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TRANSFORMATION OF A SCHOLARLY SOCIETY PUBLISHING PROGRAM

by Susan Skomal, Director of Publications, American Anthropological Association

The American Anthropological Association (AAA) was founded in 1902 with a mission to publish scholarly research for and by anthropologists. Throughout its first century, the association relied upon the tried and true technology of putting ink on paper to deliver the promised materials. In 2000, however, AAA's leadership recognized the need to seek a new publishing model to enable digital publishing and to offer new kinds of publishing and member services. In 2005—after studying AAA's existing publishing business, exploring alternatives, and looking for partnerships— the association launched AnthroSource, an online portal to full-text anthropological resources. The lessons learned from AAA's electronic evolution highlight issues confronting social science and humanities publishing in general and may help other publishers who are contemplating their own transformation.

Ink on Paper

In its 103 years as a scholarly publisher, AAA has produced some 280 books and over 35 periodical titles by gradually developing a small-scale publishing enterprise built upon a paper-based infrastructure as content and membership increased. By 2000, the association was producing 20 peer-reviewed journals, 7 newsletters and bulletins, and 4 book series, plus an annual guide to departments, the annual meeting program, and abstracts. The association's staff grew to provide a full range of management and production services, including copyediting, typesetting, advertising, and marketing, as well as fulfillment and accounting. This effort had become so important to the association that, by 2004, 42% of its budget was devoted to sustaining the publications program. The greatest challenges to sustainability—managing the costs of paper, postage, and human labor—were functions generally understood by all involved in the production stream. The move to electronic production, however, not only required a much broader set of technical skills, it called for a different understanding of how the parts work together, what drives costs, and where adaptations can realistically be made.

Despite the fact that the science, technology, and medical (STM) publishing community had already begun to invest heavily in the electronic future, by 1999 there was only a faint awareness of this prospect amongst social science and humanities publishers. In fact, as AAA welcomed the new millennium with preparations to celebrate its own centennial, few of the association's members were familiar with reference linking, nor did the leadership appreciate how soon the electronic medium was to become a standard for scholarly research. At this time, for example, citations to books far outweighed those to journal articles in anthropological publications, and the culture of anthropological research was still firmly rooted in the print medium.

Signs of impending change to AAA's publications program were visible as early as 2000. Revenue from institutional subscriptions—the single most important source of income—had declined on an average of 3–4 % per year since 1996. Although a relatively benign loss in a single year, cumulatively the trend translates into a 21–28% decline over six years. Moreover, following a 20-year period of steady increase in association membership—income that had long subsidized the cost of publication— membership dues began to level off and no longer increased sufficiently to offset publication expenses.

Education for Change

Realizing that the ground was shifting beneath the publishing industry, AAA prepared to educate its staff and members about the challenges faced by libraries, trends in the scholarly communications industry as a whole, and the experiences of the STM community specifically. Early steps included mustering a committee of dedicated anthropologist-librarians (most of whom are also members of the American Library Association's Anthropology and Sociology Section) to advise AAA on the challenges confronting libraries and the digital products and prices most likely to meet libraries' needs. AAA likewise consulted a wide range of scholarly publishers from the STM to the humanities. The association conducted a series of surveys of AAA members themselves to gather both quantifiable and ethnographic information about the diverse interests and needs of the broad membership. Had there been sufficient time and money, a study of research habits would have provided another source of useful data. Simultaneously, the association's decision makers were offered presentations on electronic publishing trends featuring experts from the library and scholarly publishing communities.

In early 2002, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation's Research and Information Technology Program expressed an interest in funding a complex social science project designed to push the digital envelope beyond merely converting print to electronic delivery. AAA was ripe for such an assignment. A discipline as diverse as the subjects it studies, anthropology analyzes raw data found in various media from across the academic spectrum. Its final products can be photos, video, audio recordings, databases, and increasingly born-digital products such as blogs, e-mail, and Web sites. AAA envisioned an electronic portal that could deliver the full complement of critical resources for scholarly research, a virtual gateway to anthropology.

AMERICAN ANTHROPOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

- Largest professional society of anthropologists in the world with 12,000 members

- Founded in 1902, currently supported by a permanent staff of 23 plus a volunteer force of thousands

- Largest single publisher of anthropological journals, with 29 current titles

- Seminal collection of over 280 books published, including monographs, textbooks and syllabi, guides to departments, disciplinary statistics, and conference programs and abstracts

- Only organization that represents anthropology's diversity, including the core fields of sociocultural, archaeological, biophysical, and linguistic anthropology, as well as such subfields as agricultural, environmental, medical, museum, nutritional, political & legal, practicing, psychological, and visual anthropology. Internally, the membership is divided into 36 sections and 15 interest groups to facilitate interaction within specialties.

