

2010

The Open publishing guide—development: phase two

Patricia Albanese

Matthew Bernius

Rachael Gootnick

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarworks.rit.edu/books>

Recommended Citation

Albanese, Patricia; Bernius, Matthew; and Gootnick, Rachael, "The Open publishing guide—development: phase two" (2010).

Accessed from

<http://scholarworks.rit.edu/books/86>

This Full-Length Book is brought to you for free and open access by RIT Scholar Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in Books by an authorized administrator of RIT Scholar Works. For more information, please contact ritscholarworks@rit.edu.

The Open Publishing Guide— Development: Phase Two

By

Patricia Albanese

Gannett Distinguished Professor,

School of Print Media

Co-Director, Open Publishing Lab

Matthew Bernius

Co-Director, Open Publishing Lab

Rachael Gootnick

Project Lead, Open Publishing Guide

Rochester Institute of Technology

A Research Monograph of the
Printing Industry Center at RIT

No. PICRM-2010-05

The Open Publishing Guide— Development: Phase Two

By

Patricia Albanese
Gannett Distinguished Professor, School of Print Media
Co-Director, Open Publishing Lab

Matthew Bernius
Co-Director, Open Publishing Lab

Rachael Gootnick
Project Lead, Open Publishing Guide

Rochester Institute of Technology



A Research Monograph of the
Printing Industry Center at RIT
Rochester, NY
January 2010

PICRM-2010-05

© 2010 Printing Industry Center at RIT— All rights reserved.

The research agenda of the Printing Industry Center at RIT and the publication of research findings are supported by the following organizations:



Table of Contents

Introduction.....	3
Structure and Construction of the Open Publishing Guide.....	4
November 2008 – August 2009: “Soft Launch” and Beyond	6
Methodology.....	7
Discussion of Quantitative Findings from Site Statistics	8
Discussion of Qualitative Findings from Interpersonal Interactions.....	13
Conclusions and the Future of the Guide	15
References.....	18

Introduction

The Open Publishing Guide (OPG) is unique among the research projects initiated by the Printing Industry Center. Whereas the majority of the Center's efforts focus on experimental research and/or surveys of business practices and literature, the research findings from the OPG are generated as a by-product of its core mission: to be an online resource for non-professionals interested in self-publishing. As outlined in our previous monograph, *The Open Publishing Guide: Creating a Self-Publishing Website Using Open Source Content Management Tools* (Albanese, Bernius, Conklin, Crespo & Gootnick, 2008), the OPG was created to meet a perceived lack of unbiased and easy to understand information for everyday persons who wish to take advantage of print-on-demand technologies in order to publish their own work. As will be discussed within this monograph, all of the anecdotal, qualitative, and quantitative research collected since the public "soft launch" of the OPG in November of 2008 affirms the initial hypothesis: there is a significant demand on the Internet for high quality, easy-to-read, and—most importantly—actionable information about self-publishing. What was revealed in the data is that the information that users are looking for may be a bit different than was initially expected by the OPG team.

In addition to providing a structural overview of the OPG, this monograph focuses on data collected during the nine months since the website's public launch (from November 2008 to July 2009). It will then present interpretations of the collected data. The report concludes with a discussion of the future of the OPG in lieu of these findings. In particular, it will address alternate methods for publicizing the OPG's content and funding the ongoing maintenance of the site.

Structure and Construction of the Open Publishing Guide

The Open Publishing Guide (<http://opg.cias.rit.edu>) is divided into five sections:

1. *About* – Information about the site and how to use it.
2. *Resources* – Links to content and assets across the web and a glossary of publishing terms.
3. *Community* – A section of the site that encourage interaction between users, and also aggregates up-to-the-minute information about news developments within the world of self-publishing.
4. *The Self-Publishing Advisor* – An interactive directory of online print-on-demand services.
5. *Publishing Step-By-Step* – A series of articles that sequentially covers each stage of the publishing process (Plan, Create, Layout & Design, Publish).

Content in each of these sections is written in a friendly, colloquial tone. When recommendations are made about self-publishing software tools and resources, the guide presents consumer-friendly tools such as Microsoft Word and open-source software solutions alongside industry recognized packages such as Adobe InDesign. The rationale for these decisions is that the average person interested in self-publishing does not have either the technical or financial wherewithal to invest the training time or the money in high-cost, expert tools.¹

Programmatically, the OPG is built upon the open-source Drupal content management system. Within an Internet browser, the OPG loads like any other website. On the back end, however, Drupal dynamically assembles the web pages as visitors request them, pulling content and page layout designs from a database. Using word-processor-like authoring tools, OPG administrators are able to easily add, edit, and delete content and pages from the site. This also ensures that people without formal experience editing HTML will be able to directly modify the content of the OPG. Drupal's reliance on page templates allows design modifications to be quickly applied to every page on the site.

