From vanity publishing to open access: missing link or broken link?
The Future is Now Conference, Johannesburg,
17 May 2010
LINKS IN THE CHAIN
Mainstream publishing
Vanity publishing
Subsidy publishing
Niche-market publishing
Community publishing
Self publishing
Where does University publishing fit in?
Online with Open Access? Is this vanity?
Conclusion
INTRODUCTION

“No place affords a more striking conviction of the vanity of human hopes, than a public library”
(Samuel Johnson)

- Vanity publishing takes place when a book, which is usually rejected by a mainstream or commercial publisher because of its quality, is published by a vanity publisher notwithstanding.

- Term ‘vanity press’ is derogatory and implies that an author was not able or good enough to get himself published via a mainstream publisher.

- Self-publishing: strict sense of the word not the same as vanity publishing
  Not many self-publishing books can stand the test of time or have enough substance to be of primary value.

Two terms for the same thing: autobiography vs vanity memoir
  Thus: many nuances in the links of the chain to achieve the publishing dream.
VARIOUS MODELS OF PUBLISHING: MAINSTREAM PUBLISHING

A recognised and established commercial publishing house

PROCESSES:
• Commissioning editors
• Actual publishing
• Marketing and distribution

BUSINESS MODEL
• The publisher takes the risk of all publication and production costs, distribution, marketing
• Cost of book includes: discount to book trade of 40%, storage and distribution costs, dispatch costs, free delivery and insurance
• Optimal imprint in South Africa 3000 copies – revenue determined by sales

EMOTIVE RESPONSE TO THIS MODEL/REPUTATION
• Norm for trustworthy, reliable and accepted publishing activities
• Gatekeepers of literary culture
• Never ever advertise for authors

Van der Merwe (2010)
VANITY PUBLISHING

A publishing house that publishes books irrespective of quality of content

PROCESSES
• Publishes books at the author’s expense

BUSINESS MODEL
• Publishes work without selection
• Sole qualification: the author will pay
• No editing or formatting services
• Production costs financed by the author
• Production costs: built-in profit for the publisher **irrespective of book sales**
• No production costs, no risks, no storage problems, and no marketing costs

EMOTIVE RESPONSE TO THIS MODEL/REPUTATION
• Lack of selectivity – operative word: “appeal to the author’s vanity”
• Have a book on the shelf, but nothing else
• Vanity press: market is the author himself
VANITY PUBLISHING

As Burton (2009) says:
“vanity presses have truly stained the world with atrocious misuses of ink and paper. These are the intellectual white elephants of the book world that sit cheek by jowl with personal poetry chapbooks and memoirs of pets”!
“the rhyme rags … give poets a useful vanity mirror in which they can burnish their egos, as well as a forum to glad-hand their friends and pursue their vendettas”

EXAMPLES OF VANITY PUBLISHING
• Vanity memoirs
• Poetry anthologies
• Family histories
• Local content

• No Vanity Publishers in South Africa
• Example from Great Britain – Minerva Press
• Hybrid Models less negative and actually worthwhile

Newey (2003)
One author’s experience of vanity publishing:

• “The response was very quick, probably only about two weeks and I received a reply, and what a reply it was. I received the editorial review of my book which basically glowed in my hands. It said how well it was written, about the relationships of the characters, how good the story was, it was such a fantastic review. What really made the review was the fact that they stated it could do well if published under the Minerva Press Imprint.”

• Success story: “Poetry” magazine started in 1912 – published new talent such as TS Eliot, DH Lawrence, Robert Frost and James Joyce

• Zane Grey the great Western writer: first novel, Betty Zane (1903) rejected by Harper & Brothers. Published with funds provided by his family
SUBSIDY PUBLISHING

Books published with the help of a subsidy or a grant

BUSINESS MODEL
• Publishes books that never would have seen the light of day
• Usually an outside body or institution who provides the funds
• Much the same as self-publishing

EMOTIVE RESPONSE TO THIS MODEL/REPUTATION
• Neutral

EXAMPLES
• David Krut in Johannesburg
• Hiemstra Trust, National Arts Council
• Church publications: include church histories, motivational books, daily prayer books
NICHE MARKET PUBLISHING

Niche market publishers concentrate on small and respectable target groups

BUSINESS MODEL
• More up market and truer version than a vanity publisher
• does reject substandard books
• profit potential of niche market publishing limited

EMOTIVE RESPONSE TO THIS MODEL/REPUTATION
• Small but respectable arts and humanities publishing house
• Fernwood Press: specializes in illustrated non-fiction reference works on southern Africa’s cultural and natural history

Van der Merwe (2010)
COMMUNITY PUBLISHING

Books published in a community or about a community – local content

BUSINESS MODEL
• Same model as subsidy publishing
• Small grant will cover the costs of printing a small print run for the first edition

EMOTIVE RESPONSE TO THIS MODEL/REPUTATION
• Community Publishing Project (CCP) by the Centre for the Book and NB Publishers in Cape Town
• Develop enthusiastic and imaginative small publishers
• To develop a culture of reading

Higgs (2006)
SELF PUBLISHING – OFTEN CONFUSED WITH VANITY PUBLISHING

Author is responsible for the traditional functions of the publisher himself: editing, marketing and distribution

