

'A ONE-STOP SHOP FOR ALL YOUR PUBLISHING NEEDS'

How professional publishing solution providers can support and enrich library-led publishing:
A case study on the partnership between]u[Ubiquity and Virginia Tech Publishing



VIRGINIA TECH
PUBLISHING

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Teaching in the University

Welcome to Virginia Tech Publishing

We are Virginia Tech's digital-first, open access publisher. Based in the University Libraries, Virginia Tech Publishing (VTP) is committed to increasing the visibility, reach, and impact of research produced at the university. We publish scholarly and educational materials in a variety of formats to ensure wide dissemination and permanent preservation. In addition to traditional publishing, we offer

LIBRARY-LED PUBLISHING offers a unique opportunity for institutions to increase the visibility of their research output, both by providing traditional publishing services and by offering other professional publishing services that are especially suited to an ever-evolving digital information space. However, setting up and maintaining such an operation can be a significant burden for a library to bear alone.]u[Ubiquity spoke to Peter Potter, director of Virginia Tech Publishing, about how he believes that library publishing can meet these challenges with support from professional publishing services.

BACKGROUND

Virginia Tech is an institution with a long history of innovation in scholarly communication. In 1989, the Scholarly Communication Project was established in Virginia Tech's Newman Library; this project was in many ways ahead of its time and sought to provide a space in which to experiment with technology to produce scholarship in new and developing formats. In 2013, Virginia Tech played a leading role in the creation of the Library Publishing Coalition, an independent, community-led membership association, bringing together academic and research libraries and library consortia engaged in scholarly publishing.

When Peter Potter arrived at Virginia Tech in 2016, the library was already publishing a variety of online materials (journals, theses, and dissertations, as well as the occasional open textbook and volume of conference proceedings), but it was limited in its ability to publish at scale or to provide the unified platform and web presence of an established scholarly publisher. It was Peter's job to assess the range of publishing needs and opportunities at Virginia Tech and recommend a plan for building a new kind of university-based publishing program—one that could meet those needs effectively and sustainably by making full use of available and emerging technologies.

Peter came to Virginia Tech with over 30 years in university press publishing, which gave him a wealth of publishing experience that proved immediately valuable to the Virginia Tech community. He began running workshops for faculty members on different aspects of publishing, including how to write book proposals, how to manage the peer review process, and more. These workshops continue to be popular with faculty members from all career levels.

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This vision of the library as a hub for scholarly publishing activity on campus is consistent with the overall ethos of the library; indeed, Peter believes that library-led publishing is a natural extension of the library's mission to meet the needs of the institution's faculty, students, and the community as a whole. Moreover, open access, library-led publishing offers a unique opportunity to support a wider range of campus output, because there's less focus on commercial viability and more on quality and areas of strength at the institution. This is a prospect Peter found particularly refreshing after years in scholarly book publishing, where the combination of declining sales and higher list prices made it increasingly difficult to justify the publication of even top-notch scholarship. He believed that setting up an open access publisher, based in the library, would hugely benefit the faculty at Virginia Tech.

USING A PUBLISHING SERVICES PROVIDER

From the beginning, Peter was interested in the possibility of finding an external publishing service provider to support the running of the press. At the time, the library was using a journal management system to support its journal publishing program, but this required considerable staff time, and it didn't address another of its goals in starting Virginia Tech Publishing—to expand the range of publishing formats to include monographs, books, textbooks, and born-digital projects. With this in mind, Peter began to look into publishing service providers, and came across]u[Ubiquity.

]u[ubiquity

]u[Ubiquity had many draws, but for Peter some of the most important were its comprehensive range of services, its community, and its commitment to openness.

A comprehensive range of services

Peter believed that]u[Ubiquity was, and still is, unique in the full range of services that it offers small open access publishers like Virginia Tech Publishing. By taking care of all of the 'back-office' processes of publishing,]u[Ubiquity enables Peter's team to focus on 'front-office' concerns related to maximising the press's quality and output.]u[Ubiquity's dedication to the open source software community, and the fact that they actively contribute to improving the platforms that their services run on, was another highly attractive factor. It was also important that]u[Ubiquity had been founded by researchers who genuinely understood the wider landscape of scholarly publishing because it convinced Peter of the company's long-term commitment both to the open scholarship community and to making sure that their services were the best they could be.

