

THE HSRC'S EMERGING PUBLISHING STRATEGY: A DISCUSSION DOCUMENT

John Daniel and Eve Gray

Underlying assumptions

Underlying the development of the strategy outlines in this paper have been the following assumptions:

- a) The HSRC's product is research. It is a knowledge generator, funded in part by the public sector with a responsibility to disseminate that knowledge to the wider public in an accessible and affordable way;
- b) The term '*wider public*' is in reality, however, a misnomer. The actuality is that the HSRC produces knowledge for a limited niche market comprised essentially of government; business; the NGO sector, and the academic community, nationally and internationally;
- c) Not only is that niche market a limited one so that HSRC publications rarely sell more than at most 1000 copies (the absolute baseline or bottom-line number for most South African commercial publishers), and usually a lot less (a recent survey of HSRC sales over the past few years reveals average sales of less than 100 per annum), it is an increasingly 'wired' one. More and more, it seeks the data it needs electronically rather than in print form. Where it requires it in print form, it increasingly seeks to be able to produce its own print, customising the information to its own volume (say a chapter or two) rather than to have to carry the entire book;
- d) The HSRC is a non-profit organisation. Its commercial goal is to attract research tenders and to deliver quality research products. Publishing is an integral part — rather than the end-product — of that research function and its publications should both promote that research function as well as serve to attract new clients. Publishing in the HSRC is therefore a not-for-profit function.

Background

In February 2001, the HSRC commissioned Eve Gray & Associates (EG&A) to conduct a review of the organisation's publishing structure. At that time, publishing operations had devolved into the different research units as a result of an earlier decision to dismantle the publishing department. A warehousing capacity had been retained, however, and a sales function with limited outreach continued to function.

EG&A reported back with recommendations in April 2001. These advocated:

- o the recreation of a centralised publishing department functioning as an integral part of the organisation's research programme with a mission of enhancing and marketing the HSRC's research capacity and reputation;
- o a shift towards web-based or digital publication of research information;
- o the creation of E-commerce facilities for the supply of print-on-demand research products;

- o publications provided either free of charge or on a cost-recovery basis in the case of print-on-demand products;

These recommendations were accepted by the HSRC in April 2001 and this has resulted in the following actions:

- o a closing of the warehouse and 'bookshop';
- o a trimming down of back stock through the pulping of out-of-date and/or slow-moving titles;
- o the outsourcing of the distribution of current titles to a Cape-based company. Its mandate includes the processing and fulfilling of orders and the warehousing of a limited stock of printed books;
- o an outsourced digital publishing services provider being identified and contracted on a one-year renewable basis. This service will include e-commerce facilities and distribution of print-on-demand orders;
- o the backlist of remaindered titles being made available for digitisation and electronic or print-on-demand delivery;
- o the appointment of a part-time Publishing Director (PD) to head up a new publishing department as well as of a full-time Publishing Project Coordinator. Advertisements have been prepared for three further full-time positions — Publishing Manager, Marketing Director and Development Editor;
- o an outsourced marketing and sales agent has been identified for both the existing print list and new digital products and is being contracted;
- o a content web site is being structured and web management outsourcing is being investigated.

The way the publishing process will work

The publishing process and the decision to publish

The brief of the Publishing Director is to manage the publishing process. This means that all publishing decisions — what to publish, in what format, in what medium — will need to involve the Publishing Director. To this end, we envisage the Publishing Director being involved in the initial or very early stages of all research projects. This should not be seen as interference in the research process, but as a contribution to determining the most appropriate and effective production outcome (i.e., digital, print, outside publisher, etc.).

With the exception of client reports, all publications appearing under the HSRC imprint will be subjected to a pre-publications' peer-review evaluation process. To this end, guidelines for reviewers have been developed and a fee structure ranging from R500 to R2 000 per manuscript has been agreed. Normally, two evaluations will be commissioned per publication. Where one of those reviewers is an existing HSRC staff member, no fees will be payable.

Peer review is largely an academic process. Its focus is on the merit of the scholarship. The decision to publish and in what format involves also a market evaluation and this will largely be the domain of the publishing department. The end goal is the production of publications that combine academic and research excellence with readability and market focus.

