, rely more closely on the supplier to initiate publishing solutions relevant to the organisation's needs.

From the service provider's point of view, its status as sole supplier affords it the opportunity to commit dedicated resources to the client as well as take a certain degree of risk in offering new solutions based on an understanding of the client that is amplified by the single-supplier scenario. In the case of the HSRC-Compress relationship, this recommendation seems to have had the expected results. Compress and the HSRC have been working together for three years and during this time, Compress has offered new solutions to the organisation while at the same time adapting to the needs of a growing publishing division.

Implementation – technical and organisational issues

As already stated, Compress was awarded the HSRC contract in November 2001. It has been working with HSRC's Publishing Unit since. During the three-year period, the HSRC publishing unit has grown and this has impacted on the initial publishing strategy and, consequently, on the publishing solutions provided by Compress, not least of which, has been the changing importance and nature of the digital publishing solutions it offered to the HSRC. The discussion here will focus almost exclusively on the digital component of the solution offered.

The history of the HSRC's digital publishing programme can be divided into three distinct phases:

- Phase 1 (2001/2002): Implementation
- Phase 2 (2003): Creating a shop window
- Phase 3 (2004): Open source revived

PHASE 1 (2001/2002): IMPLEMENTATION

The HSRC, at this stage, was an organisation in a flux, trying to shake off its Apartheid legacy to re-emerge as an Africa-orientated research organisation producing 'social science that makes a difference'. A telling result of this process of change was the existence of gaps in the organisational infrastructure, including the existing but vacant posts of IT Director and Director of Corporate Communications. The publishing unit consisted of only a Publishing Director (60 per cent time) based in Durban and one staff member in Pretoria.

It was in this context that the publishing strategy had been presented and accepted. Compress was tasked with building a low cost, high reliability website based on the new parallel print and digital publishing strategy. It was required that the website conform in its look and feel with the existing corporate website.

Implementation

Compress constructed a website with the following salient characteristics:

1. Hosting of the website with a third-party ISP to offer reliable, high-speed hosting services.

2. Website front-end built using HTML and ASP. (The original HSRC website had been built using only HTML with extensive use of Dreamweaver templates.)
3. A database created using SQL built for an online bookshop linked to an e-commerce gateway. A Microsoft SQL license was licensed from the ISP to minimise initial expenditure.
4. Electronic files to be made available as PDFs rather than in HTML. The drawback at that stage was that search engines did not search within PDF documents, but the PDF route was more affordable, maintained the integrity of the original publication in terms of layout and made printing easier.
5. PDFs were to be stored using proprietary software, AdLib Publisher. This software solution was chosen as it allowed for effective off-line storage required for the management of print-on-demand as well as the uploading of new content to the website.
6. Scanning and making available as PDFs six backlist titles as a starting point for creating a resource-rich website.

Lessons

Any website within a large organisation tends to serve the needs of various stakeholders within the organisation. In the case of the HSRC, there was resentment from some quarters within the organisation of the outsourcing of the publishing website. A process of consultation and complete buy-in is critical for the effective and efficient conceptualisation, implementation and maintenance of a website, particularly where certain responsibilities for the site are outsourced.

No single person or committee from the HSRC was appointed to work with Compress in managing the growth and functionality of the website. There was also no interface between Compress, HSRC publishing and the HSRC Information Technology Department. It is critical for the success of any site that there is regular two-way communication between all parties with vested interests in the site – IT, marketing, sales and corporate communications. The first build really ended up being a re-dressing of the old site with additional content and functionality but without any regular updating of content once the build was complete. This resulted in a better but ultimately static site that offered little added value. This state of affairs can be attributed to the fact that no marketing function existed within the HSRC at that point to promote the website, or to develop and promote the organisation's unique open access model. This not only meant that little traffic was driven to the website but that little user feedback was generated, encouraged or captured.

PHASE 2 (2003): CREATING A SHOP WINDOW

During this period, the HSRC publishing division expanded and relocated to Cape Town. The following staff was appointed: a full-time publishing manager; a full-time marketing manager; a full-time editorial manager. Publishing output increased significantly during this period as the division began to sell itself successfully both within and outside of the organisation.