In addition to Drupal, there are a number of other web technologies and services deployed on the OPG. Our *Self-Publishing Advisor* is built using Adobe Flash and Adobe Flex, two industry standards for the creation of dynamic, interactive web content.

1 - We recognize that some members of the OPG's audience represent publishing "prosumers" – individuals, often referred to as hobbyists, who aspire to master the expert tools of a given industry, trade, or artistic practice (Kotler, 1986). While these individuals are not the primary audience of the OPG, the site's inclusion of information on industry standard software is evidence of our commitment to providing information to them as well. In fact, whenever possible, the OPG gently encourages visitors to upgrade their skills, moving them towards self-identifying with the prosumer category.

The site's tutorial video content is hosted by *Vimeo.com*,² a video sharing website. While functionally Vimeo is not unlike Google's YouTube service, it has established a niche for itself hosting professionally focused, tutorial content. To users visiting our website, it appears that the videos exist on our servers, and no additional steps are required for them to access the videos. Additionally, there are two other advantages to using a third party video hosting service. First, Vimeo's servers are specifically optimized for serving video, which provides the best viewing experience for OPG visitors. Secondly, external hosting makes our videos available both through the OPG website and also through Vimeo's own website. As will be discussed later, this provides an additional opportunity for users to serendipitously discover our content and also drives traffic to the OPG.

The final, and, in terms of this monograph, arguably most important web service used by the OPG is *Google Analytics*.³ This free service provided by Google allows users to establish and track various web metrics related to visitor traffic, including unique visitors to the site, unique page views, entry and exit pages, and top referring sites. As will be discussed, these tools provide us with a quantitative understanding of OPG user behaviors.

2 - <http://vimeo.com/>

3 - <http://www.google.com/analytics/>

November 2008 – August 2009: “Soft Launch” and Beyond

The period from which we draw our data featured a number of important milestones for the Open Publishing Guide (OPG), beginning with its “soft launch” in mid November, corresponding with the annual Printing Industry Center Symposium. Soft launching, or releasing a website without publicity, is a common tactic used when offering new services on the Internet. The OPG was publicly available, but no press releases or advertisements were issued. The only way that individuals could reach the site was by entering the site’s URL directly into their web browser, following links placed on the Open Publishing Lab and Printing Industry Center websites, or via an Internet search.⁴ There are two primary advantages to soft launching a site such as the OPG. The first is that it provides the site developers with additional testing time, ensuring that everything (rich media applications, links, spelling and grammar) is functioning correctly. Not unlike a dress rehearsal, when there are problems, the effects are seen only by a small audience of visitors. The second advantage is that a soft launch allows a content-rich site such as the OPG to continue to build its archive of material while soliciting feedback from a select subset of users. During this period, we ran a number of user tests with students and staff from the Rochester Institute of Technology (as well as an additional “outside” user) to gather usability feedback that was used to enhance the look and feel of the site.

The first public announcement of the site came as part of a presentation that the Open Publishing Lab directors gave at the 2009 O’Reilly Tools of Change for Publishing Conference on February 9th in New York City. As a result of the presentation, news about the OPG and other OPL projects were reported via attendees’ Twitter feeds and were also picked up on a number of publishing blogs. The site experienced a corresponding surge in traffic, which will be further discussed in the “Discussion” section. The larger audience also provided us with more qualitative feedback on site functionality via e-mail and other forms of direct feedback.

During this same time, two important features were added to the site. To ensure that the OPG provided the “freshest” possible content, a news feed was added to the Community section of the site. Using Real Simple Syndication (RSS) technology, the Latest News page aggregates interesting self-publishing related news and editorial content from across the web. This self-publishing clearinghouse is updated numerous times throughout the week. Also added to the Community section were a series of discussion boards, whose goal is to encourage conversation between site visitors.

