



World's oldest publisher stays at the cutting edge with Google Book Search

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Pete Shemilt
Sales and Marketing
Director, Academic and
Professional Books



Introduction

Cambridge University Press was founded by a royal charter granted to the University of Cambridge by King Henry VIII in 1534. It is the oldest printer and publisher in the world, having been operating continuously since 1584, and is one of the largest academic and professional publishers globally.

The Press's purpose is to further the University's objective of advancing learning, knowledge and research, and it publishes over 1,200 new titles per year for academic and professional markets with over 24,000 books in print. With offices in 30 countries, Cambridge University Press has evolved to become a truly global publisher in the modern age. Despite its high title output, all books are required to undergo a process of rigorous scholarly review and the approval of the Press Syndicate - a governing body of University academics - before being published.

Cambridge University Press combines tradition and a history of excellence with an innovative approach to publishing, embracing digital and online advances in the field. An ultra-short run printing programme ensures that as many books are kept in print as possible, and Cambridge University Press has developed a strong online presence to drive increased sales.

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ABOUT GOOGLE BOOK SEARCH

Google Book Search enables publishers to promote their books on Google. Google scans the full text of participating publishers' titles so that Google users can see books that match the topics they are searching on. When users click on a book search result, they are taken to a Google-hosted web page displaying a scanned image of the relevant page from the book. Each page also contains multiple “Buy this Book” links, which enable users to purchase the book from online retailers. Users may also see contextually targeted Google AdWords ads on these pages. Publishers will receive a share of the revenue generated from ads appearing on their content.

For more information, visit
<http://books.google.co.uk>

Challenge

The high quality of Cambridge University Press books is extremely important to the organisation, and allowing consumers anywhere to view titles throughout the list is essential for continuing sales. “Visibility is critical for our books, because they tend to be specialised and targeted at niche markets,” explains Pete Shemilt, Sales and Marketing Director in Europe for the Academic and Professional Books group. “Our marketing challenge is to find ways to reach the widest possible audience for each book cost-effectively, motivating purchase or recommendation. The key thing for us is to make the public aware of all of our books: not just the frontlist, but the backlist too.”

Solution

Allowing the discovery of titles which leads to sales was therefore the key reason behind Cambridge's decision to join Google Book Search. The Press first heard about the programme in April 2004 at the London Book Fair, and within a month committed almost all of its backlist. “We want all our books to be made instantly available for purchase to anybody searching for them, and what better way of doing it than through Google,” says Pete Shemilt. “Google listened to everything we said and has been a very good partner. After all, this is a real partnership, one where we know scholarly and professional publishing and Google knows how to connect information and people.”

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“Since joining Google Book Search, our backlist sales have increased across all channels, due to many positive factors” says Shemilt. To explore the effect of Google Book Search specifically, Cambridge University Press studied the differences between 2003 sales and 2006 sales for books that were published before the year 2000. They discovered that in the United States, books in the Google Book Search programme had a sales rate 20 percentage points higher than those that were not in the programme.

“The market for older books is clearly becoming stronger,” explains Shemilt. “Content can be kept in front of people for much longer on the web. It is giving us the opportunity to make high quality products, once difficult to find, more visible to the consumer. This is of considerable benefit to our authors.”

Cambridge University Press is determined to pursue any channel which increases the visibility of its books while ensuring they remain secure, and the Internet has proved a valuable tool for this. “If there are millions of people looking on your website for books, how can it not be driving sales?

“There were security concerns, of course, but we talked to Google and they put our minds at rest. Even so, we do occasionally spend time trying to break into Google’s system,” confesses Shemilt, “but the viewing limits always work exactly as they are supposed to.”

Cambridge University Press measures its own website traffic through Google Analytics. The marketing team has found that Google Web Search and Book Search cumulatively account for over 65% of all traffic to its website. Although the majority of visitors come from the main Google Search pages, a Book Search visitor is actually more valuable than the average visitor to the Cambridge University Press website. A user who comes from Google Book Search typically looks at more pages on the site, is twice as likely to purchase a book, and spends 50% more per order, when compared to other visitors.

“We’re absolutely certain that Google Book Search is making a difference to sales of the backlist,” says Shemilt. “We are also sure that people are researching online and then buying offline. Google Book Search provides reassurance to consumers that Cambridge University Press content is relevant to their needs. It’s the publishing equivalent of being able to walk around a car, look under the bonnet and kick the tyres before making the decision to purchase.”

“The fact that Book Search provides a link through to the Cambridge website and to a selection of online retailers also provides an immediate call to action, making it simple to buy,” Shemilt adds. “And although there are other variables in play, over 500,000 book views per month is clearly having a positive impact.”

Book Search is also making an impact on Cambridge’s digital ‘ultra short run’ printing programme which is enabling the Press to keep more of its books available for longer and bring some out-of-print books back from the dead. “In order to fulfil our mission to advance learning, knowledge and research, we intend, if feasible, to keep books in print after sales have slowed down, and enabling discovery of these books is essential to make this viable.”

Google Book Search is a key component of the Cambridge University Press marketing strategy. “Direct marketing is the most important activity that we are involved in and we are embracing the potential of Search and the Web to reach our niche audiences effectively. The marketer’s role is changing in the digital age and it is essential that Cambridge University Press is just as innovative and forward thinking as it has been throughout its long history.”