During this phase the sales function was outsourced and the distribution agreement with the organisation's original distributor renewed. For reasons that were outlined earlier in this paper, the publishing division began to operate more like a scholarly publisher than the more radical Open Access role proposed for it. This meant more focus on sales and less on free dissemination. The Open Access policy, at least for this stage of development, was restricted to selected monographs and all occasional papers. There was also no further commitment to scanning backlist titles to make them available electronically.

In consultation with the new Marketing Manager, Compress proposed a rebuild of the website to accommodate publishing's increased output. By this stage, Adlib Publisher had been abandoned and PDFs were made available from web pages created manually whenever new content was available or when updates were required. The recommendation was to integrate the growing number of PDFs and book data into a single, searchable database with titles arranged by subject area in order to improve navigation and information retrieval.

Implementation

The website was rebuilt and rebranded to remain in line with the updated parent corporate website. However, a single database was not developed because of the costs involved. Nevertheless, the website now had an online library with a growing number of full-text titles and an effective online catalogue with e-commerce enablement. The relationship between publishing and the HSRC's research goals became clearer and navigation easier and quicker.

Lessons

There had been a diversion from the original recommended Open Access strategy. The website and digital dissemination had been supplanted by traditional modes of distribution. Certain product was only available in print and, locally, only from 'good' bookshops or internationally by way of co-publishing deals or through overseas distributors. Although books could still be ordered online, this was not regarded as a serious outlet. This meant that the website was marginalised to a certain degree. In particular, no further commitments were made to using the website as an interface for increasing the availability of backlist titles – either electronically or via POD. The result of all this was that the website was not being kept to a consistent trajectory – one that should track the strategic course set. With each change in strategy, comes a resultant alteration in the appropriate functionality of the website. The website could not evolve effectively – that is, constantly responding to the needs of its target market in order to improve delivery of content – if the strategic objectives were inconsistent.

There was still no single person appointed to manage website content for the HSRC. Initially, a website committee, consisting of representatives from IT, marketing, corporate communications, publishing and Compress had been conceptualised as a way of facilitating communication around the website. This committee was never constituted. This resulted in poor communication between the market, HSRC and Compress.

Overburdened with a major overhaul of HSRC's IT systems, the HSRC IT Department was slow in setting up infrastructure to improve hosting capabilities. The lesson here is the importance of generating realistic time frames for the objectives set – building, testing, launching, gathering feedback, adjusting and marketing, all take time.

PHASE 3 (2004): OPEN SOURCE REVIVED

In 2004, the HSRC publishing division made an important decision to revert to and marshal resources for managing a full Open Access model. This was accompanied by the appointment of a dedicated HSRC representative to manage the website. However, responsibility for creating new content to promote titles uploaded remained unclear. Pressure remains to reintegrate the website back into the organisation both in terms of the hosting and maintenance of the site. This remains problematic in the face of limitations in bandwidth and server capacity at the HSRC.

A single database for both PDFs and book data was proposed. Along with this, attention would be given to improved navigation and search functionality.

Implementation

A new functional specification was prepared and quickly accepted (in July 2004) in the light of a desire to deliver on the ‘new’ commitment to Open Access. As part of the functional specification provided, consideration was given to the portability of site, namely, the possible migration of the site back onto the HSRC server. The ‘new look’ website was due for launch in November 2004 with enhanced search, functionality, and appeal which would potentially result in enhanced dissemination. In addition, the new website offered better tracking of users and their use of the materials provided.

Lessons

To some degree it feels as though the site has come a full circle with the benefit of a better understanding of the target market. For example, it has now been learnt that no assumptions should be made about users’ computer literacy. The most common feedback when a site user attempts to access a PDF is that ‘the site doesn’t work’. Nine times out of ten, the problem is that the user is trying to open the PDF within their web browser and becomes impatient when, because of a slow connection, the PDF does not open immediately. In instances where a lot of traffic to a set of PDFs is expected, users can request now that the PDFs be e-mailed to them should they encounter any difficulties. All PDFs are presented as complete books in a single file but also as a file per chapter to allow for smaller files and quicker access.

Finally, despite the reversion to Open Access and the resultant commitment to a site that reflects this strategic shift, gaps remain in terms of communication. It remains unclear who will assume overall responsibility for the new site: will this be marketing, a dedicated website manager within the Publishing Department, or Compress?

Print on demand

All titles are offered as professional-quality print products. Many are produced in short runs through POD, although others are produced in conventional print runs.