]u[Ubiquity Community

Another attractive feature of]u[Ubiquity was the growing Partner Press Network. Early on, Peter was able to speak to existing members of the network, and hear about their experiences with]u[Ubiquity, which proved valuable in his decision making process. Moreover, Peter liked the prospect of Virginia Tech Publishing being part of a community of like-minded publishers to connect with and learn from.

Shared values

Ultimately, it was the shared values between]u[Ubiquity and the library at Virginia Tech that confirmed for Peter that this partnership was the right one. From the start, it was non-negotiable that the press would be open access because of the library's commitment to ensuring the widest possible access to knowledge.]u[Ubiquity's total dedication to open access, to open source software, and to open scholarship in general aligned with this commitment. After a period of discussion with]u[Ubiquity's founder and CEO Brian Hole, Virginia Tech agreed to join the]u[Ubiquity Partner Network, and Virginia Tech Publishing was born.

WORKING WITH]u[UBIQUITY

Virginia Tech's extensive history of scholarly communication innovation and Peter's 30 years of publishing experience meant that Virginia Tech Publishing was positioned well for success. Partnering with]u[Ubiquity further enabled Peter to mitigate some challenges and provided plenty of support along the way.

Building a Press from the ground up

A major challenge for any fledgling publisher is building a professional publishing team. Based in rural southwest Virginia, Virginia Tech has its own unique challenges, so Peter understood that he would have to be flexible in building his team, allowing the press to be shaped by this team rather than the other way around. The fact that]u[Ubiquity was there to cover essential 'back office' work relieved much of the stress associated with technology and software maintenance, and allowed Peter to focus solely on growing a press team that was wholly dedicated to learning about and improving library publishing.

Technology & development

Peter soon discovered the benefits of having an outsourced team to deal with the publishing software. In the setup period of the press, the Virginia Tech Publishing team did not have to build any systems from scratch. Instead, the]u[Ubiquity development team provided both tested technology and in-time tech support. In the years since, this has proved to be one of the enduring benefits of working with]u[Ubiquity. As Peter explains, "most small publishers can't afford to directly invest in technology; the constant upkeep required to simply maintain it, let alone improve it, would have greatly eaten into our limited time and resources."]u[Ubiquity's commitment to maintaining and developing open source software, and their active role in the open source community, has enabled Virginia Tech Publishing to enjoy the benefits of having evolving publishing software to use, without the responsibility and burden of maintaining it themselves.

Support from the]u[Ubiquity Team

]u[Ubiquity is based in the UK and in 2016 already had a notable presence in the US, which gave it a solid understanding of the unique position of the US institutional library publishing market.]u[Ubiquity's continued expansion in the US, including a growing number of team members based in the US, means that this aspect has gone from strength to strength.

This US presence also allowed for a more personal service for Virginia Tech Publishing; beyond simply having staff to contact who are based in the same time zone, Peter has had the opportunity to meet several members of the team in person. Peter recalled one of]u[Ubiquity's staff members, who was based within driving distance of Virginia Tech, making several visits to the campus. This level of attentiveness is something that simply wouldn't be possible in a big corporation. The ability to build working relationships with individual staff members, who Peter could easily contact, was invaluable in the press' set-up process, and has continued to be

very beneficial. Being able to reach out to individuals, to resolve issues, to discuss plans, or even just to share ideas, is something that Peter values highly; the expertise, flexibility and investment of the]u[Ubiquity team is something he believes really sets it apart from other companies, and indeed the personal touch and alignment of values makes]u[Ubiquity feel truly like a partnership, rather than a simple outsourcing exercise.

CONCLUSIONS

Having seen Virginia Tech Publishing go from strength to strength over the years, Peter is a firm believer in the value of a library publisher working with a publishing services provider. While some libraries may question the cost of working with a comprehensive service provider, he believes that they should look more closely at the value and cost of staff time, especially with respect to maintaining technology systems, which age more quickly than we all like to admit. In the end, he says, forming a partnership with a trusted service provider can actually be more cost-effective. He believes that education in this area, and a better general understanding of the true costs of publishing is needed to help librarians understand the value proposition of effective, sustainable scholarly publishing.

PETER'S ADVICE FOR LIBRARY-LED PUBLISHING

To institutional libraries looking to start a press, Peter recommends having a clear vision of what the press wants to achieve, and the values it wants to publish by, whilst always remaining flexible. Furthermore, having a good team that is dedicated to the same end goal is crucial to a press' long-term success. Virginia Tech Publishing has been shaped by the expertise and knowledge at the team's disposal, and Peter believes this has been valuable not only in overcoming issues such as staffing and building the team, but in the success of the press itself.