The OPG officially launched on May 2nd at the 2009 Imagine RIT: Innovation + Creativity Festival, with an official public announcement. In addition to a presence at the main OPL booth in the festival’s showcase area (also known as the “WOW Center”),

4 - Note that by Internet search, we mean, for example, a Google search on a term like “self publishing” rather than a direct search on the term “open publishing guide.”

the OPG also had a presence within the Wallace Memorial Library’s Publishing Scholarly Support Center. At both locations, visitors were able to browse the site and pick up promotional material. Additionally, at the Publishing Scholarly Support Center Rachael Gootnick (the project lead for the OPG) and OPG staff members Ryan Snyder and Sean Conklin were on hand to answer specific self-publishing questions that visitors had. This event provided us with a wealth of qualitative feedback, both on the site itself and also on its utility for people who were interested in publishing their own works but didn’t know where to start. Again, following the festival, the site experienced a rise in traffic.

However, during the summer, the OPG experienced a seasonal downturn in traffic. This reduction was mitigated by a lecture program given by Rachael Gootnick at the Henrietta Public Library as part of a marketing effort to “take the OPG” to where its niche audience resides. While it is too early to quantitatively judge the results of this effort, the talks provided an invaluable source for qualitative feedback. Several Rochester-area libraries also have promotional bookmarks about the OPG available.

Methodology

The qualitative and quantitative data for this report was gathered during a period from mid-November of 2008 to the end of August 2009. The data was gathered from a wide range of sources, including the previously mentioned Google Analytics, feedback from one-on-one user tests, comments e-mailed in from site visitors, and interactions with individuals at various public presentations of the OPG. Taken as a whole, it provides us with a better understanding of what content is of most interest to our users and the necessary steps to launch and maintain content-based projects like the OPG. In addition to sharing these findings, this monograph will also discuss some of the limits of these research methods to generate a complete picture of the OPG’s “ecosystem” and propose alternative methods for gathering supplemental user feedback.

Discussion of Quantitative Findings from Site Statistics

Google Analytics is a powerful, free statistical tracking tool that is integrated into a third party website through the addition of a short string of “tracker” Javascript code to the pages one wishes to track. Thanks to our use of the Drupal platform, the tracker was applied to all pages of OPG. Once in place, the tracker passes information about site traffic over a secure connection back to the Google servers. This information is retrieved via an interactive web interface accessible through the Google Analytics site. This interface provides users with a rich suite of tools for managing the capture, retrieval, and analysis of web data. The analytical tools provided by Google, including advanced features such as specific reporting on advertising campaign activities, rival those of many high-priced web statistics services and exceed the standard statistical packages offered by most web hosts.

For the purposes of this report, we are most concerned with a subset of those statistics. The specific statistics that are of the most value to a website are measured in terms of unique *visitors* and unique *visits* to the site. These two categories allow us to measure how many individual users visit the website and how often those visits occur. “Unique” is a critical concept in web statistics, allowing us to differentiate between 100 people visiting a website once, and a single person visiting the website 100 times.⁵ These statistics, along with others that will be discussed below, allow us to understand user movements and select user behaviors at both the site and the page level.

It is important to note that these traffic reports are quantitative statistics. Therefore, we use the phrases “user movements” and “select user behaviors” as a reminder that they are best at providing information about “who” was “where” at a given time. These reports also provide information about where the user came from, how long they spent at our site, and their navigation within our site. From this we can make a number of educated guesses about our content. However, it is not good practice to use these reports for making qualitative judgments such as “whether or not a visitor liked the content” or if a given page was “useful.”⁶ Results from our qualitative research will be discussed in the next section.

In addition to selecting what traffic data one wishes to analyze, the other critical variable to consider is over which intervals to measure data. Web traffic, like the traffic you encounter on the road, can vary heavily by hour, by day, by week, and by month. While it is possible to parse web traffic in units as small as visitors per second, that isn't the

5 - The realization that web traffic could be easily inflated by a single user making multiple return visits led both to the development of the “unique” category and, more importantly, the rise of robust services and tools for tracking website traffic (like Google Analytics).

6 - For an excellent, in-depth discussion on interpreting quantitative traffic reports and their limitations, see chapters 7 & 8 in Goto and Cotler's *Web ReDesign 2.0: Workflow That Works* – now available online at: <http://www.web-redesign.com/>

most effective way to measure user activity. The two primary units we have chosen for this report are *weeks* and *months*. Because week over week traffic is similar in terms of pattern (if not the proportion of unique visitors), it is a more stable measure than looking at daily traffic, which fluctuates significantly (and predictably) from Monday to Sunday.

For the first 108 weeks, the OPG averaged 72 unique visitors a week and had an average of 14% week-over-week growth in unique visitors (see Figure 1). The highest number of unique visitors, 151, was recorded the week of February 22, corresponding with the O'Reilly Tools of Change conference. On eight separate occasions the site received over 100 unique visitors per week. On average, 39% of each week's unique visitors returned for at least one more visit during the same week.

