

READING THE BUSH - TRENDS IN DIGITAL BOOK PUBLICATION IN REGIONAL AND RURAL AUSTRALIA

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ABSTRACT

Digital book production is just one advanced communication technology being explored in rural and regional Australia. Books remain critical cultural, political, and social artefacts. This paper presents current, representative case studies of rural, digital book production. These transformations to how the books are created, sold, and distributed are closely related to the ways non-urban Australia is positioning itself for the information economy. They also may be seen as localised responses to the challenges of globalization.

BACKGROUND

Facilitating creative dialogues between people is the Internet's greatest, and perhaps only, contribution to business culture. (Benett, 2002)

The convergent communication industries: media, computing, and telephony, lie at the heart of globalization. They have also become essential services. Without them, participation in the information society becomes problematic.

One focus of complaint from rural and regional and remote Australia has been inadequate access to these services (Telecommunications Services Inquiry, 2000). Although the world isn't really shrinking, the suite of communication devices collectively thought of as the Internet has lessened the disadvantages of the outback's great geographic spread. Technology now offers an antidote for the 'tyranny of distance' that has been as fundamental to Australian life as droughts and floods. However, observers who herald the arrival of 'anytime, anywhere' communications are also quick to point out that this comes with strings: how, and who will ensure that these new facilities support, rather than supplant, the human and social values we want to preserve? (Perugini, 1996).

Australia is one of the most urbanised countries in the world, with a sprinkle of population linking the major coastal cities. Yet there has always been a respect and even awe for the lifestyle and inventiveness of the people in the smaller towns and the even more isolated outback regions. Increasingly, these non-metropolitan areas have become restive in response to changing economic and social dimensions. Questions about the impacts of globalization are no longer abstractions for the people outside Australia's metropolitan areas. The rise of alternative political parties, such as

One Nation, indicates a raw nerve in the national psyche.

The challenges of globalization for local cultures is most often described in relation to less-developed nations versus the values and influence of the wealthier countries (Friedman, 2000), but this critique scales both up and down. Even within OECD countries, there is resentment and resistance to the US influence, particularly movies and popular entertainment – including the multimedia smorgasbord that new technologies invite. And within Australia there is conflict between the dominance of metropolitan ways of life, the fast-paced, high-spending 'latte' set, and the slower more measured and personal approaches that reflect the values of rural life.

Or at least, those are the stereotypes that find their way into our thinking. The reality is more complex. Rural and regional Australia has cultures that are both national and local. As well as a collective sense of being non-urban, many areas also have differentiated sub-cultures associated with their history, geography, local industries, and migration patterns. The stories, songs, bush knowledge, and robust ways of life can be documented and preserved via new media, while also reaching new audiences.

The convergence of technologies also helps to bring together diverse resources and people: digital publishing requires at least design, editing, creative, financial, marketing, and computing skills and input. Digital books blend with existing modes of communication and publishing and provide extra features. This convergence and interdependence of communication systems is an emerging quality of the information age, so that it is now more appropriate to think of the Internet as the assembly of all technologies that enable

electronic communications and data transfer around the world (Bimber, 2000). An array of multi-media technologies are now available to enhance text. These considerations justified the inclusion of case studies that were based around communities, including communities of practice, as places to look for the seeds of digital publishing's future in rural Australia.

Digital publishing presents opportunities for communities to use technology to talk about their technology: what they want for themselves, their communities, and their futures. This wider context of globalization: local and regional autonomy; is the context for this brief survey of digital publishing in rural Australia.

This paper is based on research carried out early in 2002 for the Creator-To-Consumer Digital Publishing Project, funded by the Department of Industry, Science and Resources. Several descriptive case studies are used to discuss the context for digital books in rural Australia, and observations are made about likely future directions.

METHODOLOGY

This survey is based on a sampling of small publishers and several community-based groups. Suggestions are made in the conclusion for further avenues of exploration. Publishers were found from online lists and sites that were sent from several sources, including responses to queries to a library mailing list, a regional forum list, and a national list about Internet developments. Enquiries were also made to regional arts organizations. The focus was on publishers either based in a rural area or who have (or could have) significant rural content or customers. The case studies included those who are selling books online, but emphasis is on those taking the next step and making them available electronically or via print on demand. Vanity and royalty publishers were not surveyed per se, although some digital publishers also provide this service.

