APEX
Content & Media Solutions

Modern Publishers:

Gain a Competitive Advantage With These Emerging Technologies

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Introduction

Revolution.

In many industries, the word itself has become a cliché – deployed so often to describe change, especially technology-driven change, that it has lost its meaning.

But publishing is one industry for which digitization really did bring about a revolution. More than in most industries, technology transformed fundamentally how modern publishers and their readers discover, ingest, and understand what's happening in their world. Technology has changed how publishers:

- Develop and disseminate content

- Manage their processes

- Synthesize internal teams with authors, copy editors, and other external professionals

- Make their products accessible to new audiences

- Find new sources of revenue and cost savings

People who just a few years earlier caught up on news via a stack of oversized, printed sheets, soon began following events in real time through a digital readout on their phones — and now their wristwatches. People whose home libraries were once filled with volumes started downloading eBooks to their tablets.

Those were turbulent times for many publishers. Eventually, however, most had adopted entirely new ways of sourcing, developing, distributing, and selling content. They pulled together their "digital asset" teams, web developers, and e-commerce departments and *thought* they'd survived the great revolution of publishing by building a new paradigm.

...journal publishing grew from $8 billion in 2008 to $10 billion in 2013...

And indeed, some book publishers began to grow again, largely through eBook sales and internal efficiencies. And according to The STM Report issued March 2015, STM journal publishing grew from $8 billion in 2008 to $10 billion in 2013, with more than 28,000 scholarly, peer-reviewed journals in operation.

The Tech Revolution Continues

But what many are discovering is that the industry's tech-driven transformation isn't something that *happened.* On the contrary, it's ongoing. And the publishers that take comfort in the apparent stabilization of their revenue streams are the ones that fall behind the fastest.

But here's the good news. While the first phase of the tech revolution hit many publishers like a tsunami, in the current phase technology should be seen as an opportunity, not a threat. It's not about stabilizing revenue anymore, but about exploiting what's possible to grab market share, aggressively ramp up sales, and maximize productivity. It's about building healthy relationships with satisfied authors, improving workflow, and moving products to market faster.

That doesn't sound so scary, does it?

But to get there — do more than just tread water — publishers must continue investing in emerging technologies.

Join us as we examine the areas of the content production process that can most benefit from technological innovation — and the technologies now available to achieve genuine transformation.

Let's look at these opportunities to improve workflows in more detail. We can start with authors, scientists, and researchers. Without them, there's nothing to publish.

Chapter 1: The Publishing Workflow Today

While publishing workflows differ slightly depending on the class of product, by and large, they follow many of the same basic steps, including:

- Acquisition of content
- Manuscript/materials delivery
- Peer review
- Content edit
- Author revision
- Design / copyedit / art review
- Author review
- Layout
- Edit review/proofread
- Author review
- Final edit review
- Indexing

- Metadata distributed to vendors
- Materials to prepress
- Soft proofing and files to production
- PDF to printer / Online PDF
- Distribution to vendors and partners
- Upload to printer or POD
- Upload digital version to online retailers, hosts, or platforms
- Distribute to libraries/vendors/OA repository/publisher website
- Archiving
- XML development

Efficiency is the one measure that impacts, for better or worse, every link in the chain of publishing — from idea generation to content distribution. Each transition in the workflow is a point at which information might be shared or passed along incorrectly, bottlenecks might occur, and fixes might be necessary.

Let's take a look at the major transition points and other potential stumbling blocks to see what sort of improvements can be made with help from technology.

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Chapter 2: Manage Your Freelance Assets Effectively

The content-development process often begins with the sourcing and management of freelance writing, design, and copy editing professionals. Finding the right freelancer for a given project, adding them to a project team, keeping them on track, and getting them paid are all points in the process that can act as bottlenecks.

Exacerbating the situation is the fact that the ratio of permanent staff to freelancers is shifting in a major way, with more workers than ever reporting themselves as contractors.

Having a system in place to manage this rising workforce is critical to the efficient management of workflow and production. Technology exists today to minimize and even eliminate bottlenecks, ensuring that your projects remain on schedule and on budget, no matter the number of freelancers with which you work.