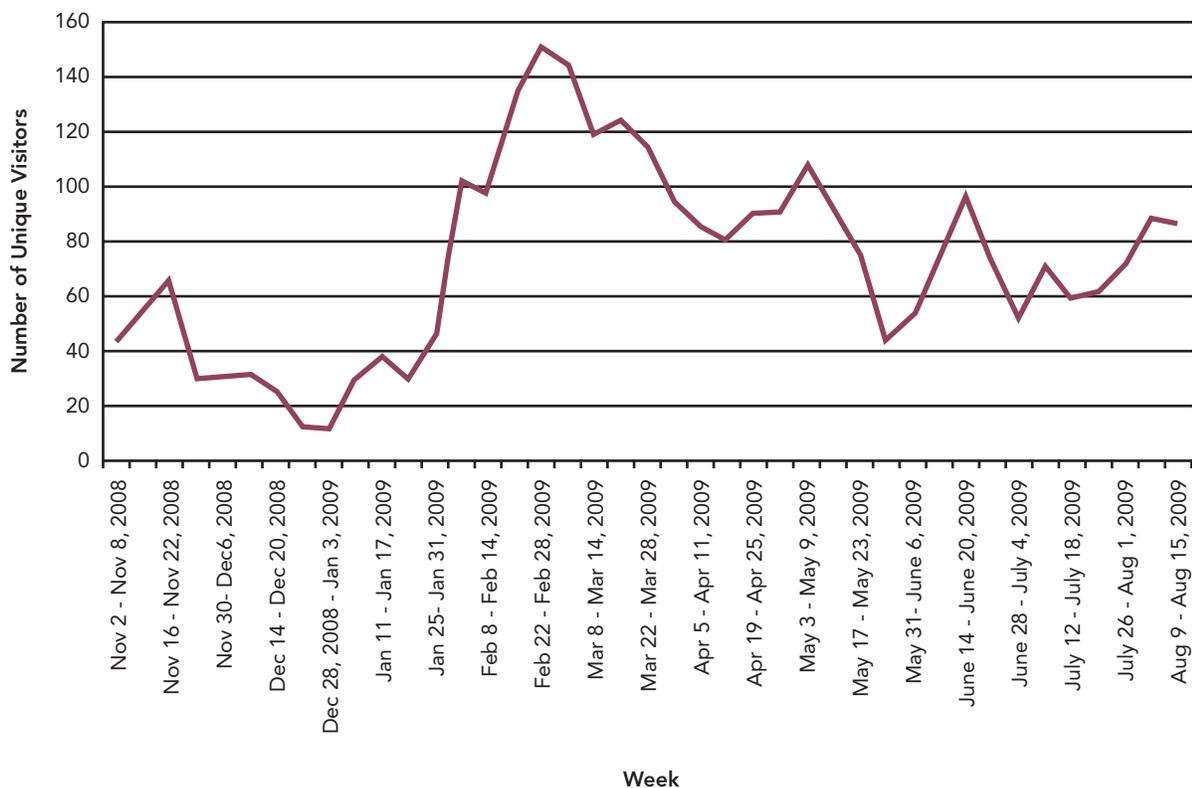


Figure 1. Unique visitors by week

Comparing these statistics to those of other sites is a difficult task. We have long since passed the phase of the web where, borrowing from the 1989 film *Field of Dreams*, “if you build it, they will come.” For the majority of those nine months the site was in a soft launch mode where it was not being publicized. It is also noteworthy that once the site was announced at Tools of Change there was an uptick in traffic to the site. Further, when looking at monthly statistics a number of positive trends emerge.

Discussion of Quantitative Findings from Site Statistics

When evaluating a content site like the OPG, it is hard to understate the value of the returning unique visitors metric. While it is difficult to make judgments about the value of content from quantitative statistics, a correlation can be drawn between the utility of a resource and how many visitors, on average, return to take advantage of it. When we shift from the weekly to the monthly view, our average return rate rises from 37% to 43%. As demonstrated in Figure 2, from December of 2008 to June of 2008 the OPG saw relatively consistent growth in the number of unique monthly visitors who returned at least one more time during that month. March is a predictable outlier due to the influx of new traffic due to the Tools of Change conference.

