
IPG CONFERENCE; WEDNESDAY 6TH MARCH; 16:30

REACHING READERS

ALASTAIR HORNE

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ABSTRACT

Academic and professional publishers' routes to market are changing fast. Alastair Horne of Cambridge University Press showcases some of the best ways to build close relationships in niche communities and across social media.

INTRODUCTION

ME

I've ten years' experience in digital publishing, working mostly for Cambridge University Press in a variety of roles, from Project Developer to Innovations Manager; I'm the author of the Media Futures report on the future of publishing (<http://www.mediafutures.org.uk/2011/report/>), write for Bookseller's FutureBook blog (<http://futurebook.net/blog/26>), and tweet (unofficially) as @pressfuturist.

I'm now Social Media and Community Manager for ELT at Cambridge. On the social media side, I'm responsible for developing and implementing our social media strategy globally, working with our branch offices around the world and with a small team in our Cambridge office.

As Community manager, I run the community side of Cambridge English Teacher, our new professional development site for teachers: organising and hosting fortnightly webinars.

WHAT I'LL BE TALKING ABOUT

Why publishers need to be using social media to develop relationships with their audience.

How to do this effectively on a budget – we're not Nike; we can't just do it and never mind the cost. I won't be recommending any expensive tools, or strategies that work if you've got hordes of people to run your social media strategy.

SOME CAVEATS

I'll mostly be talking about 'content'. It's hardly a beautiful term, but it just about works as a catch-all expression for all the stuff that goes into the books and other things we publish these days. I'll talk about 'products' too – it's another ugly word, but one that does a similarly useful job of covering those things themselves.

To make up for those ugly expressions, I'll be using social media as a plural (when I remember), as a good grammar-school boy who learned Latin at school. I may not always remember, though. It makes sense to think of social media as plural, anyway, because the different platforms that make up social media aren't a uniform bunch: they each have their different characteristics and if you think of them as an undifferentiated mass, you won't get the most out of them.

Not all of this is necessarily the voice of Cambridge University Press; what I have to say is informed by my experience of running our social media strategy for ELT at Cambridge, but it's also informed by my experience of tweeting as an individual, and of watching what's worked for other companies too. I'll say it at various points during the next hour, but there's nothing like using social media as an individual to get a sense of how to use it as a company. Having your own Facebook page doesn't automatically equip you to run your company's, but trying to run a company social media account without having experience of the 'other side' is like trying to do your job blindfold.

WHY SOCIAL MEDIA, AND WHY RELATIONSHIPS?

WHY RELATIONSHIPS WITH READERS ARE MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER

My abstract talks about routes to market changing fast, and that's true. Selling directly to consumers is increasingly important, so our customers are no longer just the bookstores.

Life was easier in the past: booksellers were (mostly) our customers, and were (essentially) our partners – what was good for them was largely good for us. That's less true now: as Amazon becomes increasingly dominant, and moves from selling our books, through facilitating self-publishing, to publishing under its own imprints, our primary bookseller is more and more our rival.

Amazon – and to a lesser extent, Apple – stand between us and the reader in an unhelpful way, not sharing information. With ebooks read on connected devices like smartphones, ereader, and tablets, and bought on credit cards through accounts that retain the details of every purchase their owner has made, it's possible to know more than ever about what our readers buy, like, and read. Unless you're a publisher, in which case you risk knowing no more than you ever did. And as the likes of Amazon increasingly become our rivals, this information gives them an enormous competitive advantage.

So, we need to seek out our audience ourselves – find them and engage them in conversation; find out what they like, and what they want from us; let them know what we're doing. It's something we've been doing on a smaller scale for years through mailing-lists, but we need to raise our game if we're going to outflank the likes of Amazon by building meaningful relationships with our readers.

We've two options, then: either build a place to have those conversations, and invite them to join us, or go where they are already, and join the conversations they're having there.

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The big advantage of the first option is that you're not dependent on a third-party in the way that you are with social media; the big disadvantage is that you have to build it (and pay for it), and then get people to join you.

This is what we've done with Cambridge English Teacher: built a community for English language teachers (our core customers). It's an opportunity for them to develop their professional careers with online courses, resources, discussion forums and fortnightly webinars; it's an opportunity for us to build a closer relationship with them, to find out more about them; learn what their needs are; to build up the profile of our authors through webinars, and to make teachers aware of what we have to offer them: our titles on professional development, for instance, and other teaching resources. We're coming up to the first anniversary later this month, and it's working well.

SOCIAL MEDIA

The big advantage of social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn is that they already exist, so we don't have to go to the expense and effort of building them, and that the conversation is happening there already. The community for your content almost certainly already exists; you just need to join it.

