

APE 2008: Pre-conference day – The purpose of publishing, education and training course for younger academic publishers.

Tutorial 2: Providing readers with the Google experience (user experience)

Brill's publications on Google's BookSearch platform

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1. Introduction

In this paper, Brill's participation as "early adopter" in the GooglePrint initiative, as it was called at that time, launched at the Frankfurt bookfair in 2004, is outlined, and first results and gained insights are briefly discussed in due course. Facts, like traffic and usage data, are given and analyzed. An overview of benefits for Brill publication readers, authors, and the publisher itself are briefly reviewed and used for a brief discussion of assumed future needs of current and future user generations of Google's book search tool, and its upcoming competitors.

2. About Brill

Founded in 1683 in Leiden, The Netherlands, Brill is a leading international academic publisher in the fields of Ancient Near East and Egypt, Middle East and Islamic Studies, Asian Studies (including the Hotei imprint), Classical Studies, Medieval and Early Modern Studies, Biblical and Religious Studies, Social Sciences, Biology, Science (the VSP imprint), Human Rights and Public International Law (the Martinus Nijhoff imprint). With offices in Leiden and Boston (MA), USA, Brill today publishes more than 100 journals and about 500 new books and reference works each year. Almost all publications released by Brill nowadays are written in the English language, with the occasional exception of a work in the French or German language.

In addition, Brill is a major provider of primary source materials online and on microform for researchers in the humanities and social sciences through its imprint IDC Publishers. In principle, all publications are available in print or microform, as well as in electronic form.

3. E-publishing @ Brill

3.1. Overview

From the subscription year 2000 onwards, literally all Brill journals have been made electronically available, through the Ingenta platform [1]. Also in 2000, Brill started to offer selected book titles as e-books through some selected vendors, who are primarily focusing on the institutional (librarian's) market, like Netlibrary [2] and e-brary [3], in addition to some others. From 2005 onwards a few hundred books, primarily Humanities titles, have become available on Questia's platform [4], which actually marks the first Brill experiment of offering e-books to individuals. In 2005 Brill launched its reference platform called Brillonline [5], through which many of Brill's Major Reference Works and Encyclopedias are made available electronically. In 2005, partnerships with both Amazon [6] and Google [7] have been entered into, to allow indexing of most of Brill's book titles through Amazon's "Search Inside the Book" and "GooglePrint, also named Google's BookSearch (GBS)" program, respectively. Both services, although slightly different in their purpose and market approach, do have in common that their primary market certainly is that of the individuals.

Finally, it is worth to mention that since 2005, some selected IDC microfilm collections have been made available electronically through IDC's digilib application [8].

3.2. Traffic to HP

Within the context of this paper, it is important to understand the various ways Brill customers (primarily authors, readers and librarians) approach ("find") Brill's homepage: www.brill.nl.

About half of all web-visits on brill.nl enter the publisher's homepage through either Google (40%) or Yahoo! (10%), while GoogleScholar accounts for another approximate 10%. Brill's participation on Google BookSearch accounts for additional traffic to the site, currently at a single digit % level. Navigation to the site directly is undertaken by approximately 40% of all visitors. That figure is certainly remarkable and confirms Brill's strong brand recognition.

3.3. Brill publications on Google's BookSearch platform

Since summer 2005, about 6000 Brill titles (under the imprints Brill, MNP and VSP, respectively) have been uploaded to the GBS platform [9]. From October 2007, a workflow has been in place to allow the regular uploading of all new book titles, immediately after publication. For all these titles, cross-links are available between the individual title's product site on Brill.nl and GBS, respectively, and an extended choice of purchase options for the customer within the Google environment.

Additionally, a huge amount of currently commercially non-available (except for any occasional 2nd hand opportunities), so-called out-of-print titles have been uploaded to the GBS. A significant amount of these titles have been published in the 19th century, under the Brill imprint, which itself is in used since 1849/1850. These "archive" titles so far lack cross-link facilities between their own product homepages at either brill.nl or their GBS site, as well as purchase opportunities. Brill, however, is evaluating,

primarily from feedback received from customers, market opportunities to republish selected titles from this list in the future.

E-access and POD facilities, which have been expected to be launched by Google for quite some time already would, if coupled to the initial GBS indexing platform, allow Brill (like all other publishers) to keep publications (digitally) available to customers relatively easily as well as long term. Such approach would represent an alternative to serve existing and future archive needs, both of the community and the publisher itself, as libraries would not be involved in such a set-up.

4. Discussion and conclusion

4.1. Impact

Up until the end of 2007, all book titles Brill has uploaded to the GBS platform generated approximately 4.5 million book-visits so far, of which about 25% (1.2 million) have been viewed books and have generated a total of 14.4 million page views. This calculates an average of 10–11 page-views per session/visit. About 3.5% (+40,000) of all those customers who have viewed pages of Brill publications on the GBS platform have clicked onto the “Buy this Book” link on the GBS product page of individual Brill books, to inquire for further product information, e.g. purchase opportunities. About one third of all BTB clickers have done so by approaching the product page on brill.nl.

