Have you ever seen a platypus? Well, check out the advertisement for Informit in this issue of Learned Publishing. The platypus is a unique Australian animal. It is a mammal but it lays eggs. It has webbed feet and a bill like a duck but swims like an otter and lives in rivers like a beaver. It is a monotreme, one of only two in the world. The other is the echidna or spiny anteater, also only found in Australia. Each of these animals has evolved a unique combination of attributes that make it highly fitted to its environment.

But what has this got to do with Informit and RMIT Publishing? RMIT Publishing too is a unique Australian. It has evolved over its 16-year history from being a producer of CD-ROMs to being Australia’s foremost aggregator of databases, as well as an online and print publisher. RMIT Publishing’s other unique feature is that it started as a purely electronic publisher and continues today as Australia’s only university press that is principally electronic: 96% of its sales come from electronic products. This is the story of that evolution.

Starting in 1989 as a business unit called ‘infoRMIT’ within the Library at RMIT University in Melbourne, Informit published Australia’s first database compilations on CD-ROM, the most famous being AUSTROM which continues as an online database compilation to this day. In those early years we were often referred to as AUSTROM due to the overwhelming success of that product. In 1997, when the RMIT TAFE Publications Unit joined Informit, the business became formally known as RMIT Publishing.

RMIT Publishing now publishes under the following imprints:

- RMIT Publishing
- Informit
- RMIT University Press (print only)
- RMIT Press (print only)
- TAFE Publications (print only)

**Abstract:** In a time when university presses are struggling to survive and most require financial support from their parent institutions, RMIT Publishing – an electronic publisher from its inception in 1989 – has grown its annual sales from AU$2.8m in 2003 to an expected AU$6m in 2007. This 100% sales growth in five years has been achieved by RMIT Publishing’s unique, context-driven approach to electronic publishing. This approach has made RMIT Publishing the publisher of choice for Australian databases, aggregated scholarly content for the global market and now ‘born-digital’ publications.
Throughout the 1990s, the success of AUSTROM spawned a range of other subject-based database compilations on CD-ROM. Most of these databases (70+) are still updated and available online via Informit (www.informit.com.au). The Informit brand has stayed with the electronic products and is now the name for the online search infrastructure which delivers all RMIT Publishing’s online products.

In 2000, RMIT Publishing evolved further, and released its first Plus Text product developed around the APAIS database from the National Library of Australia. Australian Public Affairs – Plus Text was unique to its environment in several ways. Firstly, it aggregated the full text of journal articles based on an existing subject index. Secondly, it came about through a three-way partnership between Informit, the National Library of Australia, and the Copyright Agency Ltd (Australia’s collecting society for text-based works). Unlike Europe and North America, Australia’s scholarly journal publishing is not concentrated in major publishing companies and societies. Instead, a myriad of research bodies, universities and professional associations each publish one or two journals in their field, so it had always been difficult to clear rights for these journals to transfer them to electronic media.

The agreement between RMIT Publishing and the Copyright Agency Ltd to clear rights to these journals for inclusion on the aggregated service marked a significant turning point in online access to scholarly content in Australia. Currently, Informit publishes five Plus Text products which all use an existing index database as the basis for the aggregated full text (see Table 1).

The Plus Text products have been extremely successful, having been sold on subscription to every university library in Australia, the majority of libraries in the government and educational sectors in Australia and New Zealand, and increasingly in global markets such as Asia, the UK and North America (see Figure 1).

Around the same time, another product, Informit e-Library, was being developed. This was a further evolution as it was a cover-to-cover aggregation of journals, books, conference papers, reports, occasional series and other ‘grey’ literature published in Australia but not widely available online. We embarked on the daunting task of clearing rights to over 2,000 Australian scholarly and research publications which represented approximately the same number of organizations. One person started on this process in earnest in 2003 and the list of titles built slowly. Not only was it incredibly time-consuming due to the large number of separate approaches that needed to be made, it also required a lengthy negotiation process as most of the organizations being asked for permission were not aware of the burgeoning electronic publishing industry and the increasing demand from institutional libraries for aggregated content, indexed and searchable via sophisticated online interfaces.