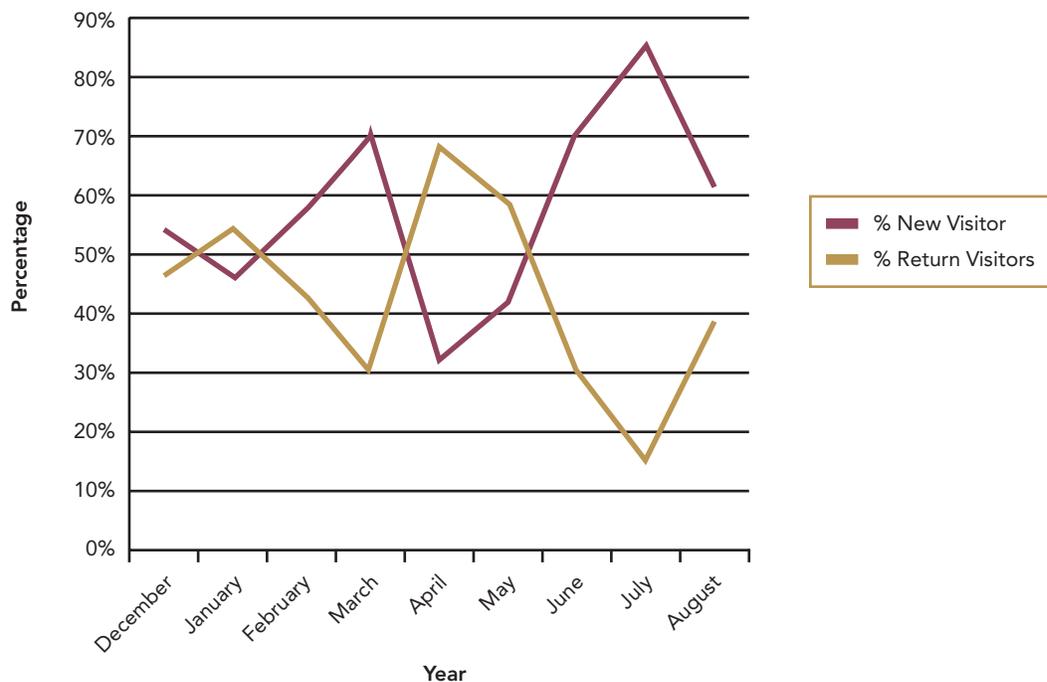


Figure 2. Percent of returning visitors by month

There are also seasonal traffic patterns to consider in the analysis of web traffic. Year over year comparisons of data gathered on global web traffic since 2002 demonstrates a consistent yearly cycle (AT Internet Institute, 2009). The expected cycle builds for the first half of the year, experiences a significant drop off in traffic for the summer months, and then a parabolic increase in traffic from September to December, corresponding with the approach of major social and religious holidays (ibid). The week-by-week statistics (Figure 1) demonstrate a similar trend. It is important to note that while traffic to the site decreased during the summer, there is a significant increase in the number of new users to the site (Figure 2). Our belief is that influx of new users corresponds to the site's public launch and Rachael Gootnick's efforts to market the site at local libraries and other Rochester area organizations.

When we look at traffic patterns at the page level in terms of total number of visits to a page (Table 1), the three most popular sections of the site by far are the *Public Domain Resources*, *Print On Demand Profiles*, and the *Self-Publishing Advisor*. Looking to the top ten pages, more than half of the top most requested pages focus on learning about various content and print-on-demand resources. In addition to the three resource pages already mentioned, *Free Software Tools*, *Marketing Resources*, and the information page for *Public Domain Pictures.net* all drew significant traffic. Of the tutorial pages, the only two that break the top ten are the overview page to publishing step by step and the page that is dedicated to design and layout. It is also interesting to note that of the two pages, *Layout & Design* got 81 more visits even though it technically is below the other page in site navigation hierarchy.⁷

Table 1. Top pages based on total number of visits

Ranking	Page	Total Visits
1	Public Domain Resources	1366
2	Print On Demand Profiles	983
3	Self-Publishing Advisor	733
4	Latest News	637
5	Free Software Tools	543
6	Publishing Step By Step - Layout & Design	511
7	What is Publishing Step By Step?	430
8	Marketing Resources	390
9	About	358
10	Public Domain Pictures.net	271

When we evaluate content based on the average number of visitors per month, some subtle but noteworthy shifts occur.⁸ *Connect and Share* and *Author Community*, two pages added later to the site as part of our community features rise to the number three and four spots respectively; our community *Forums* enter into the seventh slot (see Table 2).

