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TITLE:
**CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR
DIGITAL MARKETING WITHIN CONTEM-
PORARY ART BOOK PUBLISHING**

ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines a number of challenges and opportunities in digital marketing within con- temporary art book publishing. As products of a uniquely cross-pollinated strain of culture and publishing, their tactility and physicality are amongst their most appealing qualities, standing out in a world where so much takes place in a virtual space. The appeal of art books today is thought to be getting stronger and stronger as many other kinds of books dematerialise in the digital space, standing out more than ever as objects.

However, art books still have to contend with a marketing landscape where digital grows increasingly more dominant and influential each year. The differences that make art books stand out may well give rise to difficulties and challenges when it comes to marketing and selling them in a digital environment. But conversely, there could be a greater amount and broader spread of opportunities for effectively marketing art books online that would not be available to different kinds of books. This dissertation seeks to investigate how a number of art book publishers are currently using the digital marketing tools that are available to them, the effectiveness of their strategies, what challenges are being faced and which opportunities are being under-utilised.

**KEYWORDS: ART BOOKS, DIGITAL MARKETING, MOBILE OPTIMISATION, WEB DESIGN, BOOKSELLING, ONLINE BOOKSELLING,
MONOGRAPHS
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FULL ARTICLE

1.1. A brief history of art books

“We are now so used to the presence of magnificently illustrated art books – sometimes on our shelves, as well as on our coffee tables and in shop windows - that there is a tendency to take their existence for granted as an integral part of our culture,” wrote Francis Haskell in the nineteenth of the annual memorial lectures dedicated to the memory of Walter Neurath, one of the founders of Thames and Hudson. Haskell’s monograph traces the conception of the art book as we know it today to Pierre Crozat, the immensely rich art collector who served as a banker to King Louis XIV in the early eighteenth century, though the concept of the illustrated book as an object intended for display dates back even earlier. In a 1580 essay, the French philosopher Michel de Montaigne speaks of his dread that his published essays would only serve as “a common piece of furniture, and a piece for the hall”. Hundreds of years later, publishing industry professionals are still loath to conflate their products with household furniture, and the term ‘coffee-table book’ is generally avoided due to its connotations of superficiality. However, de Montaigne’s wry comment serves as textual evidence that the idea of books fulfilling a decorative and luxurious purpose – either as a primary or auxiliary function – has been around for centuries.

At the same time, art book publishers have opened up the world of art to people to whom it had been largely inaccessible. They brought beauty and education to those who were starved for it in an era characterised by darkness, brutality and utilitarianism, and helped artists reach wider audiences. They converged education, communication and commerce in a way that seems remarkably forward- thinking in the era of the social web. The Neuraths dreamt of creating “a museum without walls” (Duguid, 2009) – a vision which predated the great democratising force of the internet, which has opened up the world of art to the public beyond their wildest dreams.

1.2. The new crisis in art book publishing

While art publishers and art books in the twentieth century were democratising forces for bringing art to wider audiences, the debate rages on about whether they have managed to maintain their accessibility, discoverability and relevance in the internet age. Several forces have contributed to this crisis: producing illustrated books takes up a lot of time and money, to say nothing of selling challenges when customers have so many options visible to them at the touch of a screen. The fluctuations of market conditions and corporate sponsorship dictate many of the subjects which are acceptable topics for new titles.

Picture and licensing fees are prohibitive, especially when considering usage across multiple platforms. Overseas competition has eaten away at book printers’ profit margins, as have cuts in many institutional budgets for humanities titles, allowing little leeway for innovation. The shelf space in physical bookshops grows ever smaller as bookshops close, making it more difficult for new titles to be discovered in the traditional way, where their physicality has greatest impact.

Art publishers who produced “highly erudite, expensively illustrated, expensively authored [volumes] that could not be commercially sustained” were criticised by Thorp (2006), who argued that at the heart of the art book publishing crisis lay the fact that the people who most wanted and needed art books were not having their requirements fulfilled. Thorp said publishers were too keen to please their sponsors and funders, ranging from corporations to institutions, rather than the people who would actually be buying them, attributing the blame to “the ability of the various participants to respond effectively to a rapidly changing business environment.” Thorp added that “by accommodating the requirements of readers in the publication, by prioritising their needs over those of the originators, while utilising recent technologies and being responsive to fluctuations in the market, (...) it remains possible to publish affordable, accessible books that offer significant contributions to contemporary culture.”

The digital age has brought numerous gifts



to the art book publisher, including print- on-demand technology, and the effective communication of high-level research to academic communities without the necessity of a printed volume (Thorp, 2006). It has also arrived with its own tools of marketing and promotion, replacing those which have since been rendered obsolete. It is not surprising that the new ways of digital promotion and marketing have been met with trepidation, especially since the practice of publishing and marketing art books has roots extending so far into the past.

1.3. The future of art book publishing

The idea of conceiving of the art book and its audience in fresh ways was the subject of a panel titled ‘The Future of Art Book Publishing’ in 2013 in New York, chaired by Margaret Chace, Paul Chan, Sharon Gallagher and Chul Kim. Gallagher was confident about the resilience of the art book trade in the digital age, though in a follow-up interview with Publishers Weekly stated that art books were still dependent on brick-and-mortar stores in order to be seen, and that if the physical shops and venues should close, the art publishing trade would suffer a heavy blow (Miller, 2013).

Art book publishers with sufficient clout and resources are better equipped to deal with this problem in the old-fashioned way. Taschen, for example, developed a self-branded boutique in Sloane Square which also functions as a gallery, where the art publisher can curate and present its increasingly luxurious editions and accompanying art objects to its customers, exactly as the company’s vision dictates. But this option is only available to comparatively large and powerful publishers, leaving out smaller presses and self-published art book auteurs. As the very idea of the art book fluctuates in the digital age, so do the methods of marketing them and bringing them to new audiences.

Donmall (2011) foresees a future for art books where “digital publishing and enhanced ebooks will be able to create an entirely new experience.” If this is so, there will not only be a new paradigm for books co-existing with their

physical counterparts, but also a myriad of new opportunities, changes and challenges in the way that traditional art books are marketed, with many or most of these developments taking place online, through a plurality of digital devices. The next chapter examines the rise of digital marketing, the impact it has had on the way that books are discovered and bought, and why art books are in a category of their own.

2.1 ‘The most disruptive development in marketing history’

The term ‘digital marketing’ broadly encompasses any form of marketing, including the acquisition and retention of customers, which occurs through and is supported by digital devices and technologies (Thomas and Housden, 2010, pp.14-15). A direct consequence of the increasing proliferation and availability of the internet all over the world through different devices, as well as the unique way that users connect and engage with this technology, is its place as the fastest-growing channel for marketing. PricewaterhouseCoopers’ 2015 global entertainment and media report estimated that internet advertising would overtake television advertising revenue by 2017, and outstrip it as the largest advertising segment by 2019.

