



Beyond the Book[®]



**Interview with Rachel Chou, Chief Marketing Officer
Open Road Integrated Media
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Q: We're in the office on an internet startup in Soho, which raises the question, what does that have to do with book publishing? Well, these days, quite a lot really. In fact, almost everything. Welcome to Beyond the Book. My name is Chris Kenneally and joining me today is Rachel Chou, who is the chief marketing officer for a company called Open Road Integrated Media. Welcome to Beyond the Book, Rachel.

A: Hi, Chris. I'm so happy to be here.

Q: It's great to have you here and to think about a book publishing startup and one particularly with roots, not only in book publishing, Jane Friedman is your CEO, but Jeff Sharp as well, your co-founder who comes from Hollywood, Academy Award winning film producer. There's quite a lot going on here, but you've thought through how this all fits together and talk about it as kind of layer cake. Could you explain what Open Road is up to and I think it's grabbed a lot of attention and it tells us a lot about the direction we're moving with ebooks and publishing. So we're all very curious. What's the layer cake approach mean?

A: Sure. I think that the thing here is that when Jane and Jeff got together actually back in the HarperCollins days, they were really thinking about bringing the eye of a producer and the eye of the film and digital entertainment community to the process of looking at books and really from the beginning, the period of when a book is launched and then the contracts are signed, so that they can think about it, not in terms of just feature films, but what you could do for marketing and so they started their relationship quite a few years ago and then when Jane left HarperCollins and decided to go on the Open Road, she thought Jeff would be the perfect partner and so the layer cake, the way that we describe the company, is really at the base of the cake or the base of the company is – and we'll talk about this a little bit more later, our digital marketing platform, which is really what I've been working on, and the film and digital entertainment I'd say division or infrastructure.

And those two pieces are underneath all of the different layers that we're adding to the company, of which there right now are four. We have the author branded backlist, which is what has been in the news a lot. The idea of an author, such as William Styron, and his incredible writing and all of the backlist titles that are not available on E and bringing the world of Styron out to the consumer and putting it



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together in one place, using our film and digital entertainment to really think about ways to market and bring the archives, bring his life to not only the big screen, but also to all the other screens that are there right now. The second layer of the company, the publishing partnerships, what we call the niches, many of you have read that we are working with Kensington as our first publishing partner.

Those titles will release early spring and that's really a marketing partnership and that's really leveraging, again, the film and digital entertainment side, to think about creative ways to market the author, to market the titles and then using the marketing platform that we're building right now to get scale and reach and we'll talk about that in a bit. The third layer of the company are e-originals, are the titles that are born digital, the titles that roughly ten to 20 a year, we are really getting in and thinking about what we can do on the different devices and taking them through their natural, their course of development, and then using, again, film, digital entertainment, and marketing to get them out to the consumer.

The last piece, the discovery piece as Jane likes to say, is the least well defined, but it's really the notion of self publishing, but we do not want to become a big self publisher. It's really thinking about curating and looking and working with some of the self-publishers and talking about the marketing and film side and what we can do with titles that are kind of rising to the top in those already carved out companies and online places where the self-publishing authors are. So that's kind of what we talk about as a layer cake. We've got this base of film and digital entertainment, digital marketing platform, and then the different layers of the company that use those resources.

- Q: And we should tell people a bit about your own background. You worked with Jane, actually, at HarperCollins. You were vice president of online product development and among the many things you did, you launched Author Assistant, which is a proprietary toolset that lets authors deliver their content, multimedia content, to a variety of websites, corporate and partners and so forth. Moving forward, authors have been worried about their role in all of this, how much work they have to do and you have some thoughts about where the work can be shared I think.
- A: I do. I think first and foremost, any authors I have ever worked with, I always say your writing comes first in terms of the actual product of the book because without that, you can't market anything. And so there should never be that conflict of I've got to write this marketing copy or I have to do Twitter versus working on the actual manuscript or the product that you're working on. That being said, it's hard not to be out there and be really represented in some of these large social communities. The idea behind Author Assistant and really the marketing platform in a much bigger way that we're building right now is to give authors a single point



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of entry into that world and for us to do the leg work and understanding which new communities this author would be right for, and that doesn't just mean the book communities.

It could mean the content communities. We have a particular author we're working with that is a huge antique fanatic and there are lots of online communities that would welcome her into it from that angle and then that would expose her and her writing to a whole new group. So again, but it's coming in through a single dashboard, a single entry point where they can upload photos, put in their status updates, talk about new articles or pieces they want to put in, they can upload video, we can do the video work that we're doing, and then we determine through that dashboard, where to syndicate it out to and the key here though is there's been a lot of talk about Facebook and Twitter in particular and connecting the two and really understanding people in the moment. The issue, for me, has always been what is the net effect of that? How do you measure whether or not it's being effective? And the nice thing is – I kind of think the past decade has been about analytics in terms of getting the data and I think this next decade is about analyzing that data and for us, it's really creating the sense and creating the ability to say, is it worth your time? What are we getting out of it?