Based on the widely-accepted criteria of Yin (1989), a case-study approach was considered appropriate for this mutable area, even though this research could only provide a 'snapshot' in time. The research was based on Web site analysis, with interviews conducted via E-mail and phone for some of the case studies. Participants seemed comfortable with what one called the "incremental interview, so well suited to E-mail". They were uniformly happy to provide information, and interested to learn

more about what other digital publishers are doing. They were sent drafts to comment on, and a final copy of the chapter.

CASE STUDY 1: RURAL EDUCATIONAL PUBLISHER

Applying Knowledge Pty Ltd.
<http://appknow.com>

This company demonstrates the integration of professional skills with convergent communication technologies and digital publishing, in the important growth area of online learning. Based in Albury, NSW, it provides consultancy services in tertiary and primary curriculum development and online education. The company has been operating for three years, and has developed from the interests and skills of the directors, Dr Peter Tylee and Dr Jenny Tylee, who have extensive experience as academics and professionals in health, education, and information technology. Currently, Applying Knowledge has seven staff members. They have created a division to assist with their digital publishing, as that is an important part of their work.

They have two tertiary texts in online format. They will convert these to e-book format when they resolve some issues of preserving interactivity. Present interactivity includes auto-correcting self-tests using client sided programming to enable timely and effective student feedback, control of dynamic models and illustrations, navigation systems within the materials, and controls to set font type and size. Various types of student-teacher interactivity are also available in online course versions of the texts. Users of the online courses have rated them as excellent and significantly better than traditional materials. Their focus will remain on e-books rather than print on demand for the time being. Their course on primary health care is an example of content that is highly topical for regional audiences. It places this topic in its international context, and relates it to Australian research and policy, all with appropriate links to resources and reading.

Another important aspect of their digital publishing involves e-zines, or electronic newsletters. They offer a full publishing service to organizations wishing to establish an e-zine. The organizations provide the primary content, although Applying Knowledge can help to present material in a Web-friendly and possibly printable format. An example is the *Online Informer*, an e-zine developed for the National

Learning Network Project undertaken by Australian Women in Agriculture. This publication was designed and developed for a nationwide readership, primarily in rural Australia.

They see the future in not just producing electronic versions of paper documents, but in the value-added capacity of a digital curriculum to engage readers as active learners through meaningful and intelligent interactivity. Thus, their business model aims to bring together the skills of the author, teacher, programmer, and electronic publisher. They see this as going beyond conventional texts to provide a service and information that is more dynamic, up-to-date and interesting.

They do not perceive their rural location as a disadvantage, as their market is global, although currently restricted to the English language. Although they see significant potential in e-books and online learning materials for rural and regional audiences, they also recognise that both the skills base and the access to infrastructure can be limiting factors. They also see potential in the tertiary market, although universities differ greatly in their stages of development and willingness to invest.

Director Peter Tylee notes that within Australia AUD 68 million has been committed to 'learning object development' for years K-12 over the next three years, and this is likely to lead to greater maturity and consistency of standards in this field. Over the medium term he sees the greatest opportunities for Applied Knowledge in specialist areas such as development of online curricula for companies and non-commercial organizations, along with spin-offs such as e-zine and corporate manual publication.

At the time of research, the company's Web sites were being redeveloped to enable improved site maintenance, security, and database integration. They are also determining appropriate market differentiation across their existing Web domains, particularly Education4Skills.com, HowToGuidelines.com and AppKnow.com.

CASE STUDY 2: RURAL PUBLISHER

The Writer's Exchange E-Publishing <http://www.writers-exchange.com/epublishing/>

This is an electronic publishing site edited by Sandy Cummins from Atherton, a small regional centre in northern Queensland. It carries titles in

many genres, including romance, self-help, parenting, humour, science fiction, westerns, Christian, humour, children and young adults, parenting, and some free books. It is supported by collaboration with a number of editors and illustrators, some of whom are based in the US.