That's because social media platforms are increasingly where our audience is hanging out: Facebook has 900 million active Facebook users, half of whom log in every day, sharing one million links every 20 minutes. There are 500 million active Twitter users too, with one million new accounts created every month. [Statistics from www.statisticbrain.com/]

The biggest disadvantage of social media, though, is that you're not in control: you're at the mercy of the people who own the platform, whose every change of the rules may affect your ability to reach your audience.

FIVE KEY REASONS WHY YOU NEED TO USE SOCIAL MEDIA

5. SEARCH VISIBILITY

Social networks are increasingly used by people to search for information: Twitter handles 1.6 billion search queries every day; more than Bing or Yahoo. (figure via Statistic Brain)

Facebook is currently rolling out Facebook graphs, to improve its search functionality by making it possible for users to search in a much more granular fashion than in the past.

Perhaps most importantly, Google is making social networks an increasingly important part of its search algorithms: if you have a Google account (and, thanks to Gmail, Google Docs etc, who doesn't?) then the results that you get from your search will increasingly be influenced by what the people in your network have found useful, the links they've clicked on and shared.

Peer recommendation has always been vitally important and - unsurprisingly - better trusted than advertising: social media just widen its reach.

4. MARKETING

Marketing is certainly important - after all, the aim of all this activity is to sell more books. It's not the most important factor, though.

To extent that social media are a form of marketing, they're a different form of marketing than we're used to: marketing by consent. Historically, marketing a product largely consisted of paying third parties - magazines, for instance - in order to be able to interrupt what other people were doing and let them know what we were doing. Social media don't work like that. (Well, the paid-for element does, but I won't be talking so much about that.) By following us on Twitter and liking us on Facebook, people are actually choosing to receive information from us regularly; it's more like signing up to a mailing list.

On social media, then, you can't just market all the time, or people will unfollow you. You need to provide them with reasons to keep following you; provide them with content that makes it worth their while paying attention to you, so that they're still there when you do try to sell them something. You need to market by stealth, providing your audience with something useful that just happens to make them aware of a product that you sell.

You shouldn't just think of social media as marketing: at Cambridge, I work with the marketing teams but I'm not actually part of the marketing department.

3. CUSTOMER SERVICE

Social media amplify word of mouth: bad news can quickly go viral.

Our customers increasingly expect to be able to get quick and effective customer service through social media. This raises the stakes for us: first of all, their whole network will know they've had a problem, and if they're not happy with the response they get, their whole network will learn that too. But there's a real opportunity here too, since we've got that audience's attention; a chance to exceed their expectations and come out of this with an improved reputation.

We need to respond quickly to the messages people send us on social networks. But we also need to keep our ear to the ground for what people are saying about, rather than to, us. (when, for instance, they write a tweet about Cambridge University Press without using our twitter name). You can use Social Mention (a search tool for social networks) and Google Alerts to keep informed of when you're being talked about on social media; you should also set up alerts on your phone for when you're mentioned on Facebook and Twitter.

2. MARKET RESEARCH

As I said at the start of this talk, thanks to the rise of internet-connected reading devices, it's never been easier to know what people are reading, what other books they're buying; how far they've got; which pages they find most interesting – unless you're a publisher. Amazon, Apple et al, all have this information but are unwilling to share it with us. As they increasingly become our competitors, we need to find our own routes to our readers, to find out what they like and don't like; what they think of what we do, and what we could do better.

Social media give us an opportunity to supplement the knowledge we gain from focus groups, to make sure that our publishing decisions are better than ever informed by knowledge of how our readers (and, perhaps equally importantly, those people who aren't our readers but might be) behave. Social networks like Goodreads enable us to find out what our customers think of the books that we publish, and which other books they read: a vital source of the sort of information the likes of Amazon get automatically. Goodreads tells us what our customers like and dislike about our books, and what other titles they've read, which can lead both to insights and questions: why do so many people who love our grammar titles choose to buy a learner's dictionary from Oxford rather than Cambridge?

1. BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

This is the most important of the five reasons to use social media, and draws together all the others: by building a relationship with the people who follow us on SM, we gain an opportunity to let them know what we're trying to sell them; we get the chance to learn more about what they want, what their problems are, how they want to receive our content.

Why do we want to do this? We want to be a part of their lives. We want them to think of us when they have a need that we can answer. If they see (and enjoy) our content everyday on their Facebook page, their first thought when they need assistance is more likely to be "I wonder what Cambridge has that can help me". If we can get them to take a look at our site before they search Google or Amazon, we're far more likely to make a sale.