From the printing press to radio to television, milestones in the history of marketing are underscored by developments in technology and its impact upon the lives of those who use it. Consumers who spend a sizeable amount of their time online are seeking higher levels of engagement, interaction and control even within the marketing messages that they consume. These qualities are native to the internet – particularly the ‘new web’, and are different to what traditional mass media marketing can offer (Ryan, 2014, p.3). Charlesworth (2014) quotes McGovern as saying that while “old-school marketing” focuses on getting customers to do things, digital marketing is about helping them do things. As a result of this paradigm shift, Ryan (2014, p.5) heralded digital marketing as “the single most disruptive development in the history of marketing.”



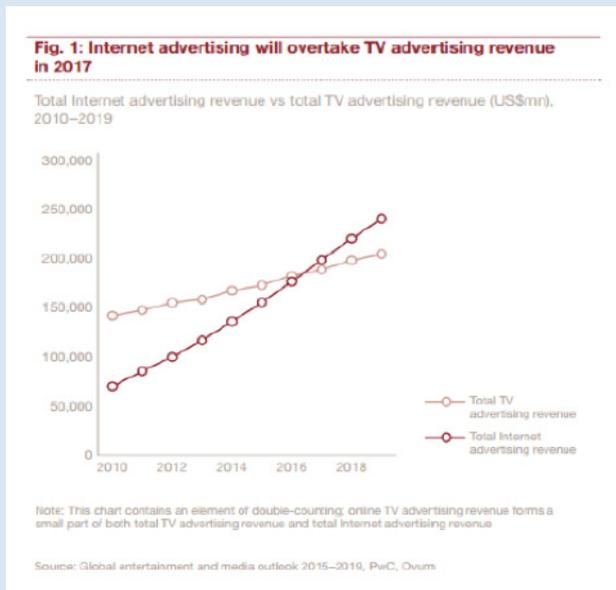


Fig. 1 - Internet advertising to overtake TV advertising revenue in 2017 (PwC, 2015)

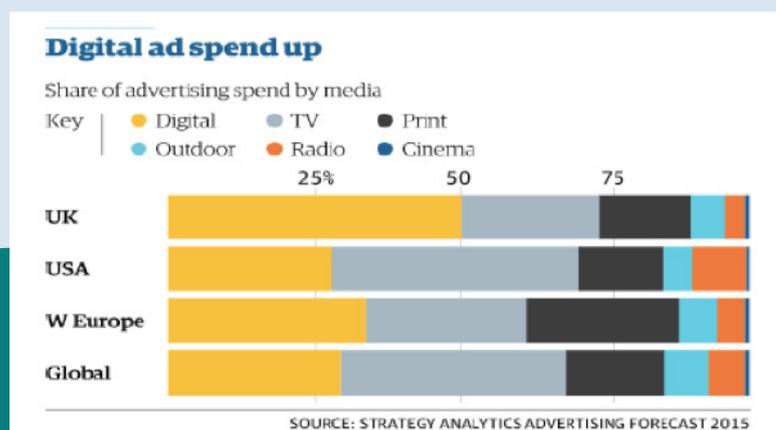
2.2 Digital marketing in the UK

In the UK, digital advertising is expected to grow by 12% in 2015 to £8.1bn, making it the first country in which £1 in every £2 will go on digital media. (IAB/PWC, 2015). The figure includes paid-for results on search engines, adverts on mobile apps and newspaper websites, as well as video-on-demand services. Several factors contribute to the UK's position as a world leader in digital advertising. Online shopping is very popular amongst consumers in the UK, with the average customer spending £559.41 per month through online retail channels (Tryzens,

2015). A significant proportion of British television and radio programming is ad-free, leading to the rapid adoption of online advertising for both desktop and mobile devices and resulting in a comparatively high spend on digital channels (Sweney, 2015).

For many large companies, this represents a shift from linear TV ads to online video. Furthermore, smaller UK firms with a budget which does not extend to mass media advertising have found that digital marketing provides them with an alternative route, especially for those whose retail activity is focused online (Glennie, 2015).

Fig. 2 - The rise of digital ad spend across various territories (Guardian, 2015)



2.3. How marketing books went digital

While digitisation as a whole has affected the publishing industry on at least four levels (Thompson, 2005, pp. 312-313), the new reality of digital marketing has led to an acute and urgent call to action within the publishing industry. At first, publishers were content simply to have a website which they could use as an online catalogue – “an environment in which their books could be listed and, for those who developed e-commerce capabilities on their website, sold”, but with the rise of Amazon, and the enervation of the high street bookstore, the

paradigm of marketing and service provision changed, and the internet began to be seen “as a medium which could provide a range of support services for customers and which could be used more proactively to market books and to carry out market research” (Ibid., p.312). Nowadays, the internet is central to book seekers and buyers. In a Pew Survey carried out amongst Americans aged 16 years and older about book discovery and acquisition, 28% of participants said that they got recommendations from online bookstores or other websites. This was the second-largest bracket behind family members, friends and co-workers.

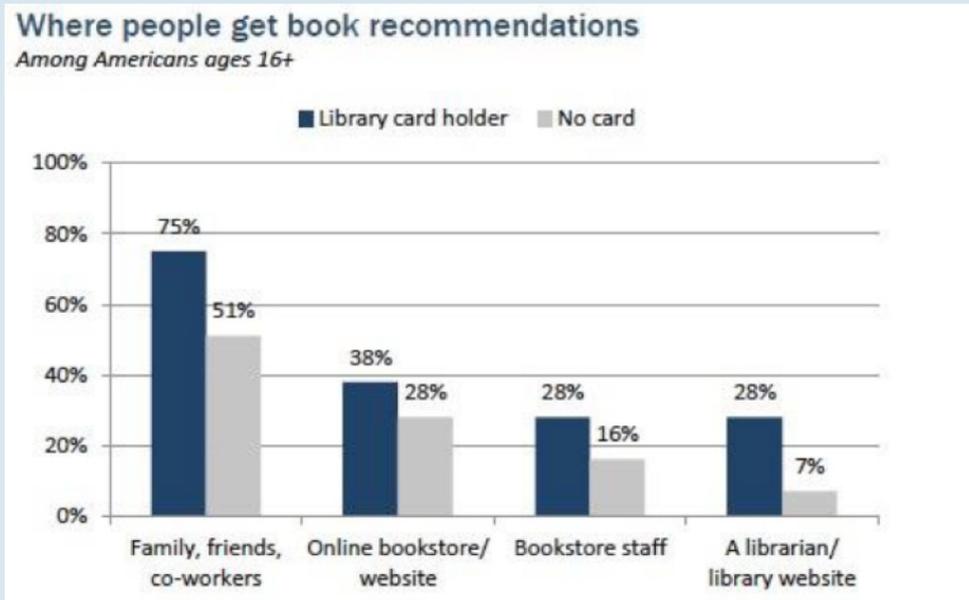


Fig. 3 - Where people get their book recommendations. (Pew, 2012)

Another survey found that book buyers discovered books in both physical bookstores and in online bookstores: the online venue was ranked as being more important (39% vs 32%), and customers were twice as likely to purchase the books online (O’Reilly, 2013).

When one thinks of how the internet has changed the way that people shop, the areas that

first come to mind are usually related to transactional benefits – the very tail-end of the marketing process where the decision has been made, the sale has been closed and all that remains is to wait for the delivery. These include the convenience of shopping at any time of day, the value for money, the ease and speed of delivery, and the wide selection of products available for purchase.