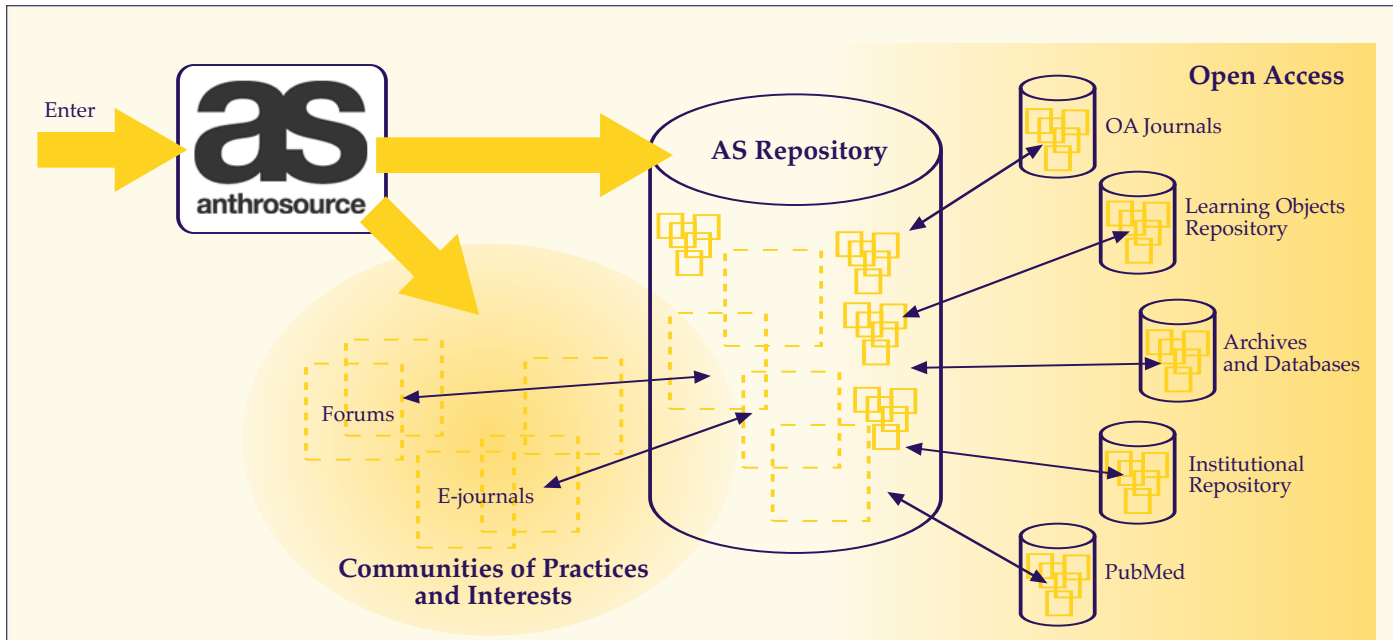- Web site is one of the largest dedicated to anthropology and related issues

Business Strategy for Survival

Before accepting a full proposal, The Mellon Foundation wisely requested a comprehensive situation assessment and business plan for the project AAA envisioned. Supported by a Mellon planning grant, this effort became a research project itself, requiring a full year for analysis with the aid of an outside consultant recommended by the Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition (SPARC). After 100 years, the AAA's publishing program had become complex, where journals, newsletter, bulletins, and books followed a variety of production paths, ranging from informal preparation in word-processing software on an editor's home computer to formal copyediting and typesetting through AAA's professional in-house staff. Because there were few standards and limited oversight, in many cases it was difficult to track the actual costs to run the overall publications program.

The situation assessment enabled AAA for the first time to calculate realistic profit and loss assessments for each publication, as well as for the program as a whole. The association had not realized, for example, how heavily it was subsidizing each journal, nor had it been able to track the effects of sustained subscription loss. Neither dues nor subscription prices had kept up with the market or the cost of living, with the result that, even when large increases were implemented periodically, the income generated could not compensate for the cumulative loss over time. In addition, the fact that page numbers, print runs, and production schedules fluctuated as much as 40% each year made it difficult to budget accurately. The program clearly needed stronger central oversight, where all parties clearly understood their roles and responsibilities, as well as a coordinated marketing effort to stem subscription losses and increase sales.

Enter

as anthrosource

AS Repository

Open Access

OA Journals

Learning Objects Repository

Archives and Databases

Institutional Repository

PubMed

Forums

E-journals

Communities of Practices and Interests

BEYOND BOUNDARIES

AnthroSource will expand the AAA's mission beyond the boundaries of its current scholarly publishing program. AnthroSource was conceived as the indispensable research and educational resource for anthropologists, the primary professional venue for building global communities based on anthropological knowledge, and the authoritative source for a public understanding of anthropology. The AnthroSource Steering Committee developed this conceptual map to graphically depict the relationships between discrete services envisioned for the portal. After entering the collection of published scholarship branded as AnthroSource, subscribers are able to participate in communities of practice and interest by posting commentary to forums, sharing their own working papers for comment, and assembling collections of posted comments and papers into new e-journals. These materials and functions are hosted in a dedicated AAA repository that is in turn connected to open access journals, learning objects, archives and data sets, as well as to other repositories and open access collections. This map and the boundaries it draws will necessarily evolve as AnthroSource develops beyond the current vision.

