

Better Stories, Better Sustainability: How Authentic Storytelling Can Lead University Presses into the Future

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History and Context

- Presses are judged on the character of their content
- The crisis of the monograph in the 1970s to today
- Changes in the disciplines, especially the Humanities
- List-building: textbooks and trade titles



Content, Process & Audience

- Content is king to merit high price tags
- Leading the (specific) field
- Your publishing as author-facing
- The illusive general reader



Market & Mission

"Publishing is barely an industry. It is hardly a business. It is more like art and the worse you are at the business, the less it can seem like art." - Steven Yates, The University Press of Mississippi

- Positive storytelling
- Authentic Leadership
- Vulnerability and Connection



Strengths & Values

- Playing into organizational strengths and history
- Accepting who the organization is, including flaws
- List-building as collective identity



Framing & Narrative

- Framing: a set of assumptions you carry with you
- Re-framing shifts within the disciplines
- Focus on emotion rather than importance



Ethics & Authorship

"...so collaborative that in some ways we, as the press, disappear so that it becomes the author's wonderful vehicle," —Steven Yates of the University Press of Mississippi

An Organization's Soul

- Soul: a resolute sense of character and confidence in who we are
- Stress creates ethical questions for a press
- The business of authorship and building an organizational story together



Messaging & Independence

- Content and author names as a part of organizational story
- Manuscript ownership
- Embracing authors and other strengths across the disciplines



Author Care & Inspiring Evangelists

- Press/author relationship: reinforcing brand
- (Lack of attention) affects where an author chooses to publish
- Supporting large authors vs supporting small authors
- Digital storytelling



Partnership

“Every light was a story, and the flashes themselves were stories going out over the waves, as markers and guides in comfort and warning” – Jeanette Winterson, Lighthousekeeping



Inter-Press Partnership

- Formal associations and meetings
- Collaboration as a tool for re-framing



Conclusion

- Staying true to mission, vision and values
- Creativity within constraint
- Authors as evangelists
- Questions?



Closing Recommendations

Proposed Recommendations for Publishers:

- Be more transparent with authors, especially debut authors about the publishing process
- Keep authors apprised of progress made on their work
- Prioritize creativity and storytelling over pure financial gain
- Remain true to core mission, vision and values
- Authors as evangelists
- Connections with other presses and collaboration