The U.S. Economy Is Becoming Freelancer-Based

In 2016, Upwork and Freelancers Union commissioned the most comprehensive independent workforce survey of its kind. The survey found that freelancers, of which there were 55 million last year, now make up 35 percent of U.S. workers, and that number continues to grow. The publishing industry is not immune to this trend. In fact, according to Economic Modeling Specialists, Inc., editorial professionals are making the transition faster than most, doubling the number of its professionals working as freelancers between 2001 and 2014.

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Imagine trying to manage your freelancers using Google Docs or a massive spreadsheet when your competition is using a fully integrated, cloud-based system that provides robust details on each freelancer in their databases, including areas of expertise, qualifications, skills, and even schedule of availability. To find the right freelancer for any project, these publishers access a database that makes it easy to find individual freelance professionals by areas of expertise, notes on past performance, stats of on-time delivery, and more to help identify the best, most qualified people for the job.

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Once that's done, publishers can use the system to send work to the freelancers, and then it automatically tracks their progress and sends crucial reminders, such as due dates.

Upon completion, the quality of the work is assessed and, if certified, the system can automatically generate an invoice and submit it to the accounting department. This increased level of efficiency saves time and money, while ensuring that work farmed out to third-parties is completed accurately, on schedule, and on budget

Chapter 3: Smooth Your Production Workflow

In every production process, content changes hands many times — between authors, peer reviewers, editors, designers, production staff, and any number of freelancers. And each and every transfer point risks the introduction of delays and errors. As noted by Rick Salinas and Diana Blanco of Duplo USA, a printing equipment manufacturer, "every touchpoint in the workflow is money spent." And in some production processes, there can be a dozen or more workflow touchpoints.

New technology promises to streamline the production process and help reduce or eliminate errors made as files are duplicated or shared. It also facilitates the management of more complex projects where consistency must be maintained across multiple authors with different styles.

This technology enables everyone assigned to work on particular content to access it at the appropriate time through a cloud-based system. This means that everyone is working with the same materials in an order that ensures only a single master copy is working its way through the system at any one time.

New technology facilitates the management of more complex projects where consistency must be maintained across multiple authors with different styles.

How It Works

Upon initiating the production process for a particular project by uploading the source files, the system initiates a "forced march" through the editing and production process. The next person in the production chain receives an email notifying them of what they're to do with the materials and by what date. Once that job is completed, the software alerts the next person in the chain, and so on until the content has been completely processed and is ready to be published.

> ...technology provides greater visibility into the production process...

These tools also can provide access to contributors working out-of-house, meaning that freelancers can work on the same copy as the in-house editors, eliminating concerns about multiple edits changing hands during the production process. What's more, the technology provides greater visibility into the production process, so management can assess how things are moving along and where, if any, bottlenecks may be occurring before they become a problem.

The benefits of such technology enable publishers to optimize the efficiency impacting the core of their workflow, which results in greater speed to market and improved ROI. In general, if a publisher was committed to upgrading only one aspect of its production process, the technology noted above would make the biggest positive impact on its business.

> ...technology enables publishers to optimize efficiency impacting the core of their workflow...

For the Public Library of Science (PLOS), the world's largest publisher of open-access scientific journals, implementing this technology enabled it to reduce its publication time on every journal by 12-27 days, and its production costs by 25 percent. At more than 30,000 articles per year, the ROI was profound.

Chapter 4: Make Authors Happy From Beginning to End

One key consideration for every publisher is the need to maintain happy relationships with authors. They provide the content that is at the heart of every publisher's business, after all. Two areas of regular friction between the two sides are image submission, which happens early in the process, and final review of the near-finished product, which naturally happens at the end.

Let's look at how technology is smoothing relations at both ends of the process.

Some of the most common issues revolve around the degree of resolution, the complexity of charts and graphics, and large, cumbersome tabular forms. These improperly formatted visuals are a major source of production bottlenecks, slowing down workflow and speed to market, while at the same time increasing expenses and staff/author frustration. That's why it's crucial to deal with these issues early.