This group produce full edited books, and also assist with self-publication. Their writers are predominantly American authors but there are also a few Australians, and a range of other nationalities amongst their 'upcoming' authors. Their site is personalised by including a good deal of information about the authors. Decisions about publishing are made based on the texts, and since preliminary negotiations are electronic, the publisher only becomes aware of an author's location when the contract is being processed.

All are available electronically, in a range of formats, including PDF, RTF, HTML, CD, and LIT, the Microsoft Reader format. The plan to also produce in formats for the ebookMan and Hie-book electronic hand-held readers in the near future. The CDs contain all the formats, so are quite flexible for customers who do not have high bandwidth access.

Their print books are available as print on demand from Digital Print Australia (<http://www.digitalprintaustralia.com>). They offer a full electronic commerce facility on the site, using PayPal, or Clickbank for credit card purchases, and have just moved onto a higher bandwidth Web host.

The Writers Exchange describes itself as "a community designed to share and enrich our writing lives". To this end, the associated Writing Resource Site has links to a wide range of information and services for writers, including jobs, awards, interviews with other writers, and books and articles about writing. They have eight columnists writing regularly for the site, with articles archived. The Writing Resource Site was featured in May 2001's Writers Digest Top 101 Web sites.

They are quite active in advancing the professionalism and acceptance of e-publishing, and are members of several professional electronic publishing organizations, including:

The Electronic Publisher's Coalition (<http://www.epccentral.org/>)

Electronic Authors Guild International (<http://www.eguild.org/>)

The Electronically Published Professionals (<http://eapro.homestead.com/information.html>)

Electronically Published Internet Connection (<http://www.epicauthors.org/>)

Publisher Sandy Cummins believes that standardisation of formats, preferably so that they can be independent of the technology used to view them, would encourage the development of e-books. She notes that in the US a variety of readers are available, but Australia only has the eBookMan. These readers are now being advertised via mainstream media in the US, which indicates they are gaining acceptance with the general public.

She sees obstacles falling away, as publisher James Bennett is now including e-books in its catalogues, and this will make Writer's Exchange books available to Australian libraries. A local computer company is also working with her to set up a display of her e-books. Other hurdles have come from within the publishing industry and associated professional bodies. Cummins notes that Romance Writers of America (RWA) has set up a taskforce to find out how many of their members have quit after the RWA refused to accept electronic publishing as a qualification for membership. Local e-books are also likely to expand, as long as large sales aren't expected. Australian non-fiction books will generally have a more limited audience, but when produced as e-books they can also remain on the electronic shelves without taking up more than the site visitor's scanning time. She says that US authors, illustrators, and book designers have had a first-mover advantage, as the Internet has been a feature of American life for longer, and their access charges are less and their bandwidth higher. This helps to explain the noticeable presence of Americans who are involved in Australian e-publishing. The cross-fertilisation with Australian authors and designers, etc., partly through international professional organizations, along with improvements to telecommunications access, are likely to change the balance in various areas, including rural and regional e-publishing.

CASE 3: A REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

Cabonne Country

<http://www.cabonnecountry.com>

This is an extensive Web site funded by a Networking the Nation grant, supported by the Cabonne Council. It was part of the Small

Towns Development Project that identified the need for information -technology development and education within the shire. The site centres on eight villages around Orange in NSW, and has won several awards. It is best understood in the context of a broad community-development approach, which will facilitate the collaborative networking and skills base that could lead to digital publishing opportunities. A community-development officer was appointed, and a number of activities contributed to the overall plan, including:

- a SWOT analysis;
- a First Impressions Photographic Survey, and a follow-up Participatory Photographic Survey of each community involving representatives from student groups, the elderly, people with disabilities, businesspeople, sole supporting parents, and farmers, etc.;
- the development of a large network of committees within the shire villages and towns, with an overarching committee to assist in building the strategy and implementing the plan;
- several community consultations and public meetings to collect the views, needs, wishes, and dreams of the residents and business people;
- a Skills Audit to understand the creative side and resources of each community;
- the building of a database of businesses for the 8 villages of Cabonne Country;
- a visioning exercise based on principles of community participation.