Marketing and dissemination

The promotion and marketing of HSRC titles has overall been a success. Interaction between the Publishing and Marketing Departments has ensured that there is a strong branding effort

through well-designed publications, in print and online. Attractive illustrated e-mail brochures are sent out to targeted mailing lists for every new title and the publications list gets good exposure through press releases and public launches, some of which take the form of workshops where research findings are presented to target audiences.

It has taken two years for the push and pull of marketing needs to be effective and this is now energetically managed. A lesson learned is that it would be wise to invest in a 2-year minimum plan. Internally in the organisation, the publishing model is catching on and the momentum of organisational confidence is building. Nationally and internationally, HSRC research is being effectively promoted.

Sales are managed through an outsourced service provider with a sales force covering all the SADC countries and overseas agency agreements have been set up. What is not yet in place is the ambition to see cross-border book distribution through digital content distribution linked to remote POD sites. This is a long-term goal needing further development, possibly with the creation of a number of partnerships

For international distribution, there has been a lot of discussion around POD, but at the moment, it does not seem to be cost-effective to print overseas. The charges for loading titles with international POD operators is too expensive in local currency: Lightning Source requires potentially prohibitive investment and the international distributor Gardners charges \$50 per title to upload for promotion through key online booksellers such as Amazon.com or Barnes & Noble. The HSRC is looking at smaller organisations like H-NET and agencies like Michigan State University Press in an attempt to find a solution that delivers its strategic goals, while still containing costs.

Language is clearly a problem for communication across African borders. The HSRC is working with CODESRIA to try to resolve this by setting up a project to translate selected research output on an annual basis. The main problem is the issue of cost. Exploration continues in the development of strategic alliances with non-English-speaking research institutions in Africa to assist with knowledge- and resource sharing.

The relationship between Corporate Communications and Publishing

The relationship between the marketing and promotion of publications in the HSRC and the corporate communications function remains problematic, with continuing duplication of functions. There are three partitioned operations responsible for promoting the organisation: business development, which looks for tenders and contracts; Corporate Communications, which gets press coverage for the HSRC; and Publishing, which focuses on research dissemination. Also not fully worked through yet is the relationship between the library and the publishing department when it comes to the research dissemination role. The misconception perhaps arises from the common misperception of publishing as a production and printing operation rather than a strategic marketing and dissemination function. This issue becomes particularly acute when publishing operations are redefined as online and Open Access.

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These issues all form part of ongoing discussion and development in the HSRC and a central strategy is needed to pull all the functions together and maximise the mileage to be gained from a strong publishing programme.

AN EVALUATION OF THE SUCCESS OF THE PUBLISHING MODEL

Overall, the new publishing strategy seems to have been a resounding success. Research impact has been dramatically increased and the publishing department has contributed to the successful transformation of the HSRC's image as a social science research body with a contribution to make to social justice and regional imperatives. The Open Access model, once there was buy-in, has proved to be a strategic advantage and an effective research dissemination tool, both for content that is available free of charge and content that is sold. The type of content published by the HSRC is a distinct advantage in this regard: primary content based on surveys and analyses. Many readers come to the site primarily for that reason.

An interesting sidelight on the process is that in 2004, after Open Access publishing had been embraced and many products were available free of charge online, the sales turnover of the publishing department has risen by nearly 300 per cent. This is probably the result of a combination of improved product quality and expanded availability because of the online access, but it is an interesting reflection of findings elsewhere in the world that the availability of full text online for scholarly publications does push up sales. In August, an HSRC title commissioned by the Ministry of Education made it into the top ten best-selling non-fiction titles in South Africa, measured across 350 retail outlets nationally – a considerable feat for a scholarly press. This is made even more remarkable by the fact that the HSRC Press has not bought into the prevailing ethos that it has to publish predominantly for a general market – its products for the most part remain resolutely scholarly and specialist.

With a solid list of online and print titles, the HSRC is now beginning to build its international relationships. With the conversion of the HSRC Publishers to the HSRC Press, an Editorial Board has been formed to guide the publishing process and ensure quality control and at its second meeting, the Board agreed to enter into a co-publishing arrangement with CODESRIA and Zed Books to publish up to five books in a new series. The first of these appeared in early 2005.

Effectively, the HSRC publishing programme has become a hybrid of new and old publishing models, working effectively to advance organisational goals and helping to expand the availability of Africa research output. We watch the future with interest.

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