HOW ON EARTH DO I FIND THE TIME TO DO ALL THIS?

But this all takes so much time!

It does. The initial assumption that social media were a cost-free marketing channel has been replaced by the gloomy assumption that they're a time sink with no return on the investment.

But you don't need to do all the heavy lifting yourself: get your whole team – and your audience – to play their part.

Involve the people who know your content best – probably the editors. Get them to write blog posts, tweets, Facebook posts: they don't have to post them themselves, they can still go through your social media person (and probably should). Produce guidelines on how to act (these will mostly be common sense).

Get the authors involved too. It's a chance for them to build up their personal profiles (and sell more books in the process).

WHY PUBLISHERS HAVE THE ADVANTAGE

Probably the biggest thing in marketing right now is content marketing – creating content to build a relationship with your audience (which is what this is all about). "We're all publishers now" say content marketers, but where does this leave us – we were publishers already?! On the one hand, it gives us an enormous advantage – we know how to create content, and we have a back- (and front-) list full of it. On the other hand, though, this is the stuff that we charge for. The problem facing most content marketers is that they have to step into the unknown when they create content; for us it's that we might be cannibalising our market, giving away for free what we're actually trying to sell.

There are advantages too, to being a smaller publisher, or publishing within a niche: you're likely to have much stronger brand awareness amongst your audience, and greater loyalty. Few people are ever going to go looking specifically for a book by Random House, but they will buy a book by a publisher like Angry Robot sight unseen, as the success of Angry Robot's subscription scheme demonstrates.

HOW TO USE SOCIAL MEDIA EFFECTIVELY ON A BUDGET: TWELVE TOP TIPS

1. YOU DON'T NEED TO BE EVERYWHERE – FIND OUT WHERE YOUR AUDIENCE IS.

Social media can be enormously time-consuming: there are lots of different platforms, each with their own requirements and way of doing things – you can't just syndicate the same content across different platforms (though you do need to repurpose content to make it work for you across multiple social media).

But, thankfully, you don't need to be on all of them. Find out which ones best fit your content and your audience. Facebook may be the biggest social media platform, but it may not be the place where your readers have their conversations. If you're publishing professional or business titles, then LinkedIn will most likely be the best place to build your presence.

Take a look at the different characteristics of each platform too, and how they match up to what you do: if you're publishing highly visual books, for instance, then Pinterest will give you an excellent opportunity to show off the quality of your content.

Engage with the key people in your area: not just in the hope that they'll engage with you, but to find out what they're talking about. Search for your titles on Goodreads, for instance, and see who's read your books.

2. BE REGULAR.

Timeliness is important: post too often, and people will unfollow you because you're annoying. Post too rarely, and you're wasting the opportunity that people have given you by following you.

We find that 1-2 posts on Facebook a day is generally enough; on Twitter you can post more often, but it's still better to post over a period of time, rather than all in one go.

Plan posts over the course of a week or month, and use the free version of Hootsuite to schedule posts to save time. But keep an eye on this – you need to be know what posts are coming up and be able to change them for something more (or in some cases) less topical.

In December last year, four days after the shootings at a school in Connecticut, the word of the day on Oxford University Press's dictionary site – chosen long before the massacre – was 'bloodbath'. Prompt action from OUP – a swift apology, and an announcement that they were reviewing procedures – limited the damage.

3. BE PROMPT AND RESPONSIVE.

Set notifications so you know when someone's mentioned you, or posted to your page; you can use smartphone apps for this, or email notifications. Then respond quickly, if you need to.

Keep up to date with what's going on so that you can join in the conversation. Search social media to find people having conversations about relevant subjects. Join in those conversations (politely); this can work particularly well if at the end you can offer them something free to help them.

4. INVOLVE THE WHOLE TEAM

Don't restrict social media to your marketing team or person; encourage everyone to get involved, either directly or indirectly.

The best social media accounts for publishers are run by people who use social media personally; who understand why people use them and what they want to get out of them. You might be better off getting the person in your office with the most followers on Twitter to run your company Twitter account than your marketing manager (although your marketing manager is probably still the better person to deal with long-term strategy.)

Get your editors involved, your designers too: anyone who's got something interesting to share about your content, the publishing process, or the wider area in which you publish.

Make use of your authors: get them to write blogposts. If they're too busy, interview them over the phone and write it up. Or you can get them to take part in an interview via Twitter or Facebook. (It's often best – and safest – to prime the pump by inviting some of your most active readers directly.)