However, such surveys show how digital marketing has changed the face of both promotion and transaction, facilitating not just commerce but also discovery and dialogue. Digital marketing allows books to be promoted to buyers all over the world with considerably less physical restrictions than traditional methods of marketing, in much more innovative ways. While discoverability is still a troublesome issue to contend with, consumers can now look up and find titles, subjects or genres, ranging from the vastly popular to the niche and obscure. Digital marketing has increased transparency, thanks to the capacity to read reviews from other users, compare prices from one retailer to another, find out information about the author of the work and the publishing house, and even sample the work itself, allowing them to make sure that this is really the book that they are after, even in the absence of a physical component. Potential customers are able to collect a wealth of data before the decision to purchase is even made, and they have the tools at their disposal to make a more informed choice about the book that they are buying.

Digital marketing has also brought the audience closer to the publisher, whose “links with readers and end users have traditionally been much more attenuated since their immediate customers in the book supply chain are wholesalers and retailers” (Thompson, 2005, p. 310). It also “offers the ability to start a conversation with [the publisher’s] customers, to manage and develop a two-way communication and create confidence, offering a place where [the publisher’s] customers can return, feel listened to and reassured,” thus building “communities of interdependence” in the process (Baverstock, 2015, p.

207). In this way, it facilitates more direct forms of market research and feedback and presents the opportunity to build a pool of past, present and prospective clients that can be utilised in various ways.

Knowing what clients are interested in and how they are reacting to specific books – as well as how those same books are presented as a buyable commodity - is tremendously useful for any publisher, especially when these can be measured in clicks, likes and shares and weighed up against concrete sales figures. In some cases, such as when signing up for a monthly newsletter, users are asked directly what subjects they are interested in, allowing the strategist to tailor promotional and marketing content according to each user’s interests. These tools allow marketers to be considerably more efficient with their budget. It also takes steps to tackle the crisis in art book publishing that Thorp (2006) outlined, by accommodating readers’ needs and priorities and responding to the rapidly changing business environment through the use of technology.

2.4. E-luxe: luxury goods and the internet

Art books are a product of the publishing industry, but they also share several distinct characteristics with traditional luxury goods, including “creativity”, “craftsmanship and precision”, “emotional appeal and an enhanced image”, “exclusivity” and “high quality and premium pricing” (Okonkwo, 2010, p.14). Luxury brands address a number of key values, which depend on the consumers’ individual financial, functional, and social intricacies. However, at heart,

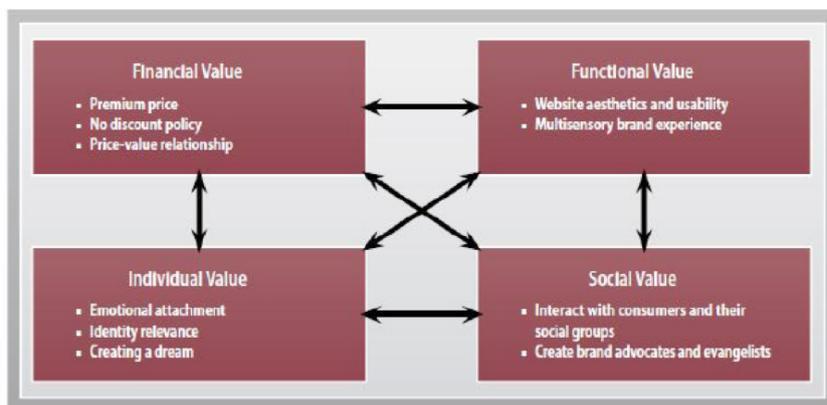


Fig. 4 - The values of e-Luxe (Okonkwo, 2010)



they play to “the deep-seated need of man to show his distinction, to be admired, recognized, appreciated and respected, through differentiating himself, in most cases with his possessions.” (Ibid. p.13)

The luxury goods sector has also been one of the slowest to embrace digital marketing; even notable international brands such as Versace and Prada failed to develop comprehensive corporate websites until 2005 and 2007, and the rise of the social web has presented an entirely new set of challenges. While some of the problems faced by traditional luxury e-tailers – those which involve the financial risk which arises from payment by credit card, as well as the product risk of encountering counterfeit goods (Hennigs, Wiedmann and Klarmann, 2012) seem to be largely peripheral to the task of marketing art books online, there are other several other issues to contend with which are highly relevant to digital art book retailing.

Firstly, luxury goods are regarded as sensory in nature, meaning that the human senses of sight, smell, touch and feel are considered imperative in selling them (Okonkwo, 2009), which presents a challenge when it comes to stimulating the same senses in a digital environment. Secondly, the internet has democratised access to information and products, and a delicate balance has to be found between separate streams of publishing products, as well as the discounted rates that consumers expect to find online and the exclusivity and premium prices that form a necessary part of the art book’s image and *raison d’être*. Other problems include reconciling the ‘top-down’ model that is a staple of luxury retailing with the more consumer-centric environment of the internet – “where the consumer is in total control and expects to be looked up to” (Ibid.), as well as how to accommodate the necessary aesthetics of the art book within a user-friendly online experience.

In the world of art book publishing, there are echoes of the same reluctance to use the internet for marketing that resulted in a comparatively slow take-up and development of the digital marketing aspects of many luxury brands. When it became obvious that the resistance to digital marketing had to be overcome, they had to work

hard and intelligently to catch up with other sectors which took to digital marketing with less trepidation. However, there are still many art book publishers who are finding it difficult to square the presence and space that they occupy in a bookshop, where the intrinsic qualities and values of the book speak for themselves, with the space that their brand and products take up online in the dematerialised space of the internet. The next chapter examines how this challenge is being handled by a number of contemporary art book publishers, and how they are integrating it within the wider scope and function of their digital marketing strategy.

3.1. Methodology

The research for this study was carried out over a period of six months, from March to August 2015. The principal aims of the research were to examine how art book publishers are carrying out their business-to-client digital marketing strategies, what challenges they are being faced with, how clients are responding to such strategies, and whether there are any opportunities for growth and development. The research explored how the art book publishing industry was reacting and responding to key digital marketing components, including website design and mobile optimisation, digital products, social media and content marketing, analytics, the social web and digital customer relationship management.

The scope of the study was already delimited by the nature of the research question – to seek how art book publishers are making use of digital marketing, what challenges they are facing and what opportunities are being underutilised. All of the publishers who were surveyed or responded to the questionnaire have headquarters or a branch in the United Kingdom. The research itself involved the use of interviews and questionnaires with key personnel within art book publishing, supplemented by first-hand experience and observation of the present digital marketing systems in place. The questionnaires involved mostly open-ended questions, and were sent to the respondents by email, giving the interviewees time to answer them at their leisure.



The questions were based on the elements outlined by Ryan (2014) as the basis of a good digital marketing campaign.

However, respondents were encouraged to freely pursue points or issues that they felt were particularly pertinent. All but one of the respondents gave their answers under conditions of anonymity, in order to be able to detail with confidence the strategies they were pursuing, as well as which issues they felt were posing the greatest challenges to the companies they represented. A sample of the questions used in the email interviews can be found in the appendices.