⁷ - For a number of reasons, this type of non-linear browsing is quite common on content-based websites. Causes can include the placement of links to “deep content” on various key pages, the fact the site uses a drop down navigation that gives the user the ability to browse to the *Layout & Design* page from any page on the site, visitors who enter the site via search engines, and return visitors who may have bookmarked the page.

⁸ - Part of the reason for the shift between the two charts is that there have been some significant content updates to the OPG since its launch. As previously noted, the community features of the website were not available when the site launched, and thus are lower ranked in Table 1 which sums total visits since the site was launched. If present trends hold, the community features will break the Total Hits Top 10 by the end of 2009.

Discussion of Quantitative Findings from Site Statistics

Table 2. Top pages based on average number of visits per month

Ranking	Page	Avg. Visits/Mo.
1	Public Domain Resources	137
2	Print On Demand Profiles	98
3	Connect and Share	78
4	Author Community	77
5	Self-Publishing Advisor	73
6	Help	66
7	Forums	65
8	Latest News	64
9	Publishing Steps	62
10	References	56

What both tables reveal is the popularity of the reference content, including the self-publishing information. With the exception of the home page, *Public Domain Resources* and *Print On Demand Profiles* are the two most popular pages on the site by a significant margin. It's also worth noting that there is also a noticeable difference in popularity between those two pages.

One explanation for the popularity of the *Resource* content can be attributed to one of the methods that visitors use to get to the OPG. Since the launch of the site, over 450 unique visitors have been directed to the OPG via Google and other search engines. Table 3 displays the top 15 keywords used to find the site with the corresponding percentage of search engine traffic that they have driven:

Table 3. Top search engine keyword by total percentage of referrals

Ranking	Search Keyword	Pct. of Total Search Engine Traffic
1	open publishing guide	16%
2	bartleby dictionary	15%
3	open publishing guide toc*	12%
4	rit opg	5%
5	book1one**	4%
6	opg opl rit	4%
7	public domain clip art	4%
8	public domain clipart	2%
9	smultron column mode***	2%
10	public domain pictures	2%
11	free software	2%
12	step layout	1%
13	bartleby's dictionary	1%
14	public domain cliparts	1%
15	on demand photobook publishers	1%

* "toc" is short for Tools of Change. ** A print on-demand site. *** A Mac text editor.

Excluding searches based on the name of the OPG, it's clear to see that the vast majority of search engine traffic to the OPG is the result of different self-publishing support resource keywords. It's worth noting that the OPG book1one profile page is the fourth link provided by Google when you search for *book1one*. Equally impressive is that the OPG's Clip Art resource page appears on the fifth page of a Google search for *public domain clip art*. Given the countless number of web pages dedicated to clip art, it is quite a feat to break the top 60 links on Google.

The last quantitative data point of note is the amount of time that a visitor spends on the OPG. On average, a visitor to the OPG will spend seven minutes on the site. Considering the traffic patterns discussed above, many of those visitors are using the OPG to find resources to assist them with a publishing task at hand. Given that the OPG's role in such a transaction is directing visitors to other sites, a seven-minute stop suggests that beyond links, the Guide is offering interesting enough content to hold its visitor's attention for a short time. Again, as discussed above, we cannot make a value judgment as to whether a visitor considers the time well spent. However, it does suggest that additional research should be performed to better understand what is occurring during the time that a visitor is on the site.

Discussion of Qualitative Findings from Interpersonal Interactions

In addition to this quantitative data, the OPG team collected and used qualitative data to further develop the site. There were three primary sources for this data collection. The first source was the OPG's web feedback mechanism. Visitors to the site are encouraged to provide their opinions about the site using a web form. A wide range of feedback has come into the site via this mechanism. Approximately 50% of the e-mails have been from individuals who are in the process of creating books and were interested in getting additional information about self-publishing options. In some cases they were specifically looking for printing information. A number of these e-mails commented that they would like the ability to see how a specific job may be priced across multiple print-on-demand sites. Other e-mailers were nowhere near as far along in the process and were writing to seek general help with getting their projects started. Again, it appears that the primary interest of these users was getting tactical information and assistance in self-publishing.

The other direct correspondence either revolved around very specific technology questions (ex. color management and PDF creation), reporting of site bugs, and website masters who were requesting that the OPG add a link to their public domain content or print service website.