(Credit: Leslie Chan, 2005.)

Armed with the situation assessment, AAA was able to outline a comprehensive plan to improve its publishing program. This included development of a set of shared goals and expectations for each publication and negotiation of a Memorandum of Understanding to be signed by those parties most intimately involved in a publication's production and oversight. The association's accounting system was also reconfigured to be able to evaluate the profitability of each publication. This now enables AAA to track the progress for each publication and to do comparative trends and analysis for the publishing program as a whole. The new system likewise provides a tool for staff to educate editors and decision makers in the financial aspects of publication. Thus, when viewed as a strategy for sustainability and survival, the concept of operating as a business became far more palatable to a community of scholars whose primary goal is to share, rather than profit from, knowledge.

Strategic Partnership
Early in the investigation process, it became apparent that AAA could not effect a profound transformation of its publishing program alone. The association possessed neither the technical expertise nor sufficient resources to formulate a business plan or fund conversion of its some 250,000 pages of print legacy. Nor was the current production process fully digital at the time. In 2000, for example, staff were still pasting up artwork by hand, and it was not until 2002 that AAA was equipped to submit PDFs to the printer. Several scenarios for going electronic were floated, ranging from outsourcing management of the entire program to investing in an even larger in-house operation. Both solutions, however, would have required staff, expertise, and funds beyond the capacity of the association at the time.

AAA's decision to outsource the production process was designed to retain ownership of its own publishing program, as well as to control the problems of spiraling

costs and irregular production highlighted in the situation analysis. Rather than invest further in an operation still too small to generate economies of scale, AAA decided to seek a partnership with a like-minded nonprofit publisher. Eight university presses were invited to bid on a proposal to provide production and electronic hosting services as well as build the infrastructure to support a full-service portal. The University of California (UC) Press impressed AAA with a business model flexible enough to adapt quickly to changing technological demands, but also, to AAA's delight, the press had independently targeted development of their anthropology collection in their latest long-range plan. AAA began working with UC Press in September 2003, and by April of the following year, had transferred production of AAA's 10 biggest journals to the press's system. Within one year of the partnership, UC Press had increased their staff by one third to accommodate the expansion.

Strengthened by the improvements recommended in the situation assessment, armed with a realistic plan for sustainability in the comprehensive business plan, and supported by a sympathetic partnership with UC Press, AAA presented a full proposal to The Mellon Foundation. Beginning with a complete collection of the association's periodicals, AnthroSource was conceived as a virtual community that would grow to include third-party publications, as well as other authoritative resources—both published and unpublished. These would include grey literature, field notes, data sets, photos, video and audio recordings. In December 2004, Mellon awarded AAA $756,000 to cover the one-time start-up costs incurred over a three-year period. For its part, AAA has committed over $1 million of its own resources over the three-year grant to cover the ongoing operating expenses and further development costs. One year after receiving the Mellon grant and effecting the transfer of its production to UC Press, AnthroSource was ready for prime time.

Adapting to Change

Considering the static character of the association's homegrown publishing operation, the pace with which AAA achieved the outsourcing of its production, conversion from print to digital, and creation of a comprehensive portal service was nothing short of meteoric. As any student of social change might have predicted, however, this operation has posed challenges for all involved, including AAA and UC Press staff, AAA leadership and members, as well as librarians and users around the world. AAA is committed to making AnthroSource a sustainable service by the end of 2007. To meet these goals, the association and its 36 publication-sponsoring sections have had to reassess their financial priorities.

Because all AAA publications are now bundled as a single electronic package, where individual subscriptions are available only for print versions, publications that had previously relied upon non-publication revenue to cover production costs (such as membership dues) are becoming skilled in strategic budgeting. Education is again key. The member volunteers responsible for the success of these publications are learning to consider timeliness of production as well as factors that influence cost, such as volume of content, format, and presentation. Association leaders are likewise thinking creatively about how to bridge the costly transition to electronic production with dwindling print-subscription revenue. Although there are no plans to discontinue printing AAA publications, it may soon become necessary, for example, to price the print versions at cost. With the print thus paying for itself, publications could invest more in their electronic future.

Serving Diverse Communities

The publishing programs of scholarly societies serve two important audiences: their individual society members and institutional subscribers. With its increased accessibility, the electronic medium has posed another set of challenges for balancing these two types of consumers. When members can access their scholarly society's publications through a university library, for example, the incentive to retain membership may well decrease. AAA is therefore developing new benefits of membership to distinguish the service provided for members from that offered to libraries. Based on member feedback, AAA is also considering the development of additional member services such as discussion forums, author services, and repository functions for use in conjunction with AnthroSource.

