

Everything you know about publishing is wrong

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- **The alternative sucks 30,000 times more**

The alternative is 30,000 times more frightening. So, you think there are too many magazines, newspapers and books in print. Consider this carefully. According to a 2000 study by the University of California, Berkeley, printed content represents 0.003 percent of all content published annually in the world. That statistic is worth repeating:

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Think about all those bookstores. Think about all those books, magazines and newspapers. All that massive, massive quantity of print still only represents 0.003 of total content.

Where the hell is all the rest of it published? The vast majority of content in the world can be found on computer disks. In comparison to computers, print publishing is a miser. Print is simply not at the races. You see, the real problem we face today is not what is being published in print, it's what is being 'published' to disk.

For every sentence published in print there are 30,000 sentences published on computers. For every book printed there are some 30,000 'books' published on computers. Traditional publishing may not be working when it comes to print, but at least it has made some effort to keep the floodgates shut. That's because the average publisher will reject up to 90 percent of publishing proposals they get.

In the world of computers, the floodgates have been blown from their hinges. Information has gone haywire on computers because there are little or no publishing standards. Everyone is a publisher, most of it is awful, and nobody has time to read anywhere remotely near what's out there. Even if they want to read a specific document, there's so much content, so badly organized, that the effort in finding it is often not worth the trouble. As Neil Postman puts it, "We have transformed information into a form of garbage."

Yet, people are reading more because they have to. People are writing more because they have to. Content is critical to the success of the modern organization and individual. Publishing may suck, but its alternative is far, far worse. No matter what way you slice it, getting better at publishing is the only

way you're going to get better at content.

The essence of publishing is communication. The essence of great publishing is about getting the right content to the right person at the right time – and making a profit out of it. Increasingly, that's what modern business is about, whether that content is going to a member of corporate staff, a supplier, a customer or investor, whether that content is helping to sell a product or support it.

- Organizations are awful at publishing content

Imagine for a moment the modern factory floor. Everything is clean and tidy. The machines are well organized. The processes work with great precision. Efficiency and productivity are maximized. A good manager will not allow a thing to get out of place.

Try and imagine what the contents of your computer or website would look like if they were presented like a factory floor. If they are like a great many other websites, they'd look less like a factory floor and more like a local dump--an information dump.

A modern manager would never let their factory floor get in the state they let their websites get into. One reason is that you cannot 'see' the state content is in. Another is that few people realize the true value or cost of content. Studies have shown that a quality document can cost \$4,000 to get ready for publication. Think about it. That report on your desk probably cost more than the computer sitting beside it.

A great many managers think about content as being 'stored' rather than 'published' on computers. "The old dynamic of computing belongs to the golden age of information," Richard Hackathorn wrote in Byte Magazine in 1997. "It was the classical 'Request and Reply' (R&R) model." This indeed is the classic approach to information. The computer stores the content, and then the reader requests a specific document.

This model worked okay when there was a reasonable quantity of content and when the person knew exactly what they were looking for. The problem is that the amount of content has ballooned and that in the great majority of cases, the reader often isn't quite sure exactly what they want. Thus, the old model of how we deal with content on computers is not working. Organizations need a totally new approach; a publishing approach.