Errors in the formatting of visual content, such as photos, illustrations, forms, charts, graphs, and figures, are extremely common, leading already-overburdened production staff to push the content back to the authors for correction, or correct it themselves.

Thankfully, technology now exists that enables authors to correct and convert their images prior to submitting them to the publisher. This technology does almost all of the work for authors, allowing them to simply upload their image files into the tool for processing. The tool then compares the image specs to a predetermined standard and, in most cases, converts the files to the correct image quality — everything from color and compression to file types. The system also generates a report detailing issues that must be fixed manually, along with guidelines for actually doing it.

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For PLOS, implementing such technology reduced its figure-related issues by as much as 75 percent, with figure-correction requests dropping from as many as 30 to fewer than 10 per day.

It Looks Like a PDF, But…

Let's move close to the end of the process, when authors expect to see a PDF of their designed work to review what the finished product will look like in print. This is when authors often have new edit requests because seeing the content displayed this way, as the reader will see it in a finished product, will produce concerns about image placement, headlines, call-out boxes, and more.

…PDF documents are not easily editable, producing frustration among both authors and publishers' staff…

Yet PDF documents are not easily editable, producing frustration among both authors and publishers' staff. Imagine technology that looks like a PDF but is, in fact, an XML-coded Word document, complete with Word's familiar and easy-to-use toolset. Publishers using this simple technology enable authors to see their manuscripts in their expected final form much earlier in the production process and allows them to make change requests more easily.

Chapter 5: Final Considerations

Technologies discussed in this Guide can change your entire workflow for the better, improve your relationships with authors, produce a happier staff, reduce costs, and — most importantly — help you remain competitive with the most progressive publishers.

But before you jump in with both feet, here are a few things to consider:

- **The learning curve.** Your staff will need to be ready to adopt new tools. Most of those we've discussed are intuitive and can be integrated with the systems that your staff already uses; so, thankfully, the learning curve is relatively low. Still, it's important for your team to have an understanding of the long-term goals associated with the adoption of new technology; that way, they can appreciate it from the outset. Technical expertise is not the key to working with these tools — it's the attitude with which one regards them.

- **The expenses.** These technologies should save you money (and fairly quickly), but it's important to see how much you're wasting on an ineffective workflow now, and gain insight into exactly where your own inefficiencies are, before you decide to move forward. Our advice is to seek the aid of a reputable consultant with experience in publication management and media solutions. Given a couple of weeks to assess your existing systems and have a dialogue with your production teams and IT department, an insightful consultant can provide affordable guidance regarding the best possible options for improving your business and getting a good ROI.

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A mid-level investment would be to put in one module like those detailed above. It might take a couple of months before you're taking full advantage of it, but the costs are manageable if you focus on the area likely to benefit the most from an upgrade. As noted previously, technology that optimizes the core of your workflow with a cloud-based system for managing content, supported by a forced-march production process, is likely to give you the most bang for your buck.

A full systems overhaul could cost upwards of $100,000 or more. Depending on the state of your current systems, this is likely not a necessary (nor a recommended) first step.

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No matter what sort of upgrade you might be considering, it seems very likely that, given the advances and efficiencies provided by some of the most recent emerging technologies, publishers who opt to stay the course with their existing resources will fall behind their more progressive competitors as they become comparatively less efficient. Those who opt to invest in the right tech reap the rewards and move ahead.

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Ready For the Next Step?

The Apex CoVantage technologies described in this Guide are already helping some of the world's largest publishers modernize their workflows – saving them money while delighting their authors and staff. We'd love to help your organization do the same. Click here to learn more.

About Apex CoVantage

For more than 25 years, Apex CoVantage has been a premiere provider of customized solutions for publishers, libraries, museums, and other content developers.

Through our suite of unique technology solutions and hands-on consulting services, we help our clients achieve modern workflows, drive workflow efficiencies, discover new audiences and revenue, and optimize content for accessibility and search.

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