5. SHARE YOUR ENTHUSIASM

We care about what we do; we get excited when new books come out, when we see proofs; when a new typescript arrives. Share that excitement: let people behind the curtain to see what's involved in publishing a book. The genuine enthusiasm of the team behind a book can be infectious.

6. INVOLVE YOUR AUDIENCE

Find out who your key influencers are: the people who share your content the most, to the widest audience (and, if you can, what leads result). Now that FB lets you know when your friends have liked or commented on posts, the people who do this are sharing just as much as those who actively share your content.

Look after these people: what more can you do for them? Is their value to you as an influencer greater than their value as a customer? Then you might want to consider giving them stuff for free.

Check to see what else they're sharing, and share it with your audience, thanking them for drawing your attention to it – it will make them feel a valued contributor.

7. ENCOURAGE SHARING

Last week at a marketing conference, I heard someone compare social media to an iceberg, and though it's an over-used analogy, it's true. Our FB page has 33,000 likes – which is great – but those 33,000 people have, between them, an enormous total of 12.5 million people in their networks. Yet the sheer numbers here are less important than the nature of these people – because friendships grow up over shared interests or professions, many of those people will also be English teachers, and so will potentially be interested in what we do. If we can get the people who follow us already to share or 'like' our content, we'll be reaching a much larger audience.

So make it easy for people to share your content. Include share buttons on articles and product pages on your website. When you tweet, don't use the full 140 characters – leave room for someone else to retweet and add their own opinion.

Make sure to produce content that people are going to want to share with their networks; content that has a use (or interest) for them and that will have the same for their friends: the more people interact with what you're sharing, the more other people will see it.

Getting content onto people's walls on Facebook is becoming increasingly difficult, as the site cuts access to timelines for businesses that aren't paying for access via adverts. But Facebook still needs to serve its users content that will keep them on the site, and if you can offer content that will do that, it'll share your content for you.

The Edgerank algorithm that Facebook uses to decide which content to show has three criteria: time, weight, affinity. 'Time' concerns how recently the content was posted; 'weight' means the attractiveness of the content (visual content – images and video – has tended to be weighted more highly than plain text); 'affinity' is based on how people have interacted with your content in the past. This last is a further reason why it's important that you get people to interact with your content – if they do, this makes it more likely that they'll see your new content in future.

8. CURATION

Don't forget that you're not the only source of good content. You can serve a useful purpose for your audience by curating the interesting content that you've found elsewhere online, adding value by offering your own perspective. This is one area where you can really benefit from involving the whole team: rather than having one member of your team spending time each day scouring the web for something interesting to share, your team can share the things that have interested them online. (It's also a way of making your lunchtime surfing contribute to the team effort too.)

Make use of your network of followers too: find out what they're sharing, and – if it's interesting – share it yourself, crediting the person who found it. It'll make them feel a valued part of your network.

On Twitter, it can be best to 'quote' the original tweet rather than just 'retweeting' it. Apps make it easier to do this. Doing this enables you to add your own perspective on the tweet, and associates it more closely with you.

9. REMEMBER YOU'RE A PERSON

Social media are where humans (and the occasional dog) communicate with each other. So be a human. Nobody enjoys a conversation with a corporation. If you have more than one person manning the Twitter feed, for instance, you might perhaps want to make a feature of this by introducing the team and then having them use their initials when they tweet.

10. MAKE THE MOST OF EVERYTHING YOU DO

Repurpose content. If you run a webinar, record it and put it up on to YouTube, then post an excerpt from it on your Facebook page. Write about it on your blog. Put the slides up on Slideshare, if they're useful in their own right. Make sure everything you create does as much work for you as it possibly can.

Add a social element to every campaign you run.

11. TAKE THE CONVERSATION ELSEWHERE

You don't want to be dependent on Facebook (or Twitter, or any other third party) for your contact with your audience. Give your readers something free in return for giving you their details.

12. WORK OUT WHAT'S WORKING

One of the most frequent criticisms of brand activity on social media is that it doesn't provide any measurable return on investment. The metrics that are used on social media – likes, shares etc – don't easily translate into additional sales.

You should certainly use the metrics that the likes of Facebook and Twitter provide to get a basic sense of how you're doing – how many likes/shares/comments each post on Facebook gets, for instance, or how many retweets you get on Twitter. Use URL shorteners like ow.ly to see how many people click on links that you share, and then make sure to use on-site analytics such as Google Analytics to track what people do on your site once you've directed them there.

*Feel free to follow me on Twitter, where I'm **@pressfuturist**, connect with me on [LinkedIn](#), or email me at **pressfuturist@gmail.com**.*