And some of it is awareness, which is hard to measure, but some of it is direct sales and so for us, it's about really graphing all of the activity because you're coming in through one point in our toolset and sending it out through that. What is the activity that's going on? How much social media? How much – even putting in things like publicity and tour events and things that would be milestones on an activity chart, mapping that against ebooks sales as well as physical sales because marketing is marketing and you're going to see a bump hopefully across everything. And so that 360 marketing is really what we're about. It's about getting everything into one aggregated place, curating it, understanding who the partners are, getting the data back, and assessing whether or not to do more, do less, and how do you move forward?

Q: Well, I think that curatorial role and that evaluation is again probably going to come as a relief to many authors. I think of my own experience, as almost a year ago I first hear about Twitter and I'm not a Luddite at all, but I had some questions about that and I, in fact, called it the Pet Rock of 2009. I've taken it all back. I have become a convert and understand that put in the right piece of what I'm trying to do with Beyond the Book, it's an important part, but it's that evaluation of it that I had to do on my own that took time. A lot of authors aren't interested, they aren't inclined, and as you say, the work comes first. So I think the partnership there that this is offering is one that is going to be very inviting.



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A: I think so. I mean I don't like to see authors spend a lot of time doing things that really have no net effect and I think that that's really what this toolset is about. You know, to be tweeting a couple of times a day and to see your followers not really increase exponentially and to invest all that time and when you put out even an offer or a direct link and we watch it and you get three hits off of it, you know what? That's the end. It's not where your audience is. So the question is, where is your audience? And finding that correct connection and that's what we're trying to do. We're trying to use the data, I like to call it data driven decision making. It's not only about data, but data can tell you a lot. It can certainly tell you what's not working when you can get that direct measurement and authors, just like all of us, don't have the time to waste if they're not going to really be reaching their core consumer.

Q: Well, and the ebook is the center of all of this and it's sort of linking out from there. It's the sun in this solar system. Talk about that some. This is a moment when e-publishing and ebooks seem to finally have arrived after quite a lot of announcement beforehand. How are authors going to change perhaps their writing, perhaps their outlook on publishing, because the ebook is at the center?

A: Well, I think it's interesting. There are a lot of experiments going on with using video, with using audio, interrupting the reading experience. That's not us, in terms of the way that we're thinking about the additional material. We really think, especially obviously in the fiction area, that the reading experience should not be interrupted. We don't really want to interject that all of a sudden, oh, here's the author talking about X. We love the idea of some of the devices that we're seeing now, what you're reading on one side and if you want to take a look at something or even to look at an annotation, great. But for us, it's really about understanding what makes powerful marketing materials and the ebook is at the center of it because without the ebook as the product, then none of this is going to exist. I think authors are extremely excited about it.

As you know, we've talked to more and more publishers. It's tough. They're publishing and they have to keep up with the front list and for us, as Jane has been called, she's the queen of the backlist because we know it's a gem and we know that it's hard to continue marketing it. So for us, relaunching or pulling together an author's entire list and putting it out there in E and then thinking about kind of how we slice and dice and think about how to market this is really exciting and we've gotten great, great feedback from the authors and the publishers that we're working with right now.

Q: When you think too that the movement from offline content, if you will, you know, the book to the online content, ebook and everything that goes with it, is one that's such a complete revolution, it's like going from Aristotelian cosmology to



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Copernican. It's just taking one thing at the center and move something else to the center and everybody has to rethink it all. It would make sense that you'd need to relaunch.

- A: I agree and well, it's also – I think of it as a relaunch, just because with the opportunity here, if you are talking about digital, you have the opportunity to kind of reach the consumers that you were never able to reach before. So it really is a rebirth and a relaunch because you're able to get out in a whole new way, and in terms of just the format itself, we were at CES, the Consumer Electronics Show, I guess now two weeks ago or a week ago or so, and it's mind boggling. I mean this is going to be the most exciting year in publishing in decades. Almost since the printing press because the opportunities are boundless. As Brendan, our publisher, likes to say, there's a lot of opportunities and possibilities. Not everything is going to be profitable, so we have to take a look at what makes sense, but it's really going to be a fun time to explore, to experiment.

Somebody said – I think it was Guy LeCharles (sp?) I think is his name – he was on your show I believe. You know, E is for experimentation. This next year, not – for the ebook, totally agree. I think that it's going to be really interesting and ebooks are absolutely going to be the center of not just our universe, the universe of publishing.