The second source of qualitative feedback was from a series of usability tests that were conducted by Rachael Gootnick during the winter and spring of 2009. Participants in

Discussion of Qualitative Findings from Interpersonal Interactions

the testing were asked to accomplish four tasks at the OPG while Gootnick watched, recorded their progress, and asked them a number of questions. The specific tasks were meant to mimic challenges faced by everyday persons who are engaged in self-publishing. The tasks are listed below:

1. A publishing website just asked you if you would like to upload a color profile with your pictures, and you have no idea what it's talking about. You've heard that the OPG can help you better understand terms like that. Go and find an explanation.
2. You wish to publish a book of pictures you took at a family reunion. You know that you are interested in making something that looks like a hardcover photo book that you would buy at Borders. Using the OPG, find out which publishers will allow you to do that.
3. You are helping a friend of the family publish a memoir about his service in the Korean war. You've heard that there are publicly available maps and pictures that you can use to help illustrate the book. Use the OPG to discover where you can find those resources.
4. You're working on a photo book and you've gathered all of your pictures together, but you're not sure about how to create the actual book. Go to the OPG site and find information on how to create a layout for your book.

In addition to these four questions, the volunteers were also encouraged to comment on the look and feel of the site and offer general comments about the site's content. Three test subjects were selected who matched the demographics of the OPG's primary intended users: individuals who considered themselves creative and are interested in self-publishing, but who do not have a significant amount of technical publishing experience.

This testing provided some valuable information about how users interact with the site. In particular, it became apparent that once a volunteer discovered the search function, this became their first method of choice for seeking specific information within the site. To answer the second question all three volunteers utilized the self-publishing advisor without any prompting. In each case, the volunteers did not spend any time reviewing the applications instructions. Instead, they chose to learn through experimentation, and in two of the three cases were able to quickly answer the question. The third volunteer expressed confusion over the various binding options in the chooser. That feedback was then used to improve the terminology used in the Self-Publishing Advisor.

In general, the volunteers who took part in the usability study were positive about their experience with the site. In fact, one participant who had recently purchased the Adobe Creative Suite said that she would be returning to the OPG to download page templates and watch the tutorial videos.

In addition to the direct feedback and the feedback gained through user testing, we

have also collected feedback from individuals at various live events including O'Reilly Tools of Change, Imagine RIT, and Rachael Gootnick's presentation at the Henrietta Public Library. All of the feedback we collected at these events were extremely positive. In many cases we encountered individuals who might be characterized as suffering from "low publishing self-esteem," meaning that they had an interest in creating their own publications, but were concerned that they would never be able to navigate the process. As summed up in the following quote, people who interacted with the OPG came to believe that they could be successful:

"I had previously been doubting my ability to self-publish, but now, I can't wait to finish my book!"

The majority of the feedback also indicated that the content was written at an appropriate level so as to be useful. Most people were also impressed that the site was a free service.

Conclusions and the Future of the Guide

As previously articulated, the goal of the Open Publishing Guide (OPG) was to create a web resource for non-technical individuals who are interested in self-publishing. In looking at the quantitative and qualitative data it is clear that, in this respect, the site has been a success. Not only have people directly communicated how valuable they found the content, the overall web traffic patterns have demonstrated that the OPG's highest "value" content is its' resource material.

Unfortunately, the fact remains that while the general feedback on the OPG's content is good, overall web traffic to the site is low. To build upon an early comment – we've built it, now we need to decide how we will get people to come. There are multiple approaches to increase traffic to the content. The simplest option, though a costly one, would be to begin to purchase banner advertisements on different sites. As noted, this would involve an ongoing financial commitment to advertising and marketing the site.

Another option would be to continue the recent "softer" outreach efforts that Rachael Gootnick has been engaging in. Her "pilot" talk at the Henrietta Public Library was extremely well received by the attendees; such activities create a lot of "good will" for RIT, the Printing Industry Center, and the Open Publishing Lab and generate good word-of-mouth. However, we have yet to see how that translates to site traffic in the longer term.

There are other soft outreach methods that have been proposed. Gootnick and other members of the OPG team have begun an outreach program to publishing websites. In addition to informing webmasters about the OPG, they have begun to look for discussion boards and comment threads that revolve around topics discussed in the

OPG. When appropriate, they will then post an answer that includes a link back to the OPG. There are two primary advantages to this method of site promotion. First, it is context relevant; Gootnick and the other OPG team members are contributing valuable content to discussions on self-publishing, and in doing so are establishing the OPG as an authoritative source. Secondly, placing links to the OPG on other websites helps its ranking rise in search engines like Google. Based on the statistical trends that we have seen, an increase in ranking helps to bring additional traffic to the site via search engines.