3.3. Balancing website usability and mobile optimisation with aesthetics and design

The website is often the first point of contact that customers have with a company's online presence, and should therefore be central to any company's digital marketing strategy, accurately reflecting the quality of the products on offer. For many luxury companies, the website is considered an opportunity to compensate for the lost sensual experience of shopping for high-quality goods. As seen from the screenshots in Fig.5., many such companies have highly visual and content-rich websites. The now-typical luxury brand approach to digital marketing was summarised by Christopher Bailey, saying that high-end brands should try to give Web stores texture, providing customers with the same experience, "whether they are walking into [Burberry's] store on Bond Street or tapping in from India or China" (Pfanner, 2009). However, Bailey made this observation before the eruption of mobile web browsing, which has since created a number of challenges for digital marketers.

For several years, web developers could count on progressively stronger hardware and faster bandwidth to help them deliver the web experience that they wanted to consumers.

Websites could be as elaborate and rich in content as the creators envisioned, but as more web users started using their mobile devices to browse the internet, there has been a sudden reversal. Websites now have to be nimble, quick

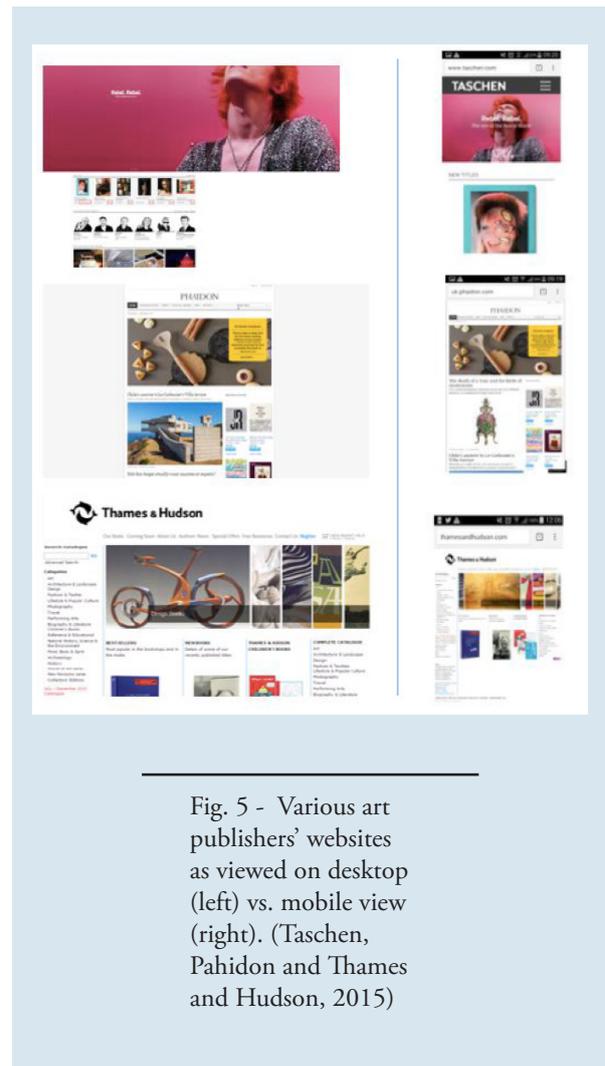


Fig. 5 - Various art publishers' websites as viewed on desktop (left) vs. mobile view (right). (Taschen, Pahidon and Thames and Hudson, 2015)

to load and amenable to viewing on a smaller device, as "the lower bandwidth, higher latency, smaller memories, and lower processing power of mobile devices [impose] an even more urgent need to optimize performance at the front end in order to meet user expectations" (Everts, 2013).

For many users, the mobile phone or tablet has become their primary portal to the internet, and they have little tolerance for poor performance. Everts (2013) quotes the Harris Interactive 2011 Mobile Transactions Survey, commissioned by Tealeaf Technology (now IBM) which reported that "63% [of adults] said they would be less likely to buy from the same company via other channels if they experienced a problem conducting a transaction on their mobile phones." Furthermore, a worldwide mobile-friendly algorithm update that was rolled out by Google in April 2015 had a signif-



ificant impact on mobile search results for mobile searchers. If an e-commerce site was deemed by Google to be less than mobile friendly, it started ranking lower on mobile searches, regardless of search engine optimisation (SEO), content and keywords (Ohye, 2015). With more Google searches taking place on mobile devices than on computers in countries including the UK, the US and Japan (Dischler, 2015; Cobby, 2015), the optimisation of art publishers' web presence for mobile simply cannot be ignored any longer. It has to be quick to load, easy to view and simple to navigate at the swipe of a fingertip.

This seems to be an area where art book publishers are lagging behind. When respondents were asked whether any versions of their main websites were optimised for mobile access, the majority of responses were negative. The focus for many remains largely on the website as accessed through a desktop or laptop computer, and indeed, one is often faced with the same version on a mobile-device as one would see on a standard computer monitor. While desktop and laptop computers may have the processing power, speed and bandwidth access to handle the complex and interactive components of an art book publisher's website, portable devices may not be so.

Poor mobile performance can reflect badly on all other aspects of the art publisher, including its brick-and-mortar outlets. Moe and Fader (2001) identified four types of online shopping visits: directed-purchase visits, search and deliberation visits, knowledge-building visits and hedonic-browsing visits. It is important to cater to every type of website visitor - one type of visit often leads to another, and a customer browsing idly through a beautifully-curated publisher's website could very easily stumble upon something that they want to buy, or remember it the next day and return to it on a separate visit. There needs to be a balance between usability, content, information and pleasure without sacrificing either of those values. Furthermore, a compromise has to be established by ensuring that there is a version of the website that is optimised for mobile browsing which maintains the integral personality and characteristics of the main art book publisher's website. The customer

browsing on their portable device should be able to find a website that loads quickly, is easy to navigate and is secure to browse and buy from, while enjoying the same feelings as if they were browsing the physical shop.

3.4. Digital dissemination and diversified products

The consumer e-book market in the UK grew by nearly 1,300%, rising in value from £20m in 2010 to £275m in 2014 (The Bookseller, 2015). Yet, despite the plethora of multimedia and interactive facilities that can be built into a digital book, art books have been left behind. The very essence of an art book lies in its physical presence, and there appears to be no substituting the copy that sits in a living room, a studio or a library. Many respondents to the questionnaires spoke about their forays into digitally disseminating their products. One respondent indicated that "The public has not embraced digital versions of illustrated books."

Different types of publishing range in suitability to online dissemination, as the schema by Thompson (2005) demonstrates. The nature of education, scholarly and trade publications leads them to be ranked further down the scale of amenability, and following this logic, it seems safe to say that if art books had been mentioned in the schema, they would be placed even further down the scale.

Thompson's schema rings true when compared to real sales figures - reference and educational digital art books do sell comparatively well. The digital version of Thames and Hudson's art history textbook *Gateways to Art: Understanding the Visual Arts*, released in online versions and as enhanced PDFs, has sold in "the four figures, and sells at a steady pace" (Reid, 2013). However, other digital publications that are more in the style of the traditional art book have found it harder to gain ground.

