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## **Books in the Digital Age**

### **The Transformation of Academic and Higher Education Publishing in Britain and the United States**

by John Thompson

Polity Press, 2006 480pp. £19.99

I was interested in reviewing this book because of my changing role at work. Having moved from subject librarian to digital assets, I am keen to get my hands on anything that will help with the transition. Although somewhat daunted by the size of the volume, just over 400 pages long, not exactly made for beach reading..., and the close typeset makes skim (or dipping in) reading near impossible! Having said that, once read it was so informative that these concerns became minor irritations as I grappled with understanding an industry that was new to me.

As an industry, publishing has been changing as technological advances allow the mechanisation of many of the technical processes involved in publishing. The changes are considered from the industry itself, from academia and for society at large. Thompson is in a good place to comment, as he was Director of Polity Press and is both academic and practitioner. However there is not that much around that allows you to get a useful overview and review what is happening (and what may happen) in that industry. This books goes a long way to dealing with that void. Although repetitive in parts, the volume is well arranged and thought through, and constitutes the first major study of book publishing.

There are four parts to the book: the publishing business; the field of academic publishing; the field of higher education publishing and the digital revolution. Complemented by over 60 tables and figures, it seeks to provide a summary of the large-scale changes that have affected the industry since the early 1980s. Of interest to academic librarians is the decline of the scholarly monographs market

Of specific interest to UKeig members is the section on the digital revolution and more directly the chapter on the hidden revolution: reinventing the life cycle of the book. This

chapter considers the demise (or otherwise) of the ebook. On the contrary it appears that more books are being produced as the digital back files kindle our passion for other titles that publishers are keen to make available.

I was disappointed that there was no discussion about the effect of the open access movement and the effect on different publishing models which this entails, especially given the focus on academic publishing. It would have proved useful (I think) if the volume had concluded with suggested solutions rather than a “too many variables to make any predictions”

I found it extremely useful to use as a potted history of a new area of interest for me. It would need to be revised and kept up to date especially given the rapidity with which the publishing industry is having to react to events (print on demand machines, the open-access movement) but it has certainly acted as a good grounding in the publishing industry.

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