Another outreach possibility that has been discussed is developing K-12 teaching plans based on OPG content. There are a number of advantages to this approach. Each year, the School of Print Media gets numerous requests for help from teachers who are interested in incorporating publishing projects into their class curriculum. An opportunity therefore exists to fulfill these requests with content that already exists within the OPG. However, beyond simply pointing the teachers to the OPG, a better model is to provide specific educational content, including lesson plans and project outlines. The advantage to this approach is that it provides materials to help get the teacher started, rather than expecting them to digest the content of the site on their own. The OPG could reach out to some of the “teach the teacher” programs at RIT, such as the Masters in Art Education, for assistance in the creation of these materials. The second advantage to an educational outreach program such as this is that it helps ensure that students will continue to have hands-on experience within the publishing field. That hands-on experience has long been acknowledged as one of the most important tools there is for recruiting young talent to the printing and publishing fields.

Another possibility for driving traffic to the OPG is strategic partnering. In this model, the OPG would approach various print-on-demand services to see if they would be interested in linking to, or perhaps hosting, portions of OPG content. The advantage to this method is that it would expose a much larger audience to our content. Further, it would be reaching the target audience “where they are” – namely, reaching people interested in self-publishing at services focused on self-publishing. At the same time, there is the potential drawback of being seen as partial to one service or another.

The other challenge that the OPG faces is the question of ongoing maintenance. The OPG does not have an ongoing funding plan. While users have been impressed by the content, it is highly unlikely that enough of them would be willing to pay for access to consider that as a viable funding option. And, while the OPG has begun some experiments with community-generated content and editing, this has yet to prove itself as a sustainable method for content update. One potential funding possibility would be to investigate a premium service for individuals who are interested in contracting hands-on self-publishing assistance. As noted in the qualitative data section, a number of individuals have directly contacted the site to see if it offers any such service. This suggests that it might be possible to enact such a service, though more research would need to be done into the possibility of such a business model.

An alternate revenue model would be to integrate advertisements into the site. However, this has significant drawbacks. First of all, the presence of any ads could cause visitors to question the OPG as a neutral source of information. Secondly, advertising would require the OPG to either develop an internal ad sales department or rely upon a service like Google AdWords. The former solution is unlikely, as the OPG does not have the resources to afford such a position. Additionally, it would require the implementation of a technical infrastructure to support the placement and cycling of ads. And, while a service like Google AdWords eliminates much of the infrastructure issues, it has its own drawbacks. First of all, with the current traffic patterns, it is unlikely that the addition of advertising would result in any significant revenue. Of more concern is that when dealing with a service such as Google, the OPG would have little to no control over the advertisements that are run within the Google Ad Space. The Google system works by parsing the contents of a page and the inbound links to a page, and then selects advertisements based on that content. It is entirely possible, given the right mix of words on a page, to have Google serve an ad that is completely inappropriate or offensive.

A different option for sustainability would be to actively seek a new, permanent home for the OPG. The Open Publishing Lab's mission as a publishing research lab makes it a less than optimal space for the ongoing OPG project. The OPG content might fit better within a different entity at the Rochester Institute of Technology, where its presence could function as both a public resource and service. Potential homes include RIT Libraries, the School of Print Media, and, potentially, the Printing Applications Laboratory.

It would be a great loss to not be able to find a way for this content to live on in one form or another, especially given the warm reception that has received so far. While print-on-demand continues to become more mainstream, it is clear that its audience of consumers would be far greater if more people could overcome their "low publishing self-esteem." Based on all of our data, it is apparent that the OPG is an important tool in helping people to overcome their self-doubt and to start down the path to self-publishing. In this way, we believe it to be a valuable resource for the members of the Printing Industry Center.

References

- Albanese, P. A., Bernius, M. B., Conklin, S., Crespo, A. & Gootnick, R. (2008). *The open publishing guide: Creating a self-publishing website using open source content management tools* (PICRM-2008-03). Rochester, NY: RIT Printing Industry Center.
- AT Internet Institute. (2009). *Web traffic: 2009 starts slowly...* . Retrieved from <http://www.atinternet-institute.com/en-us/internet-users-behaviour/website-activity-january-2009/index-1-2-2-161.html>
- Kotler, P. (1986). Prosumers: A new type of consumer. *Futurist*, 20(5), 24–28.



Rochester Institute of Technology
College of Imaging Arts and Sciences
55 Lomb Memorial Drive
Rochester, NY 14623
Phone: (585) 475-2733
<http://print.rit.edu>