Although final evidence is missing, it is strongly believed that the increased visibility of in particular deep backlist titles has supported the sales figures of individual titles, in line with the ‘long tail’ theory.

4.2. Benefits

The overall traffic and usage of Brill's publications within the GBS environment confirm that the great majority of Brill's book publications remain academically relevant for a long period of time. This effect is certainly caused by the nature of the academic areas of research typically served by Brill's publications, e.g. the Humanities. A large amount of those Brill books which are showing these huge traffic figures have not been made electronically accessible by the publisher in the past for a variety of reasons. Through GBS, these publications became visible for the first time on the internet. This looks likely to be a great service in particular also for those researchers who lack access to these works through an academic library, for example. As an additional benefit, it is in essence for the first time possible to gain a quantified picture of traffic and usage for academic books, from the publisher's point of view.

4.3. Conclusion

Usage and traffic data gained so far through the GBS platform undoubtedly indicate that the great majority of Brill titles attract interest from a presumably large public.

From these sheer figures, it is concluded that the user experience(s) must be predominantly positive. One has to divide users into at least three different categories in this context:

1. *Reading customers* all over the globe can find publications in their fields of interest relatively easily, check limited portions of the text for relevance, and are enabled to decide whether to purchase such a title, from various vendors, quickly and almost hassle-free. In pre-internet times, such a discovery, if possible at all, would have taken days, if not weeks.

2. *Authors* are benefiting as well, as they are gaining attention for their own works from a much broader audience through participation in GBS.
3. *Publishers*, last but not least, as the representative of their authors, benefit from the increased attention a title can gain through participation in GBS in at least three ways: (a) by becoming an even more attractive choice for authors as their preferred publisher, (b) by generating additional sales, and (c) by being able to digitize the book backlist titles through Google at a very limited cost.

If monetizing tools, such as the earlier mentioned e-access and POD facilities would be made available within the GBS environment, an additional benefit would arise for publishers, certainly for the smaller ones, namely that (deep) BL titles could remain “in print” perpetually at little, if any, cost to the publishers. Such a solution would eventually be to the benefit of all three major stakeholders, namely readers, authors and publishers.

One can safely state that the participation in the GBS program with all its benefits mentioned in this paper so far *supports the publisher Brill in its mission* to allow the best possible access and dissemination to its published works. Whether this happens through the printed or electronic version of any given publications is of no relevance in principle, as long as all different customer demands are served appropriately. Google's book search platform enables Brill to reach new groups of customers, of which many in the pre-internet times most likely were unable to access Brill books.

Therefore, the internet, which has been available to the mass audience on a broad scale for no more than 15 years, has significantly changed academic (book) publishing in a relatively short period. Google's book search program, launched in 2004, i.e. approximately 10 years after internet became a widely used medium, constitutes a milestone for the academic book publishing business. Academic books – like journals – nowadays can reach a much greater number of its potential readers, everywhere and any time, and with little effort.

5. Outlook

Three and a half years after the introduction of Google's BookSearch, and at a time when Microsoft's Live Book Search tool, and the Libreka! Initiative of the Deutsche Boersenverein, among others, have just been launched, it may be safely stated that Google has greatly influenced the (academic) book market with its formerly called GooglePrint initiative. Whether any of the mentioned alternatives or any others yet to come, or the whole Open Access Movement in general, will also influence the way academic books and other works are published, and if so to what extent, only time will tell. Academic publisher will have to monitor closely a number of related issues, such as Google's long term commitment to GBS and its related products, any financial implications, but clearly also all developments regarding any Semantic Web application.

So far, the internet in general and GBS in particular have made a great impact onto the academic book publishing business in a relative short period of time. GBS certainly represents a new and valuable tool to experience book publications.

The most important question, however, remains: Does this tool serve all needs of current and future users? Still, customers have to wait for access facilities (e-access, POD) to books on the GBS platform. In the academic field of publishing, however, readers are often prepared to pay considerable amounts for ‘must have’ knowledge. The current GBS approach unfortunately does not answer all customer needs in

that respect. Any of the upcoming alternatives may fill in this gap eventually, but that is speculation at this moment.

Regarding any of the literature search habits and principal needs of the upcoming and future generations, one can only speculate. Already the current generation of 'young researcher' considers almost only material which is available and accessible online as existing. Therefore, a great task remains for the content providers (publishers) and the search institutions (like Google, Microsoft and Yahoo!), namely: how to make the content, which has been digitized at considerable costs, fully available, while respecting all (copy-)rights of all stakeholders involved? As customers these days tend not to accept second best solutions, all stakeholders involved will have to offer acceptable tools to allow access to academic book publications as soon as possible.

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