The public may not have yet embraced digital versions of illustrated books, but they have certainly embraced apps and social media. Digital publications departments or similar are now



commonplace even among art book publishers, who seem to be gradually coming to terms with Donmall's (2012) vision of a future where the physical art book shares a parent with "digital products and the digital art forms they will introduce." Many of the products that arise out of these departments are still either in their infancy or are works in progress, and their viability and cost-efficiency presents an entirely new set of problems. However, there is considerable empirical evidence to show that such products will eventually mature and stabilize as unique and separate niche publishing products.

Other publishing sectors have managed to do this successfully: the children's publisher Nosy Crow's version of Cinderella, which brought the fairy tale to life through an iPad or iPhone, has gained critical and commercial acclaim since it was published in 2012, while Faber and Faber's

interactive and annotated version of T.S. Eliot's *The Wasteland* gave the thickly-woven poem several new dimensions. Of course, these apps have not put a dent in sales of children's books for the former, or poetry books for the latter, rather they provided an alternative experience that combines reading with the interactive multimedia dimension that a digital device can add to the experience, though not a direct competitor to the traditional publishing product. In a similar way, Phaidon's food and drink, travel, architecture and design apps provide the consumer with a resource that combines the expertise, authority and aesthetics of the company's art books, adding value to the company and to the customer who already trusts Phaidon's expert position. However, they do so without impinging upon the space that is already occupied by the organisation's core products – the art books.

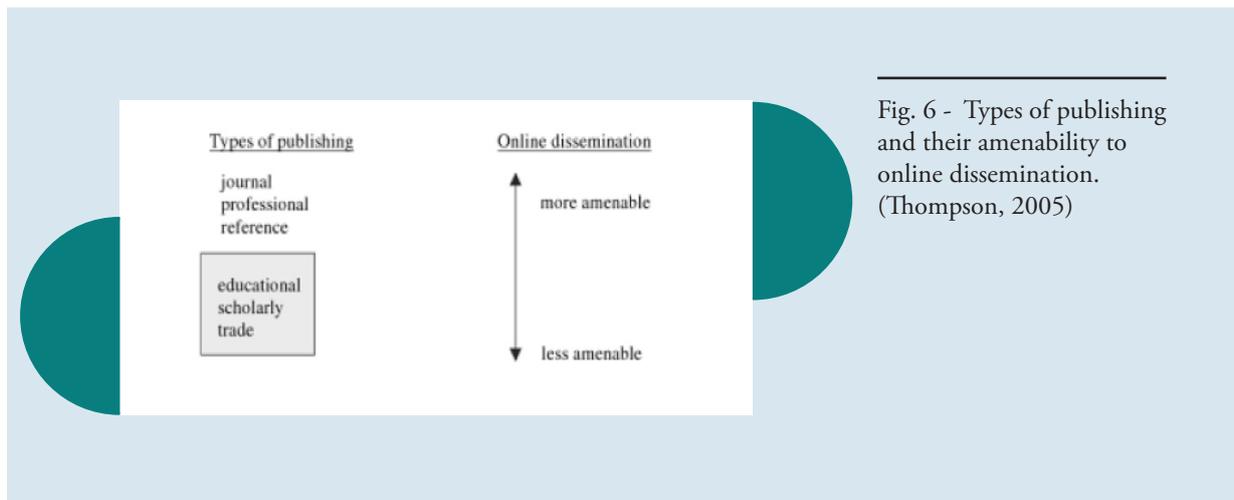


Fig. 6 - Types of publishing and their amenability to online dissemination. (Thompson, 2005)

Needless to say, apps are very expensive to create and maintain. Besides the high costs of commissioning, developing and creating an app, there are several issues to consider, including the prohibitively high costs of acquiring digital licenses for image use.

Furthermore, there is no guarantee that they will pay for themselves – most people are loath to pay for apps, and the ones that do make money do so through preview apps, in-app purchases, adverts, CPI networks or sponsorship (Thomas, 2015), rather than by levying a one-time download fee. However, for a publisher with sufficient

resources - including the financial budget to support the project from conception to execution, the analytics to support the demand and creation of such a product, and the digital marketing intelligence to make it desirable and easy to find for the people who want it - they provide a way of making use of the functional, utilitarian and referential aspects of the illustrated book, as well as an alternative way to reach, engage with and connect to audiences new and old, without the uphill battle of trying to replicate the art book experience through a digital device.



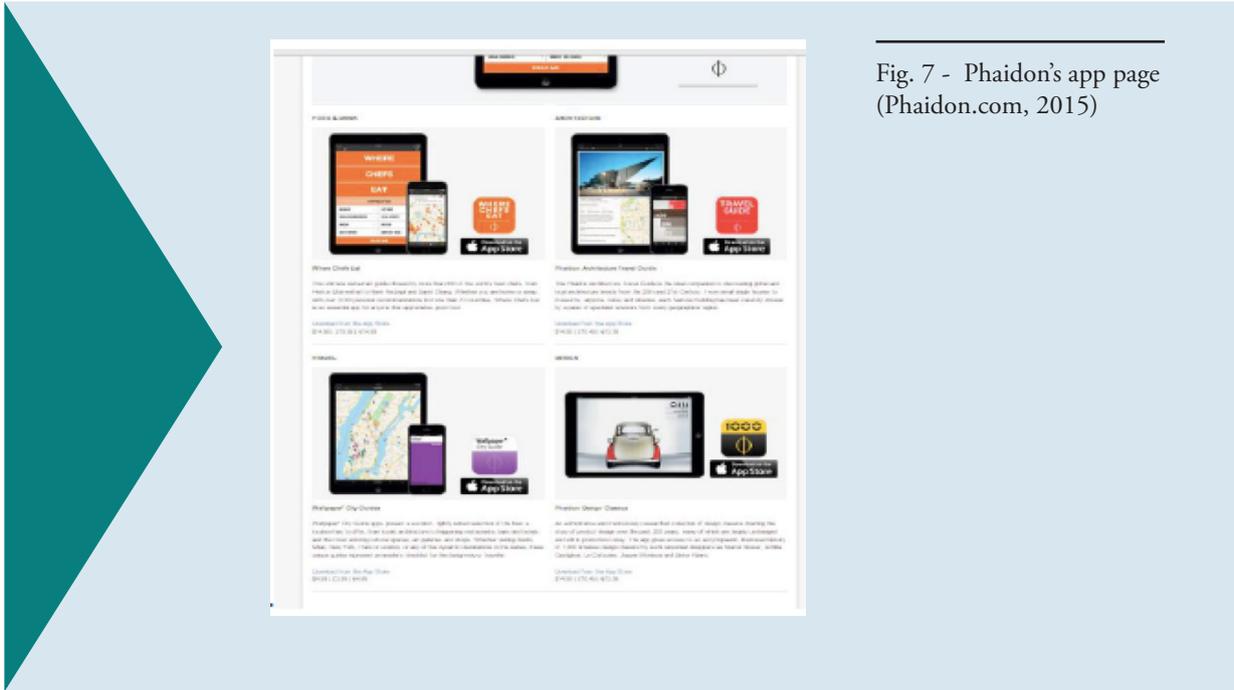


Fig. 7 - Phaidon's app page (Phaidon.com, 2015)

3.5. The analytics revolution

Digital marketers can make use of countless innovative and creative methods to communicate with audiences and help them find and make the decision to purchase the products that they have for sale. However, these methods must be underpinned by analytics – the eyes and ears of the digital marketer. They are used to extract and find meaningful patterns of information from the vast amount of data collected, “understand online customers and their behaviors, design actions influential to them, and ultimately foster behaviors beneficial to the business and achieve the organization’s goal” (Nakatani and Chuang, 2011).

