WORKING TOGETHER FOR OUR READERS

Digital information resources create challenges for creators, publishers and librarians. The challenges are compounded when the worlds of different information workers – who may have opposing priorities – intersect. Glenda Browne explains.

One way of decreasing overload is to increase cooperation. Information professionals also need to constantly monitor digital developments to ensure that decisions are based on current options, not those of the past.

Cooperation is needed both within sectors and across sectors. As a member of ALIA and the Australian Society of Authors, I sometimes find the two societies on opposing sides of discussions (for example, to do with copyright or parallel importation). I value it most when they work together for common goals. In digital publishing, it is often libraries and publishers who have different priorities, but they, too, can work together.

> Users might be the ultimate focus, but unless we have viable publishing operations (commercial or not) we won't have books for readers to consume.

The International Digital Publishing Forum (idpf.org), which develops and maintains the EPUB ebook standard, is an example of cooperation between competitors. For example, the EDUPUB standard for educational EPUB ebooks is based on a major contribution from Pearson, with input from other publishers such as Wiley. Some library-related organisations are part of IDPF, and can help readers by influencing core standards.

Monitoring of the ebook environment is necessary to ensure that library decisions reflect current options, not past ones. This is challenging, as, for example, recent research shows that some students prefer print books, while other research shows that students value ebooks for the special benefits they provide, including interactive content. As ebooks and users develop, priorities will change.

Some ebooks have omitted features that are present in their print counterparts, including images and indexes. As standards develop, ebooks will overcome some of these initial limitations. For example, the EPUB Indexes specification will make it easier for publishers to provide ebooks with quality, linked indexes. (I discussed some of this in a presentation at VALA 2014 – bit.ly/1PVtkS5).

Librarians should continue to work with other players in the digital future to ensure the best implementation of the best possible features for all users.

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