Where an HSRC research product warrants wide distribution in print form or when research undertaken by the HSRC warrants the commissioning of books for the wider market, then the publication of these titles will be negotiated by the Publishing

Director with outside academic publishers, locally and internationally. For example, should there be material arising from the recent Paris conference, then, apart from publishing conference proceedings (web-based), the HSRC could also ask specific authors to expand and rewrite material to the brief of an outside publisher, such as the University of Natal Press or Indiana University Press.

Members of the publishing department will be available to, and in regular contact with, researchers in the process of their work on a particular brief, advising, where necessary, on the final publication outcome.

Guidelines for an HSRC 'house style' will be developed by the publishing department, in conjunction with the research NPAs and the digital publishing service provider. The publishing department will also produce guidelines for the preparation of manuscripts on disk. In this structure, the researchers' role is seen as being primarily to write and the aim of the publishing department is to make this as easy as possible, with the department and the digital service provider taking responsibility for editing, typesetting and design, and the production of an index. The publishing department will channel proofs to and from researchers during the production process.

Web publication

All HSRC research publications will from henceforth be published on a content web site and be placed in a digital library. Access to the web site should be free of charge with only those publications with a high commercial value — or which need to be restricted for very specific copyright or patent reasons — being charged for in their digital form. In fact, giving away information in this way is cheaper than selling it, once the administrative costs have been calculated. It costs money to manage a commercial model and in this case, print costs have been devolved to the customer.

The digital content will be accessed through a registration process and framed by terms of agreement, which as far as possible, protect the moral rights of the HSRC as author. These terms will also control the use of HSRC content in other publications.

The web site will include news, company information and appropriate links. It will also be the site of the digital library and it is hoped that at least 15 digitised titles will be on 'the shelves' by the time of the launch of the new HSRC web site on 1 November. The publishing web site will also strive for as much interactivity as possible, both in data provision and in dialogue with readers.

On the HSRC web site, publications (print and electronic) will be listed under two headings: current and archive. Customers will be able to order either electronic or print versions of archived publications.

Print dissemination

Readers will have a choice of either downloading an HSRC publication to their own computer/printer or ordering (print on demand — POD) a printed and bound copy through an E-commerce facility on the HSRC web site. The price charged for POD copies will be based on the costs of printing, handling and dispatching the publication. The goal therefore will be cost recovery rather than turning a profit. Very limited stocks of printed books will be held for free copy provision and for sale.

Through this system, it should be possible to provide print copies in remote locations without incurring the costs of postage and delivery. For example, if a customer in the Netherlands, or in Ghana, who through browsing the HSRC's web catalogue, decides to order a publication, the digital service provider will field the order and then subcontract the downloading and printing of the publication to an equivalent provider in the country from which the order originated. This system will also immensely speed up the process of servicing an order.

Outsourced publishing services

The publishing department will prepare production briefings on all products, in collaboration with the researchers, ensuring that the manuscript is complete, including illustrations and diagrams. This will then be signed off by the Publishing Director and passed on to the outsourced pub services company.

The attached flow diagram demonstrates the process that will take place. The outsourced publishing partner will undertake the entire editorial and production processes, including layout design and indexing, meaning that neither the HSRC's publishing staff or its researchers will undertake editing and typesetting in-house. The HSRC's publishing staff will monitor all production stages and author queries will be taken up with the relevant research staff. Proofs will be channelled via researchers where appropriate.

Outstanding issues

Copyright terms and terms of dissemination need to be finalised. It is our view that both access to the web, as well the downloading by clients of our materials to their computers, should be free, with the single exception of a provision for cost recovery of printed or CD versions. It needs to be understood at the outset that this system could mean that academic departments and individuals could download our materials free of charge and then reprint them in, for example, course packs which could then be sold to students with no royalty return to us.

Our attitude is that this would be fine provided that the HSRC is credited as the source of the information. In other words, we are proposing in regard to essentially non-commercial clients, that we operate on an honours system - which we feel most clients will observe. If they do not, we should recognise the immense difficulty of enforcing legally copyright provisions. We, however, feel that this is a gamble worth taking.

This system would not, however, apply in the case of commercial publishers and means need to be devised by the HSRC's lawyers to limit the use of HSRC materials in other commercial publications.

Conclusion

If this strategy develops to plan, the HSRC will in a relatively short space of time develop into the largest non-profit online research publisher in Africa. The challenge we face in developing this capacity is to ensure that the quality of our product justifies its potential reach by way of the electronic publishing revolution.