



# Beyond the Book®



**Evan Schnittman, Vice President, Global Business Development  
Oxford University Press  
Interview at Digital Book World**

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- Q:** We're attending Digital Book World on the second day today and we're asking ourselves if publishing is on the Titanic or whether we're just floating along a very calm sea. It's probably not one or the other, but something in the middle, and we have someone here to tell us just what he thinks about the prospect for sailing ahead. Evan Schnittman is vice president of global business development for Oxford University Press and he joins me, Chris Kenneally, for this special edition of Beyond the Book. Evan, thanks for doing this.
- A:** Hi, Chris. How are you doing? Glad to have you here at Digital Book World.
- Q:** It's a pleasure to chat with you because we see you at various conferences. I saw you at the Ebook Summit. My favorite line from that was that you were – at Oxford University Press, you're just a slightly older startup than some others. Tell us what that means really.
- A:** Yeah, we're a 600 year old technology startup. Our technology just happened to be the printing press. It was the beginning of the roots of Oxford University Press, back in the 1400s.
- Q:** Well, I point it out because the chat we've been having is about the role of technology as an influencer on business models and to take us back to the introduction there, you said optimistically, and this is a conference that says the future of publishing is bright. You said optimistically to me that we're not on the Titanic, we're not about to hit the iceberg and go down because Apple is going to introduce the iPad or whatever they'll call it or the Amazon Kindle is picking up steam. What kind of seas are we in and what kind of vessels maybe are we floating on?
- A:** Well, the common description of the Titanic is that people are rearranging deck chairs as it's going down and I think that there's a perception that in the publishing world, the traditional publishers are rearranging deck chairs. As the world around us is changing, we're going down. I think the seas are brisk and perhaps even stormy, but we're not heading into iceberg territory. We're heading into uncharted waters. We're heading into seas that we don't know what's ahead, but we're putting a lot of different probes out there, doing a lot of experimentation. The business models around the Apple Tablet I think are – that are being rumored,



are clearly attempts to try all kinds of new models, models that turn publishers into their own distributors, which is a very, very, very new world for us.

**Q:** Well, let's tease that out a bit and talk about how technology influences business models. You mentioned your technology goes back to the very first printing presses. That opened up a whole new world of content, opened up a whole new marketplace, and that was 600 years ago. We've had more recent developments, like the paperback, that did the same. It changed the market and it influenced the kind of content that was consumed in that market. Relate all of that past history to where you think we are here in 2010.

**A:** You know, I bet you could do a study on the evolution of the paperback and you will hear phrases such as – or see phrases such as the democratization of content. I bet you that applied as much to the paperback and the dime store novel and how it opened up a whole new area of publishing, which was not cost effective before the paperback. You're hearing the same thing, of course, with the ebook. This is a new technology and with all new technology, the initial development revolves around – you could call it the device, the book as a device, the computer as a device, but as Tom Turvey of Google said at the Frankfurt Book Fair this year, this past year, technology starts with the hardware, but it evolves to the software, as it's a long tail, long term business modeling.

And I think as we think about the ebook, we've been obsessed for ten years with the technological side of the ebook, mostly because the business models weren't working. As the business models are now clearly working and they're working because of some hardware and business models, the future, all of our direction, all of our thinking, is going to be focused on the business models, the software or the content itself. That's where I think it gets very interesting and I think Digital Book World is a moment in time where it's very clear that the success, and this is a very successful conference – I've not seen such a packed show in quite awhile, is because it's focused on the business models and it's not focusing on the technology, which is an important thing to focus on, but I think as an industry, we're moving way beyond that.

**Q:** A couple of points on that, just thinking about the title, and not trying to do too much with it, but Digital Book World is not Ebook World. We were previously together at Ebook Summit and an ebook is a very specific format, whereas digital books can be a variety of things and it seems to me that while the focus today, before the announcement from Apple is on that particular device, we haven't yet solved some of the questions that have been put in play because of the web, for example. So while you have to address the ebook dilemma, we're still working out making content available online.