As a result of this holistic approach, the Web site relates closely to the underlying community development: they mirror and complement each other. Key features are:

- free business Web sites, and a listing of businesses by category;
- free classified ads online;
- virtual photographic tours; of the villages;
- cyber cafes to facilitate online training, Web development and services such as CD-ROM production and colour printing.

This project represents a big step towards an integrated online strategy for a rural area. Over time, the cyber cafes and other services will develop the local skills base and awareness of online services. Once this reaches a critical mass, it is likely that interest in and demand for

digital publishing will arise. An advantage is that the community development officer, Joy Engelman, is also a photographer and painter. She set up an online gallery of her work after completing a course in HTML. She is already selling overseas and is well placed to participate in and assist others in recognising the business and cultural opportunities of digital publication. Already, several CD-ROMs on village history have been produced, and these will also be available online. This is the first step towards digital publishing.

As with many community technology-development approaches, the Cabonne Country project encountered a gap between the plans and skills of the innovators and the backgrounds of the collaborative partners. These differences account for much of the 'bumpiness' of similar projects that is often obvious to the outside observer. A current limitation is that the site doesn't link directly to online education or downloadable publications, and the site for the council (still under development at the time of research), did not seem to include council minutes or links to downloadable publications. A business directory is downloadable, and includes a book store and a newsagent. There is also a rural transaction centre which offers a number of business services along with access to government services. Thus, there are several of the essential elements that could evolve in ways that would be favourable to digital publications, perhaps even digital books. This is another project to revisit in a year's time.

CASE STUDY 4: REGIONAL CHILDREN'S PUBLISHER

Bandicoot Books

<http://www.bandicootbooks.com/>

This company is based outside Hobart, so may be considered regional. Steve and Marion Isham are a husband-and-wife team, formerly a teacher and a speech therapist respectively, who write, illustrate, publish, and promote. They specialise in books with riddles and things to find that compliment the narrative. They describe the books as having 'their inspiration in Tasmania but they are designed to be enjoyed anywhere in the world'.

They usually produce one book per year, typically 5000 copies, using an off-set printer in Singapore. They are not currently planning on producing e-books or printing on demand. The costs of full colour reproduction makes print on demand unattractive for books with many

illustrations. A recent Bandicoot Books title has an element of multimedia, as it has specially written songs produced on an accompanying CD. Their business also has a strong international element, as they distribute through a US seller, and Steve spends some time each year promoting the books by speaking about writing at schools in the US (and Australia). They cater to the education and gift markets, about equally. Their site doesn't have a full electronic commerce facility, but they can take orders via E-mail or fax, and will call back for credit card details.

CASE STUDY 5: RURAL GENERAL PUBLISHER

Bob-e-books www.bob-e-books.com

Based in Wagga, this is true e-book publishing operation with a rural Australian focus. The books are available in a variety of formats, including PDF, Palm Pilots and MS Reader. They can also be ordered as paper books, through a print-on-demand arrangement with a printer in South Australia. The site is attractive and easy to navigate, with full electronic commerce functionality. It also offers several free books.

The publisher, Bobby Graham, has 24 years experience in book publishing, mostly in South Africa. She seeks to bring the professionalism of editorial input and design to the new media, and also to establish a business that is transportable. At the same time Bob-e-books is highly committed to assisting local authors and agencies to get their words out. The titles available include mostly Australian authors, and one publication of Wagga history won the regional History Prize in the 2000 NSW Premier's History Awards.

Bobby is establishing a partnership with Charles Sturt University, and is selling some of its academic research on rural issues and its publication *Rural Society Journal*. She has also done extensive market research in the area, including the local library and council, to identify possibilities for collaborative ventures. She has identified a number of value-adding opportunities, and some of these are likely to lead to sustainable projects.

The site also features details on the authors, and extensive information about the service, the security arrangements, and the basics about hand-held devices, etc. This is very helpful for people who are uncertain about e-books or how they work. There is a chatty (online) newsletter

that readers can subscribe to and receive as E-mail, and links to media articles and comments from viewers, along with the opportunity to comment on manuscripts Bobby receives – in order to help her decide which to publish. Thus, there is real user input to the site and the process. There is also a link to an associated business, eVolutionpress, which solicits material from writers. Bob-e-books is an interesting business model, as it offers authors 50 percent royalties after the first 100 copies. Conventional publishers usually only offer 12 percent.