It took a comparatively long time for the suitable tools to become more widely available to businesses which did not have a lot of money or resources to spend on analytics. It took even longer for the majority of businesses to understand their importance for effective digital marketing. However, the change has occurred and the impact is now undeniable.

One of the first digital marketing tools where analytics had a crucial role to play was in pay-per-click (PPC) advertising. There are several reasons why PPC is no longer nearly as popular as it used to be, including a shift in the

way that web users engage with the internet and Amazon’s monopoly over the system as a whole, as well as the various means that internet users now have to filter out web advertising. The two primary causes of failure for PPC advertising campaigns are an inability or unwillingness to manage one’s campaigns properly, and a lack of tracking, without which marketers are unable to gauge “which keyword buys are working and which are not” (Stokes, 2014).

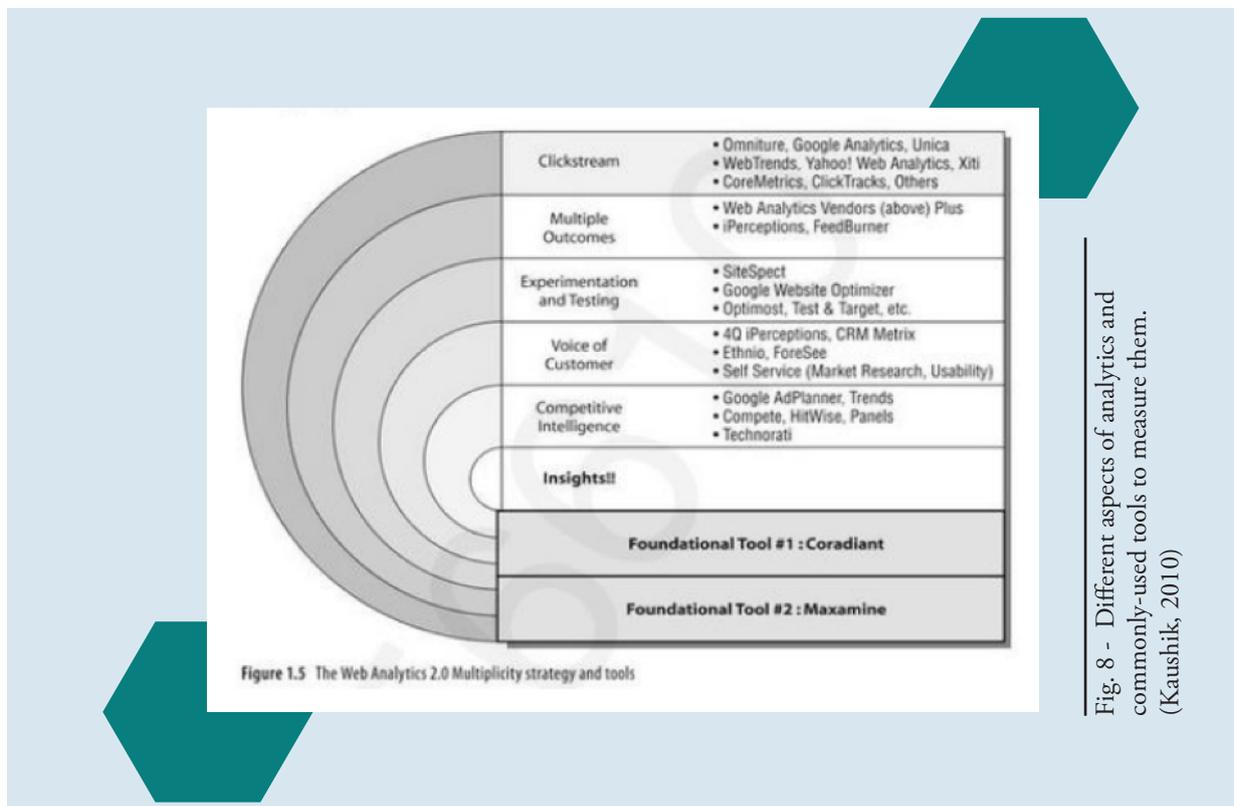
While several of the respondents showed an inclination towards working on improving their measurement and assessment of analytics, especially those who were working on developing improved website systems, most of the responses at the time of writing ranged from ‘not enough’ to ‘not at all’. Even if pay-per-click advertising is dead, and the focus turns solely on more dialogue-focused ways to attract customers such as social media marketing, no digital marketing campaign can be conducted in a vacuum. In the digital age, the modern web consumer wants to play an active role in the dialogue between buyer and brand, and often has the opportunity to act as a gatekeeper against the commercial information they want to be privy to. Soon enough, there will be “no channel left for marketers to push their message, unless customers choose to allow them to do so” (Peelen and Beltman,



2013, p.301). Analytics help make the channels that are still open to marketers relevant to the target audience. They identify which components of the marketing strategy are generating conversation and interest, and whether these are leading to sales. They also single out which ones are bottlenecks that are turning the client off, and which need to be eliminated or changed to allow marketers to continue to effectively harness potential sales.

The aim of the new multi-layered generation of analytics should focus more on ‘the analysis of qualitative and quantitative data from

[the company’s] website and the competition, to drive a continual improvement of the on-line experience that [the company’s] customers, and potential customers have, which translates into [the company’s] desired outcomes (online and offline.) (Ibid., p.5). In other words, analytics need to be used more effectively to tell the company what the clients want, what they need, and what they are not yet getting out of their websites, social media platforms and apps. Since analytics work symbiotically, there has to be a culture-wide shift in the way they are handled for them to realise their potential.



3.6. Lifestyle retailing and image curation

Illustrated books are objects designed to make a statement, conveying much about the space it is in, as well as the person who made the decision to put it there. The increasing dearth of book shops has resulted in an increasing number of art books being sold in establishments whose stock, for the most part, consists of non-book products which also make a statement about their buyers and consumers. The primary offer-

ings at Urban Outfitters, for instance, a company which offers “a lifestyle-specific shopping experience for the educated, urban-minded individual in the 18 to 30 year-old range” (Urbn.com, 2015) are clothes and accessories. However it also stocks an extensive range of mostly highly illustrated books, dealing with pop culture, celebrities, music, comics, fashion, food and self-help, in line with Urban Outfitters’ youthful, hip and trendy brand, as well as the profile of its average consumer.



Urban Outfitters is not alone. Art books can be found for sale or decoration in any number of non-traditional outlets, including boutiques, hotel lobbies, galleries and cafes. The increasing number of such retailers certainly presents an alternative opportunity for the art book publisher – presenting art books for sale alongside items that are used to make a statement about oneself every day allows customers to perceive them as an extension of one’s personal brand. Although there certainly will still be customers who seek out art books from book shops and specialist retailers, presenting them in alternative retail venues can only increase sales, and seed the art book’s popularity with a younger generation whose tastes are maturing and developing.