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- A: Yeah, I mean the most important development in the digital book world in the last five years – amongst, I should say, the most important developments, would be Google Book Search, which is about selling print books. It's just selling it in a digital environment. It's about turning print into a discoverable object in a digital environment search. That is what Digital Book World is about. This is about the publishing industries, and it's not just books, and how does that evolve? How does it need to evolve? What are the models we need? Print is not going away. Print is a different metaphor, it's a different technology, but it's still a very, very, very high demand technology. What we're trying to figure out is are there digital futures that involve print and digital? Just print? Just digital? That's what a conference like this is all about.
- Q: Well, you say the book is not going away. I think that's a pretty safe bet, but what will the book buying community or communities look like, do you think, two years, five years from now?
- A: At Oxford University Press, we have so many book buying communities, we're so broad, academic and scholarly book buyers, librarian book buyers, consumer book buyers, educational book buyers. I think all of those communities are going to have a different look and feel to them. One of the least successful areas in digital books, if you will, has been college textbooks, yet that's the most connected and wired audience in the history of mankind. There will be a turning point that I think will be more dramatic in that market and be more digital oriented than any other market. When that tipping point comes is a big question, but that market will look so fundamentally different, I believe, than it does today, whereas the trade novel reading public will go through a similar change, but there will be people, just like there are today, who would never pick up a hardcover because of the price and the weight and just the inconvenience of that format versus the people who are looking at paperbacks and saying, too small, too flimsy, I want something that is going to last and be on my bookshelf. Some people will just say, I just want to read and I have an immersive reading device and I want to use that. So we'll split that audience once again, just like they did in the 1950s when paperbacks became a business model and in the 70s when it became a dominant business model.
- Q: Well, at OUP, I wonder how all of this is changing the way you are thinking about the author community. I was just reading a blog entry today, commenting on how much the writer was enjoying the conference, Digital Book World, where we're talking today, but noting that the number of authors was pretty slim. Two, I think. What does that tell us and what do you think about authors at OUP that might help people focus on that?



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- A: I'm not sure that I shared that sentiment. I think that authors as publishers is a whole new phenomenon and I'm pretty sure that it's not the place of the publisher to be thinking about that. Perhaps it is. I don't think it is.
- Q: Well, I was thinking more about whether this is going to change the way that OUP works with their authors.
- A: Understood. What I was moving towards was I think authors need to think about content and I think we need to work with authors to think about how that content may need to change if a digital environment is dominant and I think if I'm making an assumption that there is a tipping point between five and ten years from now where higher education textbooks are primarily digital content, that is not going to be a linear paper textbook with its standard pedagogy in digital form. That is going to be a completely different digital learning object and that will change dramatically how publishers and authors work. A novel, there may be enhanced novels, there may be enhanced works of nonfiction that add content and take people down different paths through different mediums, but a straight immersive reading work, such as a novel – narrative, start on page one, get to the end of the story on page 400 – I'm not sure it matters that it comes out in one form or another, if that is going to be the dominant form of what someone will read. It shouldn't make a difference to an author and a publisher that the manuscript – the manuscript shouldn't have to be very different in order for it to be an immersive read on your Kindle versus an immersive read on a paperback or hardcover.
- Q: The device then matters and takes us back to that sort of continuing loop. Ebooks have been held back because the devices haven't allowed for that experience, that immersive experience. As we approach that and may in fact reach that, something has changed.
- A: Well, I mean November 19<sup>th</sup>, 2007, the Kindle came out and it married the world's premiere online book retailer with an enormous amount of content and a device that was designed to mimic the paper reading experience. I mean black type on white paper is the ultimate technology for immersive reading. Plenty of people love reading on their iPhones. I personally think that the majority of people would find a backlit LCD reading experience a very difficult one to be cranking through 500 page novels. That said, there's an audience of folks that have absolutely no problem with that. An interesting question is going to be, where does the tablet stand? Will the tablet provide a new or different or similar technology to a Kindle and enable a zero power, no backlit, easy on the eyes, immersive reading oriented screen, or will it be a backlit power using a generating device that flickers, if you will, when reading, and that will be a big question for me as to whether I think that is the future reading device of all reading devices.



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Generationally, people read more than ever, I think, because of the internet, because of the devices we have, but it's extractive reading. It's not immersive reading. The Kindle, I think, proved a point that give people an immersive reading oriented device and they will move from paper onto the device in huge numbers.

Q: Well, some food for thought there from Evan Schnittman, who is vice president of global business development at Oxford University Press, joining me, Chris Kenneally, here at Digital Book World. Appreciate chatting with you, Evan. I know you have to go and address a far larger crowd, but we appreciate your time.

A: Thank you very much, Chris. It's always fun.

Q: Indeed it was fun. This is Chris Kenneally, for everyone at Copyright Clearance Center, thanks for listening to Beyond the Book.

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