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Why ECM Matters

The future of publishing: thoughts from O'Reilly's Tools of Change Publishing Conference
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topics: Collaboration, Digital Asset Management, Web Content Management, Enterprise
Content Management, Enterprise 2.0, ... (more)
— Russ Edelman

Admittedly, I'm a traditional enterprise content management (ECM) guy with a genuine
interest in the world of publishing. Aside from having some ideas on where it is going, I
also published my first book last year titled "Nice Guys Can Get The Corner Office" with
The Penguin Group. As an author and regular writer, I have also observed that the
classic book business model is no longer working. Yet, the publishing community in
many respects appears to be stunted, as this is the only world that the publishing
industry knows. The challenge for this industry is to fully embrace the world of "E," the
electronic mediums that are becoming the platform of choice for content consumption
patterns. Sound familiar?

I'm happy to report that an evolution is beginning, albeit, not as quickly as we would all like. Tim O'Reilly, industry pundit and
founder of O'Reilly publishing, initiated the conference titled "Tools Of Change For Publishing" and since its inception three years
ago, it has garnered a lot of attention. Andrew Savikas, Vice President of Digital Initiatives for O'Reilly and Program Chair for the
conference shared, "There is more text being written and read than ever before. So anyone who tells you that people are
reading less merely means that they believe people are reading less of the kinds of things they think matter. The role that
publishers have traditionally played — that of curator, and content developer, and producer, and distributor; someone who
aggregates content and audiences and connects those two groups — that role is more important than any time in human
history. There is more to filter and understand and learn and process than ever, and one of the goals of this conference is to
help publishers understand the challenges and the opportunities, and adjust their businesses accordingly." Savikas shared that
the conference was actually up in attendance by approximately 15%, a data-point that speaks to the importance and timeliness
of this event.

As is the case with most conferences, it was filled with an assortment of session tracks, networking events, and an exhibit hall.
Upon arriving, I attended a 4-hour workshop and this is where I experienced my first "uh-huh" moment. A panel discussion titled
"eBooks 1: Business Models and Strategy" with a number of industry spokespeople kicked off the session and was very
informative. However, the moment of truth came to me in how they delivered the session. Rather than the classic PowerPoint
extravaganza, they opted to deliver the entire presentation as a wiki. All of the content that they discussed was previously
loaded on to different pages of the wiki site with a navigational component. They opted for a generic Google Wiki site and while
not pretty, it was new and effective. What made this really interesting was that it provided a real-time platform for participants
to collaborate as they presented. Additionally, the wiki site remains available as a living artifact of the session which still allows
for people to interact with the content that was prepared for the session. The potential for interaction in this type of presentation
model is very compelling and it directly correlates to the Web 2.0 initiatives that are evolving in the world of ECM.

As I attended a collection of other sessions, I found myself consistently impressed with Peter Brantley, Executive Director of the
Digital Library Foundation. Brantley was wonderfully insightful during his keynote. He spoke of books now becoming "Networked
Commodities and how they are becoming increasingly social and not a private act." His notion that "reading will become less
about the book and more about the people that read them" was a thoughtful and accurate discourse on the importance of social
communities. I also had an opportunity to hear him speak on the future of mobile devices and how they are serving as a critical
platform for content production and consumption. In this session, he commented, "Small objects travel further and travel faster
– their meaning adapting to the ever-changing context. Every step an opportunity." Consistent with his keynote comments,
mobile devices are clearly a key platform for content consumers not only for future generations, but also in retrofitting the
earlier generations (yes...us).

As I spoke with conference attendees, both first timers and veterans, it was interesting to obtain their perspective. Consistent
with my observations, "The times they are a changing" (yes, a cheap play on Bob Dylan). However, for some, they are passively
waiting for the industry to evolve and for others, they are actively driving that change. Joseph Bachana, President and Founder
of DPCI, fell into the latter group. DPCI is a systems integration company focused on the publishing industry. In meeting with
Joe, he recognized the importance of the move to "E" and is actively participating in that transition. Bachana stated "The
publishing community is now waking up to the importance of the next generation of content delivery." He added, "This next
generation is a blending of print and electronic mediums and it takes a practical and determined effort to make both worlds

mesh together in a meaningful, productive and profitable fashion." Bachana clearly has some battle scars as a result of implementing such systems and his perspective was an accurate one.

I also had the opportunity to speak with Mr. Nizar Jamal, COO and CTO of Impelsys, makers of iPublishCentral. iPublishCentral is a SAAS electronic publishing platform that can be employed by traditional publishers as well as authors who want to self publish. iPublishCentral provides a fairly complete publishing platform at a very low, transaction-oriented price point. With it, publishers and authors can load up content and create a unique site identity. Their content can then be purchased directly from the site and iPublishCentral takes care of the financial transaction. Jamal pointed out "In the future, we plan to introduce a social collaboration experience to the iPublishCentral platform to support content consumption patterns." Jamal and his CEO, Sameer Shariff, both have a great pulse on the future state of the industry and they are quickly evolving to introduce a heightened value proposition.

Other noteworthy observations were the announcement and excitement of Amazon's new Kindle 2.0. With a thickness of about 1/3 of an inch, it has leveraging the momentum of its version 1.0 predecessor. Sony is giving the Kindle a run for its money as it is aggressively attacking the market and looking to establish relationships with Google. Plastic Logic was also at the event, showing pre-release versions of their "Plastic Light Reader" which will be shipping in 2010. It was quite impressive as it took some slams from the hammer to demonstrate its durability. I'd be remiss if I didn't mention the 'Espresso' Print-on-Demand machine. It is arguably the first fully integrated printing and binding machine that can produce fully bound books in 4-7 minutes. I'd think this would be an ideal candidate for the Print-On-Demand show! It was impressive and interesting to watch a book be printed, along with its cover and then bound together all within one machine.

Collectively, this show represented an assortment of new thinking in the publishing world. Through wikis, social collaboration, mobile support, electronic book readers, and on-demand book printing, the publishing world continues to change. As it does, the importance of breaking content down into manageable chunks and repurposing it for future consumption patterns will become critical for sustainability in the next generation of the publishing community. Once again…sound a bit like the world of ECM!

Russ Edelman is president of Corridor Consulting and co-author of Nice Guys Can Get the Corner Office.

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