However, such alternative retail outlets also present a challenge. Sales data is notoriously difficult to keep track of when one’s books are being sold at such retailers, even for reliable providers such as Nielsen BookScan. While publishers can gauge more accurate sales figures by speaking directly to the buyers and retailers, the diffusion of the art book retailer has made it more difficult to keep track of sales through an online database. In a subgenre of publishing where the buck starts and stops with the physical product, and where print runs still have to be accurately estimated, having concrete sales figures at hand detailing the success of the product is crucial. Sales figures indicate whether the success of a book was sustained or simply a fleeting moment riding the coattails of a quickly-passing fad; indeed, if the book was worth the financial capital that was invested in its making.

Since they tell the publisher whether book buyers want more of the same kind of publication, and how highly it is in demand, sales figures are particularly important within art book publishing where print runs are comparatively limited.

Online, there is also the potential for an inversion of the business model, where art books are the primary product, and apparel and accessories are complementary but secondary retail items. On a few of the art book publishers’ websites surveyed, prospective customers could buy luxury stationery, home furnishings and gifts that were in line with the nature of the publishing houses and the tastes of its most prolific

clients. Offering a selection of such items on a website has more than one advantage, the first of which includes an increased and diversified opportunity for revenue, in the shape of the long-tail model (Anderson, 2006). Since art books are often bought as gifts, a small but select range of related products could lead to added sales, especially considering the fact that many of the subjects of these art books have strong followings or fan bases. The much-envied algorithm used by Amazon that suggests items the buyer might be interested in based on viewing or purchase history could work very well – perhaps better – on a much smaller scale where the client is buying a far less extensive, niche range of products.

A second and more intangible advantage is the role it restores to the art book publisher as a tastemaker and curator of their own image. One respondent to the questionnaire identified ‘image and content misuse’ as one of the biggest challenges that the company faced online and stressed the level of control that the company exercises when it comes to releasing images online. Book publishers are not only responsible for the content of the books that they produce but also for the perception of the brand which produces them, and the channel through which they are sold. Amazon, which controls 64% of sales of printed books online, has built a reputation for unbeatable prices and value for money through the very look of its website. While it may be only marginally cheaper than other online book retailers, the bright red numbers crowding every page “scream ‘CHEAP’” and “the overwhelming aesthetic works when it comes to creating the illusion of bargains” (Mosendz, 2014). The very opposite effect could be used to the advantage of the art book publisher who is selling directly from their website.

The art book publisher has to cater to different brackets of customers, while maintaining high standards and the opposite of cheap aesthetics throughout. In this way, by curating and offering alternative, high-quality non-book products which encompass the appropriate values and traits, the company could help shape the perception of the public towards the art books in the publisher’s own image.





Fig.9.: Art publisher Assouline’s online gift section. (Assouline.com, 2015)

Fig. 9 - Art Publisher Assouline’s online gift section. (Assouline.com, 2015)

3.7. Reaching out to the new influencers and tastemakers

The advent of the collaborative and creative Web 2.0 turned “the former mass information consumers to the present information producers” (Agarwal, Liu, Tang and Yu, 2008). Bloggers are amongst the principal intermediaries which have changed the dynamic between industry, retailers, and consumers (Stewart, 2011). They are key players in convergence culture – the concept of the active audience which “is now taken for granted by everyone involved in and around the media industry” (Jenkins, 2006), and are perceived as having less of a commercial agenda than corporate advertising and marketing ventures. Word-of-mouth, which has always been a valuable resource for marketers, has been supplanted by its digital equivalent, and word can spread very quickly through a popular blog, whose views and opinions followers and subscribers trust as they would that of an informed friend.

While the previous section dealt with the role of the art book publisher as a tastemaker, the rise of the blogger in a similar role can help

to combat one of the challenges that publishers and sellers of art books have long been trying to overcome. This is the intangible nature of the art book online, and the difficulty in transmitting and sharing the experience of the art book to people who are considering the purchase without having seen or felt the book in the flesh. The lack of a substitute for this experience is the reason why such an extensive part of the marketing budget is expended on physically getting the art book to the consumers, through brick-and-mortar shops, pop-up stands and art and book fairs. However, the sheer amount of immensely successful fashion, makeup and food bloggers, whose popularity and following stems only from the way that they use words and images on the internet, despite lacking the essential component of the experiences that their blog seeks to chronicle, are proof that an experience can be convincingly conveyed indirectly.

The practice of sending out hundreds of copies of books to bloggers in the hope of gaining a review and potentially generating sales, which is widespread within the trade publishing sector, is simply not feasible in the context of art book publishing – the print runs are much lower and



more tightly calculated and the production values and costs are much higher. This means that art publishers have to be more creative and strategic when it comes to strengthening relationships and establishing contacts with digital influencers. One possible way to bridge this gap would be to outsource or collaborate with the production of marketing-related content to the audience of the art books themselves, whose participation in social media is essential to a healthy, two-way channel of communication, but who currently seem to be playing the role of silent partners.

The collaborative and two-way nature of Web 2.0 is another challenge that art book publishers have to contend with when marketing their books in a digital world. The countless numbers of book and art blogs on the internet, and the active members that make up and participate in such online communities certainly suggest that this would benefit a significant number, if not all, of the stakeholders involved. However, the numerous benefits of incorporating online public figures within the company's digital marketing strategy pay for themselves. Prestel's Andrew Hansen cites 'look books' about famous style bloggers, which become successful because of their built-in fanbases. While the success of such books is often very short-lived, with sales peaking after the first flush of excitement, they show the benefits of building relationships with online influencers. If art book publishers could work on the longevity and sustainability of this strategy, these benefits could include building up online public relations, improving visibility and generating conversations, nurturing brand ambassadorship, outsourcing marketing content and of course, generating sales.

3.8. The social web: bringing digital art book marketing full circle?

Since the first digital-social applications were launched in the late 1990s, social media has become one of the most dynamic developments in the field of digital marketing. Facebook remains the dominant force in global social media landscape, claiming 1.49 billion active month-

ly users as of June 2015 (Newsroom.fb.com, 2015). No other social network has reached its level of global penetration, and the number of active users on other social media platforms remains highly varied between countries and regions. However, digital social interactions on any number of social media platforms have been wholly incorporated into the everyday lives of social media users all around the world, including interactions with corporate and organizational social media entities. According to Social Media Examiner, 92% of marketers said that social media was important to their businesses and 84% stated that they integrated their social media and traditional marketing activities.

The benefits of these measures were outlined in the results that these activities brought about - 90% reported an increase in brand or business exposure, 77% reported an increase in website traffic, 69% reported an increase in brand loyalty, and 66%+ saw positive growth in lead generation with a time investment of six hours a week (Social Media Marketing Industry Report, 2015).