This has all the elements for a successful publishing venture; it would be interesting to follow its evolution. Although the business is not yet providing substantial returns, it has identified print on demand as an area suitable for rural publishing. The advantages include reduced risk for the publisher, independence from local or city-based booksellers, the potential to reach an audience beyond those who can physically visit a shop on busy trips into town, and the contribution to local culture and history (and writers) that short runs make feasible.

CASE STUDY 6: ZIPTALES

Ziptales <http://www.ziptales.com.au>

This is an educational reading site, currently in a demonstration stage, and due to become fully interactive and operational early in 2002. The site does not supply a geographic location, but it is intended for home and school use, and is therefore relevant to rural children and teachers. At the time of research, the stories were free, but eventually it will become a subscription site. The potential for rural Australia is that these will be available from any computer, and will offer an additional dimension to children's reading.

It aims to provide high-quality multimedia literacy materials that offer educationally worthwhile reading materials and make full use of new technologies. As well as creating a safe Web site dedicated to children's needs, the organization hopes to provide materials with high motivation potential (interactive, animated, kid-oriented) to make learning fun. They also hope to provide an alternative to a "print-saturated learning environment".

The stories are short, in 'bite-sized' chunks, with no story longer than 1000 words. The stories are both animated and interactive, allowing children to choose options in the story development. The site uses Flash 3 technology, and has been

developed under guidelines provided by the site's professional editorial committee, led by PETA Chair and Senior Lecturer in Education (Literacy), Dr Christina Davidson.

CASE STUDY 7: GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENT

Queensland Department of Primary Industries (DPI) Shop Online

<http://www.dpi.qld.gov.au/home/default.html>

The Queensland DPI is trialing e-books. They offer a number of titles of interest to farmers and gardeners, including *Barramundi Farming*; *Fruits in the Home Garden*; *Introduction to the Bush Foods Industry*; and *Water it Right*. They link to the site to download Microsoft Reader software, and also point to a text-to-speech package. To download the e-books, the site takes you through an electronic commerce 'add to trolley' process, and notes that you will not be charged. The DPI Shop Online was a finalist in the 2001 Asia-Pacific Queensland IT&T Awards, and offers many other publications online.

CASE STUDY 8: A COMMUNITY GROUP

Maroochy Landcare Group Inc.
<http://cwpp.slq.qld.gov.au/mlg/>

This is a non-profit community group of primary producers, who offer free e-books for convenience, and to save on costs. Their Web site is hosted by the State Library of Queensland as a community Web publishing project. They have technical and administration staff who convert their documents to both Acrobat and e-book formats in addition to preparing other publications, including commissioning artists, for printing. They also run an Arcview Geographic Information System (GIS). Their databases are publicly accessible, and the Maroochy Shire Council uses their wildlife sightings GIS layer in their assessment of development applications. Their intention is to act "as an information conduit" to help with the integration of practical and effective landcare projects. They see this access to practical ecological interaction as essential for the success of landcare funding schemes. For example, they offer a V-Pack: "user-friendly information package on Regional Vegetation Management Planning". Their sub-groups also have interests in rural culture and history, and their contributors, including rural women, find it "empowering" to see their work as an e-book on the Web.

CASE STUDY 9: A LITERARY PUBLISHER

Interactive Publications Pty Ltd
<http://www.interpr.com.au/>

Although based in suburban Brisbane, Interactive Publications (IP) is included here because of its advanced approach to digital publishing, and its commitment to publishing quality literature and new authors. This is a sophisticated example of a company publishing via off-set and digital print technologies, but with a strong development into digital titles. Clearly, this business could be based anywhere, as much of its communication with authors is electronic. Some titles are from rural authors, or about rural life.