This required us to educate organizations about electronic publishing and this process combined with their reservations about losing print subscriptions meant that many publishers wanted to wait until others had committed. RMIT Publishing will forever be grateful to the key organizations that contracted with Informit e-Library early on as they were brave and insightful enough to see the long-term goal of Informit e-Library – to aggregate Australian research so that it can be used most effectively by the research community, as well as the education, government and business sectors.

### Table 1 Informit Plus Text products

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product</th>
<th>Index</th>
<th>Subject</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>APA-FT</td>
<td>APAIS</td>
<td>public affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meditext</td>
<td>AMI</td>
<td>medicine and health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGIS Plus</td>
<td>AGIS</td>
<td>legal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A+ Education</td>
<td>AEI</td>
<td>education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family &amp; Society Plus</td>
<td>FAMILY</td>
<td>social issues</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Now, we are about to celebrate our 100th journal going live on Informit e-Library and we expect this number to increase to 160 by March 2007. In addition to journals, Informit e-Library includes monographs, conference papers and many reports, issues papers and other occasional series. We are also now including some selected open access publications to this collection.

The business models of RMIT Publishing have also evolved. Beginning as a co-operative venture by an Australian university library – whose aim was to provide electronic access to the many index databases created and maintained by the research community in Australia – Informit databases were initially sold on a cost-recovery basis. Since 1997 RMIT Publishing has operated as a commercially sustainable (but not-for-profit) publisher and aggregator continuing to support the scholarly activities of RMIT University and many other Australian research organizations, government agencies and universities. In fact, we have a long history of partnering with other organizations to create new products; this has been one of our greatest attributes.

The nature of our partnerships has developed in line with our product types. The development of the first CD-ROM compilation, AUSTROM, brought together 10 databases from 10 different data-provider organizations such as the National Library of Australia, the Commonwealth Attorney-General’s Department, the Australian Institute of Family Studies, the Australian Institute of Criminology, the Australian Council of Education Research, and the National Centre for English Language Teaching for Adults at Macquarie University. This co-operation allowed the databases created within these organizations to be transferred to a common platform and marketed and sold to the wider research community. It also provided the means to generate revenue in the form of royalties back to the providers thereby ensuring the continuation of the databases. Similar partnerships with over 50 data-provider organizations have been established since that time.

Our success with partnering led us to establishing a relationship with the Copyright Agency Ltd (CAL) to facilitate the licensing of content for the Informit Plus Text products. CAL is the rights’ agent and also distributes royalties (more than approximately AU$1m/year) from Plus Text products to copyright holders of the journals and other publications.

The Plus Text products provide a unique and complementary channel for researchers to identify and access full-text articles from a wide range of scholarly journals using one search interface.

In addition to these partnerships, we now have relationships with over 100 content providers for the Informit e-Library service. Many of these providers are organizations such as professional associations, research bodies, journals being produced from university departments, and government agencies. Some are individual academics and researchers who seek an online presence for their work. Currently, only a handful is from outside Australia but this number is increasing steadily as we actively seek new relationships with international providers.

Most of these content providers are organizations whose primary function is research or industry support so their publishing activities are very much peripheral. However, at least a dozen of our content providers are companies whose principal function is publishing. In many cases they are novices to electronic publishing and therefore they are complementing their print publishing with our electronic service.

RMIT Publishing undertakes all the metadata creation, file conversion and content management work required to aggregate these publications thus providing a no-cost option for publishers wanting to transfer their print content to an online platform. The royalties content providers receive from Informit e-Library are ‘money for jam’ as

- Figure 2 Royalties paid (AU$m).
they attain this revenue at no expense to themselves and the sales capture markets they cannot easily reach (Figure 2).

Probably the area of least change is our customer base, with sales occurring in the same market sectors today as in the early 1990s. The university library sector in Australia and now New Zealand has almost universally supported the business through annual subscriptions to the original CD-ROM compilations and now to the complete set of Informit online indexes and products.

