

PUTTING A PHENOMENON TO GOOD WORK

When you see articles about Bloomsbury in the press they often start out 'Harry Potter publisher...'. But this is changing. Bloomsbury has, in recent years, invested heavily in areas outside of trade and fiction, notably in academic, digital and library products. In 2014, they won the Bookseller Industry Award for Academic, Educational & Professional Publisher of the Year for the second year running, impressive results for a company which only started its academic program six years earlier. Building the program at a remarkable rate, the Academic & Professional Division now publishes around 1,400 titles a year, has a vast backlist of 20,000+ titles, and last year launched its own ebook platform, Bloomsbury Collections. So how did they do it, and why?

To understand the Bloomsbury phenomenon, let's first go back to 1997. After eight other publishers had rejected JK Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, Bloomsbury signed up the first book in the series, and it quickly became a bestseller. The books have sold over 450 million copies worldwide and the final instalment, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, became the fastest-selling book ever, with 2.65 million copies purchased in the first 24 hours in the UK. Harry Potter has been credited with improving literacy by encouraging children to read more widely, and appeared on the best books lists of the American Library Association and *School Library Journal*, among others.

As well as being a leader in children's publishing, Bloomsbury has had, from the time of its founding in 1986 by Nigel Newton, a reputation for quality adult fiction and non-fiction. Authors include Khaled Hosseini, Nadine Gordimer, Margaret Atwood, Michael Ondaatje, William Boyd, Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall, Elizabeth Gilbert and Heston Blumenthal. Reference works which should be familiar to all libraries include the Wisden and Whitaker's titles, *Who's Who*, and *Reeds Nautical*.

Having established such great success as a trade publisher, and having amassed significant cash reserves, what was next for this independent publisher?

Bloomsbury chose to counter balance the success of its volatile and successful consumer publishing with the greater dependability and higher margins of academic



A team for change (left to right): Jonathan Glasspool, MD Academic & Professional; Jenny Ridout, Editorial Director Drama & Performance Studies; Eela Devani, Business Development Director, Digital; Matt Kibble, Digital Publisher; Kathryn Earle, Head of Visual Arts.

publishing. It is now an unusual publisher, combining academic and consumer publishing, where traditionally media conglomerates have focused on consumer publishing, and academic publishing has been the province of university presses.

There is no question that the academic books benefit from Bloomsbury's high reputation in trade publishing.

This is just the first indication of a different approach. From the start, the publisher has challenged academic publishing nostrums by publishing its first titles under an Open Content business model. Select titles were available for all to read in full, without author fee, in the belief that increased discoverability would lead to more – rather than fewer – print sales.

Bloomsbury continues to support accessibility and has published around 100 books under the Creative Commons and Bloomsbury Open licences. Today, these are available to read on the Bloomsbury Collections platform.

You don't build up a library of 20,000+ titles in five years with only a home-grown list, and the majority of growth has come from Bloomsbury's acquisitions and investment in digital publishing. Over the last six years, Bloomsbury has acquired a long list of companies and imprints: The Arden Shakespeare, Continuum, Berg Publishers, Bristol Classical Press, Fairchild Books, AVA and Tottel, and Hart joined Methuen Drama, which had been acquired in 2007.

With so many imprints and companies coming together, some of which were publishing in the same disciplines, Bloomsbury has had a major task on its hands to bring order to the array of imprints. Head of UK Academic Marketing, Jennifer Howell, remembers proofing a media studies flyer which contained no fewer than five logos and sent the poor customer off to three websites. She wanted to weep. Although many imprints were well known and loved, some hard decisions had to be made if Bloomsbury wanted to avoid a branding car crash.

Newly published Continuum, Berg, and Bristol Classical Press books were rebranded as Bloomsbury. Where imprint histories were long and firmly established – Methuen Drama, Arden Shakespeare, T&T Clark, Fairchild Books – the imprints were kept, but under the Bloomsbury umbrella brand. AVA Books were rebranded as Fairchild Books. Communicating these changes to libraries remains an ongoing challenge, and though there are always short term issues with any change, Bloomsbury believes it is the right thing to do by both customers and suppliers.

As well as expanding its print program, Bloomsbury has reacted to the times and changes in the library environment with a range of online resources for students and academics available on subscription and/or perpetual access.

The Berg Fashion Library (2010) won a pile of awards, including the Dartmouth Medal and ALA Outstanding Reference Source. In 2012, Bloomsbury digitised 800,000 original documents in collaboration with the Churchill Archives Centre in Cambridge, making them available in Australia and libraries worldwide for the first time. The Churchill Archive stands as a digital library of modern international history. Drama Online (2013) now contains 1000+ plays, enhanced with play tools and critical analysis, from Methuen Drama, Arden Shakespeare, and Faber and Faber.

Last year saw the launch of Bloomsbury's own ebooks platform, Bloomsbury Collections. This platform offers digital rights management-free collections from across the

humanities and social sciences, and will offer 4,000 titles by March this year. Bloomsbury Collections is truly diverse, including The International Critical Commentary 1901–2014, The Churchill Collection, Japanese History Landmark Texts (from the Bloomsbury Academic Collections print sets), Classical Literature Archive 1994–2012, and a range of frontlist collections in subjects such as education, philosophy, linguistics and law (Hart).

Bloomsbury is now the number one academic visual arts publisher in the world, and Bloomsbury-owned Fairchild Books is a market leader in fashion studies. So it seemed natural to launch Bloomsbury Fashion Central, intended to become the 'go to' site for fashion scholars, lecturers, students and professionals. It will include two new online libraries: Fairchild Books Library, comprising over 140 fashion textbooks and course materials will be available mid-2015, and Fashion Photography Archive will launch in 2016. Curated by Valerie Steele, the latter will include over 600,000 runway, backstage and street style images, supported by hundreds of articles, audio and video files.

If the extent and range of Bloomsbury's program surprises you, they won't be offended. Changing the perception of a publishing house takes time. Bloomsbury remains proud of their fiction, cookery and trade non-fiction program, and of Harry Potter. But don't be surprised if the introduction articles about this publisher start to talk about 'Academic publisher Bloomsbury...' instead of Harry Potter in the future.



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