Interactive Publications has three imprints: Interactive Press, its literary flagship, Glass House Books (GHB), and IP Digital (IPD). Interactive Press has an Emerging Authors Series as well as an Established Authors Series. GHB and IPD offer, as well as royalty and subsidy publication, assistance with self-publication. IP produces downloadable e-books and PDF texts on CDs, as well as short-run print jobs (from 300 copies) via docutech (high resolution laser printing). The business is expanding into multimedia, and has released one 'literary multimedia' work, *The Gallery*, (<http://www.interpr.com.au/titles/GY.htm>), with three others scheduled for release in 2002. *The Gallery* has been commercially successful, even though, at 500 MB, it is rather large for those who don't have broadband access.

The IP Web site offers a limited electronic-commerce facility, and mini-sites on most titles link to more information about the authors and up-to-date reviews, samples from the work, and even audio files of readings. These mini-sites can be used the way academics use their Web sites: as introductions to their work. This is a thriving business run by Dr. David Reiter, an internationally known poet and fiction writer. He sees audience development, promotion and distribution as key elements for success, along with innovative professional and contractual relationships with authors. While continuing to publish via off-set, he sees digital titles as a way to trial work that 'mainstream' publishers reject as non-commercial. This approach has great potential to foster diversity in literary offerings.

Since 1999, IP has received some arts funding from the Queensland Government. This has helped the company to develop its well-rounded business model. IP builds on many strengths,

and sees an integrated approach as essential. Their main sales come from print, because this form remains dominant. This stability allows them to experiment with projects such as *The Gallery*, which test the waters on what readers (and listeners) want from new media. They believe a mix of print and digital is important in these early stages of the new technologies, and their expertise in publishing means they are adding value to all authors. They have also made a substantial and thoughtful investment in a high-quality Web site. This saves time, for example, on sending out their detailed guidelines to prospective authors. Other strengths are realistic assessment of their costs, as publishers, and a good ability to promote authors appropriately. IP expects to add about ten new titles in 2002; six of these will be print-based.

ANALYSIS

The research reveals a range of initiatives involving digital publishing in non-metropolitan Australia. These came from several perspectives, not just traditional publishing. The groups and publishers interviewed were both entrepreneurial and socially engaged. They were interested in the business and intellectual impacts of their activities, and most were also content creators. This sense of purpose beyond profit (Lester, 1998) came through quite clearly, along with a sense of pride and pleasure at being where they were. They understood the synergistic nature of new business models, which rely more than ever before on building networks across sectors. Most were highly attuned to the potential for expanding the scope and techniques of digital production. The nature of convergent technology is to blur the border of the Internet, so that CDs, multimedia sound files, and interactive online communications become part of the opportunities to exploit.

Electronic-commerce bookshops for conventionally published books is still more common than electronic books. Electronic books seem to be more popular than print on demand at the moment, but this may be because of the difficulties in finding suitable printers. Books with coloured illustrations are also not economically attractive for print on demand, but are easily provided as electronic books.

Some initiatives grew out of necessity, such as the landcare group. Others were responding to the business opportunities which electronic publishing offers, such as not holding stock, ability to sell globally, etc. Cabonne Country

was helping to position their community with the skills and technologies to encourage as yet unidentified possibilities. Still others, such as Applying Knowledge and Bob-e-books, were deploying their own professional skills in a new way.

The strength of the digital publishing initiatives from even this small sample indicates that rural people and businesses are at least as much in tune with technological advances as their urban counterparts. Non-metropolitan communities do not take basic facilities such as telephone and electricity for granted, and are quick to make use of their potential. Not surprisingly, a key limiting factor was access to good online connectivity at sufficient bandwidth and affordable cost. This inhibits the wider explorations with multimedia, and even pushes the balance in favour of CDs. Without the equalisation of online access, rural digital publishing cannot realise its full potential.

If equality of access could be provided, regional and rural areas might actually demonstrate some advantages over city publishers. Their other overheads, such as housing and office space, are more affordable. The additional complexities and distractions of city life, observable even when comparing Canberra and Melbourne, can also be a drain on creative energy and business focus. Creative people are well-represented in the bush and relish the lifestyle. One small rural NSW case study that was not pursued identified a number of people who might have an interest in digital publishing, including someone involved with a rural technology centre, a poet with five published books, a local historian who has a gardening show, a music teacher on the local arts council, an academic editing a research magazine, and an economic development project. These were all in a town of just a few thousand people.

