
Post-Conference Insight from BISG Executive Director Scott Lubeck



The Book Industry Study Group hosted its first *NEXT Conference* in New York City on March 31st, 2011. The theme was *Developing the 2020 Publishing Program*.

A *NEXT Conference* is a breed apart from what many people are used to. During this year's program, nine teams of publishing professionals from across the book industry tackled the hypothetical challenges of a fictional publishing company called "Crossroads". The challenges included defining the company's core business and identifying their customer, along with developing strategies to enable content development, discovery and mobile delivery. When the teams finished their work, each one presented its plan of action to the whole group for discussion and elaboration. Common themes ran through all, and at the end of the day, the participants reached consensus around the following twelve "insights" from the exercises.

Overall Trends:

Publishers are migrating from the general toward the specific, with an increasing tendency toward vertical integration/specialization in content creation and curation. Genre-based publishing is becoming synonymous with the communities that identify with and support it.

The cloud is both a technical and a social space: cloud technologies enable efficient scaling of technical architectures, but more importantly the cloud becomes the foundation for a new "social space" built with community-minded tools (e.g. social media) that should ideally be open, non-proprietary, always available and freely accessible.

Customer centricity will lead publishers to develop a 360-degree view of the consumers of content based on an empirical, data-derived understanding of their behaviors and requirements.

Publishers can avoid disruption, resistance and failure by adopting approaches that embody agility and risk tolerance (along with risk management), and that foster experimentation and reward both success and failure.

Strategic Responses from Publishers:

1. "Become the community." Static products and services are not enough. Continuous feedback loops with consumers, customers and readers are imperative. Developing customer-driven products—where boundaries between customer and product dissolve (think games) —is crucial: the platform is the community.

2. Business model innovation means embracing new approaches that include “free” as the path to “sold,” content as a service, subscription models and direct-to-consumer.
3. Publishers must harness subject matter expertise and deep insider knowledge that give insight into communities, so that they can enable the creation and application of taxonomies and semantics that represent the connective tissue between content and communities of readers.
4. Collaboration (among competitors, suppliers, manufacturers, service providers, etc.) is the principle method for problem solving and building the business architecture for the publishing enterprise in this period of transformation and beyond.

Operational Implications:

1. Publishers must create “flexible content,” free from constraints imposed when planning for use in a single container. The consumer demand for content “my way” is paramount and publishers must extend content APIs that enable consumer engagement and creativity: to mash it up, mix and match, filter and blend, and make it their own.
2. Business decision making is based on data and analytics. In a world awash with data (produced by websites, apps, social media, etc.), going with your gut is a losing strategy.
3. Publishing requires the acquisition and retention of new core competencies:
 - a. Process management (enabling organizational agility)
 - b. Technology-based product development (multi-product, multi-format development)
 - c. Statistical, predictive analysis (empirical research, development and decision making)
 - d. Master data management (managing data from multiple sources for multiple purposes)
 - e. Information architecture (designing for simplicity, effectiveness and results)
 - f. User experience architecture (building for customer engagement)
 - g. Taxonomy and semantics development and maintenance (the heartbeat of discovery)
 - h. Metadata management (all of the information about the content from all sources: publisher and user generated)
 - i. Community management (driving engagement, enchantment)
4. Speed matters: publishing must be agile and move faster in every arena.

Last updated: 04/08/2011