- Q: Experimenting makes some people excited, to use another E word, and it makes some other people nervous, particularly authors I think, as one myself, and so how do you work with them? How do you get them to think this through thoughtfully and how are you thinking about approaching some questions they may have about online marketing where free and fee have to be sorted out.
- A: Surprisingly, the authors that I've worked with over the past few years are excited about experimentation, if you measure it. And again, it's back to that kind of data question. I actually just met with an author two days ago and we were talking about even just book tours and blog tours and being online and that a lot of authors are cutting back and I think it's about really understanding what kind of reach you can get out of it, what your expectations are, and then bringing it back and assessing, was it successful? That's been the key thing that's been missing over the past couple of years is that analysis of, did it work? Even on the free piece. Putting something out there for free and not really understanding what happened, not so great.

Putting it out there for free, we did something with Neil Gaiman at HarperCollins and watching print sales off an ebook for free, print sales rising up on the Amazon charts, a direct measurement. That was the big marketing thing that was going on. So that kind of experimentation, when you can actually look at results, bring that



back and determine if it met your expectations, if it was successful, authors, in my opinion, that I've met with, are all for that. Experimentation without real end goals, not so much.

Q: So getting them to embrace this through the evaluation. We keep on using all of these E words. It is the year of epubublishing after all. Well, there's another piece of this, which is of course enabled by online and that is the self-publishing part and that's what you call discovery. Talk about the role of the discovery piece within Open Road.

A: Well, I think discovery is just that. It's helping authors get discovered, helping them find their audience and for us, that's really pushing back to the digital marketing platform because these authors in particular need all the help they can get to understand the marketplace, to understand how to even begin to reach out to the consumer and that's really, for us, what discovery is about. At this point in time, as much as we've fleshed out about that, it's about offering a toolset or working on a marketing services plan for the self-publishing authors.

Q: Another question is about the way that Jane and Jeff are going to work together. I know the arrangement that they began to do at HarperCollins and one we discussed with Jeff a couple years ago at Book Expo was to be able to identify right at the very beginning when a book was also very likely to be a film. Is that something you're going to be doing here? And tell us about that.

A: Absolutely. And it's not just feature films. We have this chart of 360 marketing and it's really about the idea of aggregating all of the content and we call it aggregated content and premium content. It's the content that already exists, whether it's in the archives at Duke, in the case of William Styron, it's links online, it's fan sites, it's bringing that all into one place and then at that moment, kind of seeing what you've got and deciding what types of premium content you can either build or what's missing and would be a value add. And that means looking at it from a feature film perspective, a documentary perspective, a mini-doc, a webisode, a mobile application. These are all the different services or types of things we're talking about in the film and digital entertainment realm and we're in play on a bunch of those already, on the titles we've been looking at.

Q: I would imagine that's relatively easy with something that's just written work, but with backlist, there often are questions about rights. Have you got a special way of attacking that problem?

A: Really, it's simple for us because it's about people coming to us and telling us that they have the rights for their works, really making sure that we are not getting involved and starting any projects unless that's clear.



- Q: And so finally, let me just ask about the role of social media. You've alluded to Facebook pages and communities. What does an author need to know about how to become successful at that? Just generally. Just offer some free advice to the listeners.
- A: Authenticity. It's hard. I mean not every author wants to put themselves out there on the personal side, but the truth is, it's very hard to have an intern, an assistant, or somebody else doing your tweets, your status updates, or maintaining these social network sites, because it's about being authentic and out there. So if you're going to get involved in it, it means putting yourself out there a bit and figuring out what you're comfortable with. It doesn't mean that we need to know that you just had dinner and that you're brushing your teeth now. But it does mean that you give me a little insight into something that inspired you or you saw something that you loved or if you're a foodie, this recipe. It's kind of thinking about what you're willing to expose and bringing people into your life in that way, but if you're not going to be doing that, then you're not going to have that much of an impact in the social community area.
- Q: It would seem it's about passion and I'm thinking, well, you've got some very passionate people on this team here. Jane would be the most passionate about publishing that I can think of.
- A: That's absolutely true. It's been funny to – when I got here about two months ago or so, we set up Twitter and we installed it on everybody's phones and we've been getting a lot of people tweeting us, saying well, who's tweeting? Like who is this really? Is it really Jane? And yes, it's actually all of us. We decided that our Twitter account would be represented from every perspective because we wanted people to get that 360 view of Open Road and you can tell. I mean you have Jeff tweeting from CES, you have Luke out at Sundance, you have me doing marketing meetings and thinking about marketing and technology and tweeting from that perspective. Brendan's on the author side. So it's authentic, but the excitement is there because it's from all of us.
- Q: So there's even a community here at Open Road.
- A: Absolutely. Absolutely.
- Q: Well, listen, we've been chatting with Rachel Chou, who is the chief marketing officer for Open Road Integrated Media, a startup in the epublishing world that has already been getting quite a lot of attention, a top ten story in *Publishers Weekly*, and I'm sure a lot of news to come in 2010. For Beyond the Book, this is Chris



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Kenneally and everyone at Copyright Clearance Center. Thank you very much for listening and thank you, Rachel, for joining me today.

A: Thank you. It's been so much fun.

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