In a curious inversion of information economies of scale, locally-based publishers may be more likely to meet the information and communications needs of regional audiences. Partly, this is because their business models give them more scope to explore local opportunities. These might include chance meetings with local authors, or tourism groups that might be interested in a book about the area. It might mean collecting the stories of the places and events in the region that visitors and residents might want to learn about, or producing an industry e-zine. These partnerships, apparent in several of the case studies, but particularly Bob-e-books, point the way to development that is

both economically and socially useful. Every thriving e-business encourages information technology and demand, in the bush as elsewhere.

This survey found a strong presence of Americans, both expatriates and those based in the US, involved with digital book production. One publisher explained it as 'first-mover' advantage: the Americans have had longer exposure to the Internet, at generally higher bandwidth and lower costs, than Australians. Thus, they have had longer to explore the possibilities and develop the skills of editing and designing for online publications.

Non-profit non-loss models were apparent in several of the community projects, and at least one was experimenting with a subscription service. Some were operating as small businesses but not yet achieving good returns. It would be useful to conduct further research in about one year's time when a more detailed study might have evidence of successful business models. It may be too early to say just which products and models will be viable, and whether these will differ in rural areas. In education, current technologies favour online delivery, but this may change over time.

It would also be useful to fully investigate the government initiatives that are assisting in these directions. The Networking the Nation grants have clearly had a stimulus, and several other federal and state funding programs were mentioned by participants. It would be useful to find out more about the regional information officer network, funded by the Department of Transport and Regional Development. They would be well-placed to comment on other projects in the planning or trial stage.

Much of the federal funding has been for infrastructure and training. Rural groups have seized this opportunity and sensibly started to form partnerships and build networks of interest and collaboration. This was evident in the Cabonne Country project. Perhaps another stage of government funding will explicitly foster these networks, and encourage the communication across sectors that can produce real critical mass and synergies of interest. The Maroochy Landcare Group is a good example of the link between community-level self-organization, economic development, and patterns of governance, all entwined via technology and overlapping with digital publishing.

Opportunities for digital publishing abound in other areas not covered in this survey: Aboriginal projects, health and telemedicine, the complete range of online learning, industry groups, legal information, all government services, art and culture, and tourism. A comprehensive analysis would look at any sector that currently uses brochures, booklets, reports, maps, databases, or pictures. It is likely that in every area, digital publishing is being explored.

For each of these areas, there are questions of readiness, as well as the nagging issues of infrastructure and bandwidth. The spread of digital publishing has not yet reached critical mass, but this will happen as pockets spread, and through wider 'bootstrapping' projects that take an holistic approach. There is no shortage of skilled and talented people who have good ideas about what could be published electronically. Several of these entrepreneurs mentioned that dealing with government at any level is an obstacle, due to bureaucratic dawdling and lack of understanding of what could be achieved. Yet the importance of governments as leaders in this area cannot be overstated. When they grasp the opportunities, they set the pace for all other sectors.

DIGITAL BOOK PRODUCTION AS A RESPONSE TO GLOBALIZATION

Regional digital book production can help counter the globalized model of development which tends to filter down to every level of social organization. This model emphasises growth and capital investment, often at the expense of social and environmental sustainability (Hertz, 2001). Locally-based enterprises, content, and culture become less important than structured expansion. Widespread government acquiescence to these patterns of business and management has led to an equally global protest movement.

But the backlash against globalization isn't just about the smothering of local voices. A great deal of analysis has focused on the ways in which globally-centralised systems of news and media limit, rather than expand, the available information that is critical for democratic decision making (McChesney, 1999; Lyon, 1988). There is also increasing evidence that national governments have become 'captive' to corporate interests (Monbiot, 2000). It is this withering of autonomy that concerns people in the outback, as they see their development stalled, and services such as banking and healthcare contract. Lessig (1999) argues that

the design of the information society itself is being privatised, resulting in structures and constraints that favour corporate goals.