Of course those government agencies and research organizations which produce the index databases have also been an important group of customers for the full set of Informit products. These customers include the Australian and state government departments (e.g. health, transport and agriculture) with an interest in accessing Australian journal content.

The customer list for Informit services also includes the state and national libraries of Australia and New Zealand, public libraries, TAFE (Technical and Further Education) college libraries and school libraries. A growing customer group is large corporate libraries such as those in law or accounting firms. And there has always been a small component of sales to individuals who typically buy a single print publication, a CD-ROM or access a single title or article from the e-Library service using a pay-per-view model.

Whilst the market has stayed constant, increases in sales have mostly been achieved through subscriptions negotiated annually with national consortia such as CAUL (Council of Australian University Libraries), AGLIN (Australian Government Library and Information Network) and NSLA (state and national reference libraries in Australia and New Zealand). Since 2003 the total annual sales have grown from AU$3.7m to approximately AU$6m in 2006 (Figure 3).

That growth has encompassed a move away from the CD-ROM products (no longer in production) and print publications (only 4% of total sales), the introduction of a fully online service, Plus Text products and the full-text service Informit e-Library (Figure 4).

In 2004, the business reaffirmed its business-to-business (B2B) approach and undertook a growth phase to double annual sales whilst maintaining the fixed costs for the business, thereby increasing profitability and long-term sustainability.

To achieve this level of growth in sales, the following strategies are being implemented:

- Increasing licensed content for the aggregated service to existing markets in Australia and New Zealand.
- Promotion to library consortia and large research libraries in Asia, UK and North America for international sales.
- Partnerships with existing scholarly journals and new ‘born-digital’ journals to publish a coherent body of scholarship associated with RMIT University (e.g. International Journal of e-Business, due for publication in 2007).
- Repackaging and reformatting current content for syndicated resale to corporate and enterprise markets.

For the future, RMIT Publishing has secured its long-term viability by:

- negotiating new products (both aggregated services and content) for the scholarly and professional markets;
- establishing an alternative payment and
access method for individuals (B2C) and international customers;
• redeveloping production and delivery infrastructure to reduce unit costs of production;
• working with industry partners to formalize the online archiving of Australasian content; and
• promoting the Informit brand in global online markets.

Conclusion
So, what has the platypus and echidna to do with RMIT Publishing? These, and lizards, are our new mascots and we will be using them in all our advertising in 2007 as they each represent one of our strengths: the platypus – Dive Deep with Informit – symbolizes our depth and breadth of Australasian content; the echidna – Got a Thorny Question? – connotes Informit’s sophisticated search and retrieval interface; and the embracing lizards – Need Support? – exemplifies our uncompromising customer support services.

It could be argued that RMIT Publishing is really a hybrid: part aggregator, part publisher. We believe that our business has simply evolved to be the best fit for our environment. The local research habitat with its small, delicate ecology is worth preserving. RMIT Publishing, like the platypus and echidna, has quirky features that not only make it successful in its home territory but also well-adapted to deliver scholarly content globally.

Janette Wright
Director
RMIT Publishing
Level 3, 449 Swanston Street
Melbourne, Victoria
Australia 3000
Email: Janette.wright@rmit.edu.au

Sara Hearn
Publishing Projects
RMIT Publishing
Email: Sara.hearn@rmit.edu.au

SOCIETY FOR SCHOLARLY PUBLISHING

Don't have your own panel of industry and academic librarians to guide marketing, pricing, and access policies? Then...

Save the Date!
SSP Librarian Focus Group
Washington, D.C.
February 8, 2007

Lively discussion and excellent networking opportunities are guaranteed.

Praise from Publishers for Previous SSP Librarian Focus Groups

"Invaluable for small publishers struggling to know how best to serve library subscribers."

"A wonderful opportunity to have access to librarians."

"A lot of good ideas from a lot of different perspectives."

Registration will open December 8, 2006. Priority will be given to SSP members. Not a member? Join today at www.sspnet.org.

Visit the SSP website for more details:
www.sspnet.org

Other Upcoming Events... 29th Annual Meeting June 2007