Social media is an area of digital marketing where art book publishers seem to be confident. A survey of 20 art book publisher websites showed that all of them had at least one channel of social media that was auxiliary to the main website, the most popular of which were on Facebook and Twitter. Furthermore, respondents to the questionnaire all had positive accounts of their engagement with social media, citing updates, competitions and giveaways as the highest engagement boosters. Passion for a business or brand is a prerequisite for social media engagement to be successful (Heller Baird and Parasnis, 2011), and all the publishers interviewed identified a community of fans and enthusiasts around their products. Furthermore, social media marketing provides the digital marketer with a more immediate reaction to the content being offered to its audience - its analytics are built-in and easily accessible, able to track the reach of the posts, how many times they were viewed, the times of day and the days of the week that they were most popular, the path of referral and even the key words being used to find them.

Social media goes hand in hand with con-



tent marketing: the former is the ideal platform for the sharing and dissemination of the latter as well as a hub where conversations about the content as well as the product can be generated between the producers and the consumers (Lieb, 2011, p. 61). The purpose of content marketing is to create “relevant and compelling content in a consistent fashion to a targeted buyer, focusing on all stages of the buying process, from brand awareness through to brand evangelism” (Pulizzi, 2011).

While content marketing has been around for decades, it has drawn a significant amount of attention as a subset of digital marketing during the past few years. Martin Sorrell, the chief executive of the British advertising conglomerate WPP said in an interview that the tools of digital technology would be used for the purpose of sharing and telling stories – an innately human activity that had been carried out since the dawn of time – and that many of the stories in question would be created, told and spread by brand marketers. There is also an acute awareness that for any content marketing venture to be successful, the subsequent returns on investment (ROI) have to be watched, measured and tracked with great care.

Responses to the questionnaire seem to indicate that this facet of digital marketing, exploiting the unique position and characteristics of art books, is either being ignored or underutilised. The internet in 2015 is fueled by user-generated conversation and social media is where consumers “congregate, connect and communicate among themselves in an independent way” (Okonkwo, 2009). Art books are ideal and proven loci of such communities; for an art book to be commercially feasible in the first place, there must be an established interest in the subject. With all of the respondents to the questionnaire identifying niche interest groups surrounding their publications, and a strong social media presence and following observed for numerous art book publishers across multiple channels, marketing for art books has come full circle, recalling the days of Zwemmer’s art book shop and gallery in Charing Cross Road, which used to function as a meeting-place for like-minded individuals, a nexus for networking and a point

of reference and influence for many, besides a place from where books could be purchased. This should be the standard to which digital marketers aspire. While more resources should be expended upon understanding the customer, their habitus and the context of their buying patterns, there also needs to be a better utilisation of the product-centered spaces where the passionate, the gregarious and the creative converse and learn from each other.

Conclusion

When the television series *Civilisation* presented by art historian Kenneth Clark first aired on BBC2 in 1969, Thames and Hudson’s founder Walter Neurath was beside himself with anxiety. He believed that the series, which focused on various periods of Western art and how they tied into civilisation throughout the ages, would kill sales for the art book publisher, rendering art books obsolete. Several of his contemporaries recall him saying, ‘This is the end for us.’ The television series ended up having the opposite effect. Sales boomed as a result of people seeking books about what they had seen on their screens, and *Civilisation’s* companion book led to the rise of an entirely new publishing genre – the TV tie-in. The best way to experience and make the decision to buy an art book remains the physical world. As was established earlier in this dissertation, art books are a unique subgenre of publishing, occupying a space in the intellectual world, but also in the world of luxury. While fiction, non-fiction and reference books may be consumed in the cheapest and most convenient forms, art book buyers will always have a visceral and experiential reaction to the art of the illustrated book. In this way it is understandable that most art book publishers will keep funneling the lion’s share of their marketing budget towards connecting buyers with the books in person.

However, this cannot be the only way forward in a world where so many of our daily activities take place online. Marketing moves in time with the most current developments in technology, and while the subject of many illustrated books is antiquity, marketers have to have



their eyes fixed on the future. There needs to be sufficient investment of the publishing house's resources and budget dedicated to providing a digital experience for customers that is worthy of their time, their money and their loyalty. For that to happen, art book publishers have to stop treating it as traditional marketing's poor relation, an afterthought that is a necessary part of being a business in the 21st century, and give it the importance it deserves. Only then can its reach its full capabilities, which in terms of attracting and retaining clients, has potential far beyond what has been seen so far.

It is not feasible to solely target the super-rich through luxurious physical production, and if this had ever been the situation in the past, no contemporary mass market art book publisher seeking to be sustainable is pursuing this avenue exclusively anymore. This does not mean that art books have to let go of that uniquely aspirational component that makes people pay large sums of money to have a particular book in their home or work space. The output of most art book publishing houses varies considerably as they strive to attract and target a wide breadth of buyers, and the internet, with its democratisation of all aspects of market communications, is the perfect environment for art book publishers, allowing them to foster a sense of desirability in tandem with a sense of exclusivity. Publishers can choose to remain exclusive in terms of the selective distribution of the actual product, while creating and distributing content and alternative products across multiple channels that would not have been possible without the internet, in order to appeal to existing and potential customers. It allows the two essential, if oppositional forces of art book publishing – exclusivity and accessibility – to co-exist.

The rise of digital marketing has also been a boon for self-published artists and boutique mini-presses. While large art book publishing houses may have more executive and financial backing, giving them the opportunity to carry out more complicated and ambitious marketing campaigns for their publications, digital marketing calls for agility, nimbleness and a level of fluency and confidence with the medium that is native to the digital generation; this is something

which marketing departments in traditional publishing houses are striving to catch up with. In this way, the internet has again played the role of equaliser, helping to level the playing-field between the large and powerful organisations who are funneling considerable resources into the emerging medium and the small and ambitious firms for whom digital marketing, by necessity, is the only viable avenue of promotion.

4.1. Moving towards a fully integrated approach towards digital marketing for art books

The art book publisher's online presence has to be treated as a natural extension of the brand, as that is how customers will view it. A good online experience should ideally be memorable for all the right reasons, but failing that, a decent quality service has to be in place, at the very least. Not only will a mediocre or poor experience online reflect badly on the publisher in the digital space, but it will also permeate and colour the customer's thoughts and experiences, even when the books in question are being purchased in a brick-and-mortar shop or at an art fair, or simply being looked at as an object in someone else's home.

Most major trade publishing houses have already recognised the place of digital marketing in their overall corporate strategy, and have taken steps to allocate the appropriate place – one which grows with each passing year - for this channel in corporate planning. While art books occupy a different space than trade fiction and non-fiction publications, as wholly physical artefacts which will most probably remain that way for as long as physical books are being made, the onus to maintain a web presence and a digital marketing strategy which matches their high standards in the physical world is something that not even the best and most established art book publishing house can ignore.

This is not a one-off task, or something that can be replicated over and over again with the guarantee of good results each time. Digital marketing is a constantly shifting and developing medium which is still very young. It



requires constant upkeep and a commitment to keep abreast of new developments. It has been challenging for many art book publishers whose main product is very much in the realm of the physical world to do so, but the best of them have already made significant strides to connect with their audience through digital mediums. Whether they will keep improving and building on what already exists, and whether the rest of the pack will take up the gauntlet provides scope for observation, research and study further down the line.

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