This returns us to the potential of digital publishing in rural areas. All forms of information production are influential to our ability to determine future directions. The spread of globalizing models depends on advanced telecommunications, and since these tend to be located within already-developed areas, a positive feedback loop is created. Big begets bigger. This can lead to 'rural bleed', as Ron Ipsen, founder of an East Gippsland Internet service, has vividly described it. In a two stage process, first big city companies and then multinationals can move in with better, faster services that the smaller regional areas cannot compete with.

But this is not the only model for rural Australia. New forms of highly interactive information, provided in cost-effective and convenient forms, can create a 'virtuous circle' that fosters local and appropriate agenda setting, discussion, and solutions. Sharing local culture supports the articulation of democratic values. Several of the case studies in this paper demonstrate this interaction. They also demonstrate diverse business models, which some consider a sign of economic and social vitality (Mintzberg, 1996; Tisdell, 1996). Many of the projects described above were walking, rather than running towards a digital publishing future, a number of them were actively involved with determining where the race might be taking them and their communities. Their holistic approaches reveal high levels of awareness of the potential impacts their endeavours might have on their communities.

The decentralised nature of the Internet provides tools for influencing from within, as well as accepting from without. Rural publishers can, and are, selling to the rest of the world. In some cases, they are using Australian content as a special selling point. E-books can free readers from the need to travel to a bookstore, and free bookstores from holding extensive stocks. Print on demand combined with electronic commerce can give the best of both worlds, and allow shorter print runs that give new or non-mainstream authors the old Australian 'go'.

This research has identified a number of existing and nascent digital-publishing projects in rural Australia. Each is exploring the area according to the talents, inclinations, and available time and resources of its principals. Some are

working closely with their communities; others are developing working relationships with distant authors, editors and artists. Most have a strong sense of local identity and a genuine desire to contribute to their region's presentation and viability. The kinds of collaboration and creativity that these digital publishers and community groups offer is an important element for a thriving rural economy and culture.

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To read the full-text of this research, you can request a copy directly from the author. References (22). Abstract. This ten-chapter book was the first of its type in Australia, bringing a critical sociological perspective to the analysis of contemporary regional change. Synthesising results from over 15 years of research by the authors, the book sought to explain regional disadvantage. For two decades successive Australian governments have followed the world-wide trend in industrialised nations to devolve responsibility for social welfare programs to local areas and to nongovernment agencies, the stated rationale being to break down welfare dependency and to promote individual responsibility. Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Melbourne, Australia AHURI Final Report; no.165 1834-7223 Beer, A. et al. (2011) The drivers of supply and demand in Australias rural and regional centres, AHURI Final Report No.165. The opinions in this publication reflect the views of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of AHURI Limited, its Board or its funding organisations. (2007, 2005); covering a decade that saw a rapid house price boom, continued economic restructuring and diversification in regional Australia, and major changes in both government policies and global and regional economic development. In many rural and regional centres the pace of change within their housing markets has been substantial. This analysis of regional statistics shows that families living in the "bush" may differ in some important ways compared to those living in the city. Those in remote or very remote areas are more likely to be Indigenous than those living in inner regional areas or major cities; and a greater proportion of those in very remote areas live in multi-family households. While family structure does not differ markedly across regions varying in remoteness, Indigenous people are more likely to live in one-parent families, especially in remote and very remote areas. Provides an overview of fertility trends and their potential implications for Australia, as well as key current government policies and schemes. Families then and now: 1980-2010. Research summary Oct 2010. *Australia (Victoria). ABSTRACT Australian society in the 1990s has been marked by the gradual disenfranchisement of rural communities due to the urban bias of political and economic decision-makers. Best copy available. From The Bush To The City: Reversing An Australian Trend In Teacher Professional Development. Tony Taylor, Australia. gradual disenfranchisement of rural and regional communities, a circumstance which has, in part, produced a disaffected electorate and led to the growth of radical right-wing political groups such as Pauline Hanson's One Nation. This disempowerment began, it could be argued, as a consequence of the urban bias of political and economic decision-makers (e.g. Lynn, 1989 and as commented on in.