AAA's partnership with JSTOR is one example of how the association has met the challenge of serving these two very important communities. This pioneering effort enables users to move seamlessly from materials hosted on AnthroSource to the six AAA publications archived in JSTOR. (Once JSTOR likewise registers its content with CrossRef in November of 2005, users will be able to link from JSTOR into AnthroSource.) As a benefit of AAA membership, users who enter AnthroSource with their membership login and password have access to the entire collection. If they log on through their institution, access to these six publications is determined by whether the library also subscribes to JSTOR.

Vision for the Future

To guide the future development of AnthroSource, AAA has established a permanent steering committee composed of librarians, archivists, technologists, association members with expertise in areas such

as research and scholarly communications, as well as AAA staff and a representative from the university press. Chaired by Suzanne Calpestri (Director of the George and Mary Foster Anthropology Library, UC Berkeley), the AnthroSource Steering Committee (ASSC) has already created both a mission and scope statement, plus a content selection policy that outlines criteria for evaluating the relevance and quality of new AnthroSource resources, including open access content. The ASSC has likewise advised on the site's privacy policy, recommended broadening the author agreement contracts to allow deposition of AAA-published articles into institutional repositories, and conducted its own study of user needs and behaviors. Based on the ASSC's detailed archiving and migration strategy, AAA is making plans for yet another partnership to archive its entire AnthroSource content with Portico, a Mellon, Ithaka, and JSTOR-supported initiative to provide a permanent archive of scholarly journals. The energy, dedication, and expertise concentrated in this dynamic committee of volunteers portends well for the future of AnthroSource.

AnthroSource is now positioned to extend its services to other anthropologically relevant scholarly publications interested in joining its electronic community. The arrangement is analogous to that which we currently offer with JSTOR, wherein libraries subscribe separately to the non-AAA publications but users search and access content within the site. AnthroSource is likewise negotiating to allow full-text searching within anthropological publications hosted elsewhere. Searches in this case would resolve to the publisher's site, where access is authenticated.

Lessons Learned
Through the process of evolving from 16th- to 21st-century technology in five years, AAA has learned many valuable lessons. Six of these lessons have enabled the association to move faster and with greater confidence.

1. **Research**. By paying careful attention to the experiences of the STM publishing community, AAA avoided reinventing the wheel, synchronized its own products and services with a well-established market, and will be better positioned to adapt to the rapidly evolving needs of users and changes in technology.
2. **Education**. An organization that operates by consensus through a deliberately inclusive democratic process, AAA has found that education of all stakeholders has been critical. This is particularly important now that scholarly publishing is undergoing such a radical transformation itself. Resistance to change and misunderstanding the benefits and risks can cause serious delays and even halt progress altogether.

3. **Partnering.** Today's electronic environment mitigates against a small scholarly publisher continuing to operate its entire program independently. Given the complex set of working parts, partnering with vendors, consultants, funding agencies, and even other publishers increases the likelihood of success. Moreover, AAA deliberately chose to work with as many nonprofit and like-minded partners as possible to ensure that it could meet its mission to provide scholarship affordably to both members and libraries.
4. **Sustainability.** To meet its commitment for the long-term, AAA based its strategy on a solid business plan that was in turn informed by a realistic assessment of the existing publishing program.
5. **Multi-Source Funding**. AAA sought external funding to support the business plan as well as one-time start-up costs. It has likewise dedicated its own resources to cover the ongoing costs.
6. **Volunteer Energy**. The solid backing and creative input of a dedicated group of members is as important as a solid financial base. Not only does this provide a direct connection to the users themselves, it will provide the energy and enthusiasm necessary to keep AnthroSource alive and growing well into the future.

AAA gratefully acknowledges the guidance received—both formal and informal—from the American Library Association, Association of Research Libraries, SPARC, Chain Bridge Group, and BioOne throughout development of AnthroSource, and welcomes input from the library community. Feel free to explore the AAA content on AnthroSource at http://www.anthrosource.net/ and let us know what you think. Please contact UC Press at customerservice@anthrosource.net with questions or to arrange for a free trial access to AnthroSource.

—Copyright 2005 Susan Skomal

Editor's note: Effective October 2005, Susan Skomal is leaving the American Anthropological Association to become Executive Director of BioOne, a nonprofit online aggregator of scholarly journals in the biosciences. During her 15-year tenure at AAA, Dr. Skomal served as Press Officer and Managing Editor of Anthropology News before becoming Director of the Publications Department in 2000. She earned a PhD in anthropology from the University of California, Los Angeles, and was formerly an Adjunct Professor at the University of Maryland, University College.