BUSINESS MODEL
- Subsidizes his own work
- Truly self-published: author creates a names for his own publishing house
- Author in book as ‘publisher’

EMOTIVE RESPONSE TO THIS MODEL/REPUTATION
- True self publishing : author total control vs vanity publishing not total control
- Get drivel and very good quality work
EXAMPLES OF SUCCESSFUL SELF PUBLISHING

*Kook en geniet* written by S.J. A. de Villiers
- Published in 1951
- 1961: English version *Cook and Enjoy It*
- Up to 1990 (14th edition): she managed the printing and distribution of more than a half million copies
- 1992: established publisher Human & Rousseau took over and have sold more than a million copies so far

*Larger than life: a biography of Jan Bull Pickard*
- Family decided to publish a book on this very successful business man
- Paid for the writing and research of the book, printing, design
- His role in politics, business and rugby is documented (sponsored rugby rebel tours to SA)
EXAMPLES OF SUCCESSFUL SELF-PUBLISHING

ART BOOKS
• Real shortfall of art books published by mainstream publishers: expensive and market is limited
• Unique way of recording the art produced in South Africa
• Roughly 90% of art books are self-published
• *The artist in the garden: the quest for Moses Tladi* by Angela Read Lloyd and published by Print Matters

MARGINAL/EPHEMERAL LITERATURE
• Local community poetry: Jethro Louw wrote *The Cape of Storms* – 15 to 20 pages of poems stapled together with hardish cover – sold for R5 each

Botha (2010)
IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATIONS ON VANITY PUBLISHING

POD – Publish on Demand
- POD has opened up the world for self/vanity publishing
- Emphasis shifted: from publishing for an audience to publishing for the individual
- Dispense with publishers in the traditional sense of the word

Two SA examples
- One ‘publishing’ firm with two different websites:
  - 50 page booklet, folded, stapled with heavy glossy cover
  - Text supplied in final form (no editing or proofing required)
  - Layout R800, Cover design R600, ISBN number R200, Print facilitation R400, Printing R990, **Total cost: R2990. Book of 200 pages: R12000**
- **Crink**: wholly owned subsidiary of Media 24 (Naspers the holding company)
  - Enables authors to publish, sell, buy, and market their books online
  - Going off-line requires author’s capital investment
  - Limited marketing – online listservs
UNIVERSITY/ACADEMIC PUBLISHING

Academic research material being published for a limited audience

- Both have very small markets, and face the same forces and problems
- A form of niche marketing publishing
- New model: author – technology infrastructure – reader

Academics taking the vanity publishing route could end up with an inferior work and reputation

- Never appear in catalogues
- Never be sold in bookstores
- Never reviewed in any journals
- Not peer-reviewed

Winkworth (2001), Savage (2008)
Examples of successful academic POD publishing

**Cambridge University Press**
- Doubled amount of books published
- Do not have to print so many copies (as little as 10 to 50)
- New stock management system

**Why use POD?**
- Keep books/backlists alive
- Press runs are small
- Environmentally friendly
- Reduces costs of warehousing
- Cuts waste (pulping)
- Supplying out-of-print titles
- Ideal for university presses
- Savage: proposes subsidized ‘starter’ book for new academics

Thynne (2007)
VANITY? ONLINE WITH OPEN ACCESS/ACADEMIC PUBLISHING?

Hogge: blogging is the bastion of online vanity publishing
“on the Web, one is guaranteed to be ‘famous for fifteen people!’”
- Old ego really benefits from going online, blogging, flickr, facebooking, etc.
- Best of all: you don’t have to pay!

- Debates on internet on open-access journal publishing as a new vanity publishing industry
- Unaccredited open access journals: author has to pay to be published online with promises of quadrupled citation rates

- Do get OA vanity publishers that promise to publish your paper if it is “deemed to be of interest to someone”
- OA movement to work on and develop content quality which researchers can trust
WHAT ARE SOME OF THE CONSEQUENCES OF THIS PUBLISHING FREEDOM?

Issues to be addressed

- Technical quality of the products sent out in the world
- Vying for space on the bookshelves
- Overstocking with forgettable books

On positive note:

- Power to the individual that then progresses to:
- Crink “it is also about participation, distributed knowledge, collaborative online communities, personal social networks and harnessing of collective intelligence”
VANITY PUBLISHING: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

- Publishing options all linked together
- Difficult to find examples of vanity publishers: why? no marketing, no reviews

Vanity publishing in broader more positive sense

- Vibrant marginal publishing culture - more books self-published than by mainstream publishers
- Escape valve for people’s creative thoughts
- Not only hard paper copies but exploded into the electronic world
- Technically much easier to publish a book than ever before
- Commercial publishers important role to preserve our mainstream cultural heritage
- Reminiscence literature genre(!) tremendous emotional impact on a family, beacon of stability for future generations
- Our generation: freedom of speech, freedom of publishing our own thoughts but unfortunately also freedom to eternalize drivel
- Traditional beautiful aesthetic book will survive together with ephemeral family vanity memoirs

THANK YOU
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