

Digital Showcase of a University Publishing House: Case Study

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Abstract: *In the digital age, any prestigious institution must present itself to the public with a quality "window" that provides all the information useful to site visitors, and they are easy (simple and quick) to find. University publishers make no exception. They are meant to add prestige to parent institutions, the essence of their work being to capitalize on the fruit of academic research and to provide high quality content to community members. This paper presents the case study of an image analysis of a Timisoara-based university publisher. The focus of interest falls on the way in which academic publishers present themselves to the public through their digital window: their websites.*

Key words: *University Press, academic publishing, website, book publishing, digital library, e-book.*

1. Introduction

I chose this topic – Digital Showcase of University Publishing Houses in Romania – motivated by a well-founded reason: I work for a university publishing house. This is not only a job, but also an environment where I can find myself and do exactly what I like most.

Further I supplemented my job with a research interest concerning the visibility of the publishing houses to the outside world, mediated by a technological channel, the website. Institutional websites should establish an effective information and communication channel between the respective organizations and their clients (Rocha, 2012). Therefore, I will engage in an analysis of the websites of a Romanian university publishing house, in the larger context of academic publishing in Romania today. I will use as analysis criteria items such as visibility and usefulness in the electronic environment, aiming to develop a good practice model for the creation of these institutions' interface in the academic sphere.

2. Expert sources consulted

In order to accomplish the work, I have consulted various bibliographic sources: printed books, online books, studies, articles on the topic.

In order to get a broad overview of the editorial services, I consulted several online sources which I included in the webography list. I have tried to find information on how the websites have been developed from experts in the field. For example, Jakob Nielsen, "the guru of Web page usability" (The New York Times), who stated Jakob's Law of Internet User Experience: "Users spend most of their time on other sites. This means that users prefer your site to work the same way as all the other sites they already know. Design for patterns for which users are accustomed." So I have read „Essential Elements of a Home Page". I have also found Elements of Education Web Design. The 17 Most Innovative University Presses And the Books You Will Want From Them offered me other examples of good practice. I have also consulted the 21 Best Premium & Free Education Website Templates 2018 and Studies about academic websites.

3. Research method

After a thorough documentation, I have found out that the publishers of the public state universities in Romania are quite numerous: 55 in total, out of which 48 are civilian universities and 7 state military higher education institutions (according to the information found on the portal of the Ministry of National Education) [www.edu.ro].

I have used the comparative analysis as a research method. Because the topic of the paper is the digital windows of the university publishing houses, I needed a grid of analysis capable of highlighting the core features of the websites. A good website must meet the following requirements (Máté, 2017):

1. Attractive visual, professional, and clean design:
 - simple and elegant palette of colors
 - easily readable text
 - stunning graphic elements
 - quality photos
 - simplicity.
2. Relevant and informative content:
 - text grouped in alignments, with short intertitles
 - permanently updated content
 - grammatically correct.
3. Functionality
 - all links, hyperlinks, and widgets work quickly and correctly, without errors
4. Usability
 - simplicity: quality content, elegant and orderly design
 - high upload speed of web page
 - minimal scroll on the homepage (maximum 2 pages)
 - logical navigation
 - compatibility with different platforms, search engines and devices.

Considering the results of some studies and the corroboration of knowledge available in several bibliographic sources (Li, 2009), we can group website quality in three main dimensions: content quality, service quality, and technical quality. In my analysis, I have focused mainly on the content of the electronic pages, evaluating (quantitatively and qualitatively) the information provided (Jaikrit, 2011). Among the potential visitors to these websites, scientific authors have a primordial place. The promotion of academic staff and researchers heavily depends, according to the law, on the amount and quality of books and articles published in publishing houses and prestigious magazines. Another important target audience is represented by the readers, who look for ways to gain access – physically or virtually – to a scientific publication. Considering the above and reiterating that I review the websites of academic entities, I have formulated the following questions and criteria:

1. General information

- a) accessibility from the parent university's website (directly from the menu, from submenus, by search on the page, searching engines only)
- b) year of its establishment
- c) published titles
- d) access to its own printing house

2. Useful information

a) for authors

- services offered by the publisher: ISBN and CIP awarding; editorial consultancy; correction, manuscript editing; graphic design for covers; anti-plagiarism check; black and white printing/colored printing; promotion and distribution; costs
- scientific reviewing
- collections
- editorial news
- titles in preparation
- catalog of publications

- b) for readers / buyers
- where and how are books sold / online orders or not?
 - E-books: free of charge / for a fee?

3. Additional information

- a) links to social networks
 b) date of last update
 c) page access in other languages
 d) other observations.

4. Results

To illustrate the research, I will present the centralized data for the Politehnica University Publishing House in Timișoara, as a case study:

Higher education institution	Politehnica University Timișoara www.upt.ro
Publishing house	POLITEHNICA Publishing House http://www.editurapolitehnica.upt.ro/ro/
1. General information	
Accessibility	directly (EP logo)
the year of its establishment	1996
published titles	> 1500 titles and > 800 doctoral theses
own printing house	YES: Politehnica Printing House
Books distribution	BOOKSHOP@UPT Bookstore
2.a) Useful information for authors	
services offered	---
scientific reviewer	---
collections	---
editorial news	2 titles
titles in preparation	---
catalog of publications	by category, under "Categories" menu
2.b) Useful information for readers / buyers	
where and how are books sold	BOOKSHOP@UPT Bookstore, online
E-book	---
3. More information	
links to social networks	---

date of last update	2018
page access in other languages	English
other observations	has a "My Account" button and a shopping cart

This website is a new, improved version compared to the one in 2017, but it can be easily seen that the effort is not followed through. For instance, on searching for “books”, the page bounces to the website of the university library. Also, the search for the publishing house itself from the homepage of the parent institution is not user-friendly. The information for authors is not presented at all, nor the editorial services. By contrast, the website offers detailed information on printing services. Information for potential buyers is adequate and useful. Most probably this publishing house will return to its digital face and add new features or information, compared to the one presented at the date of our analysis, April 2018.

5. Conclusion

University presses perform services with added value to the university community (researchers, teachers, librarians, students), but also to the broader world of readers, and ultimately to society itself. And this work should be visible. New technologies open great chances, the electronic environment being the best platform to promote institutions, persons, ideas. University publishers should make the most of this opportunity by building quality websites. Following the analysis, however, I have found that many institutions are not making use of these possibilities. The weakest elements presented by these websites were as follows:

- many universities have no direct link to their own publishing house; some can only get 3-4 pins or just a search engine
- lack of basic information for both authors and readers / buyers: one cannot find out what services are offered to the authors, the list of scientific referees, collections, etc.

- there are editorial sites that have not been updated for years
- 5 universities do not have their own publishing house
- there are two university publishing houses that do not have websites!

But I also found "showcases" that met all the criteria and had interesting new features. The conclusion, therefore, is that professional web pages are also possible and such examples can be found in Romanian practice, not only in international state-of-the-art academic publishing houses.

Maintaining an existing website does not require big investment. Updating (at least) periodic information provided by publishers on their Internet pages would improve their image and generate more credibility. A little more interest for the communicative aspect of the website, I think, would bring major benefits for both publishers and their parent universities.

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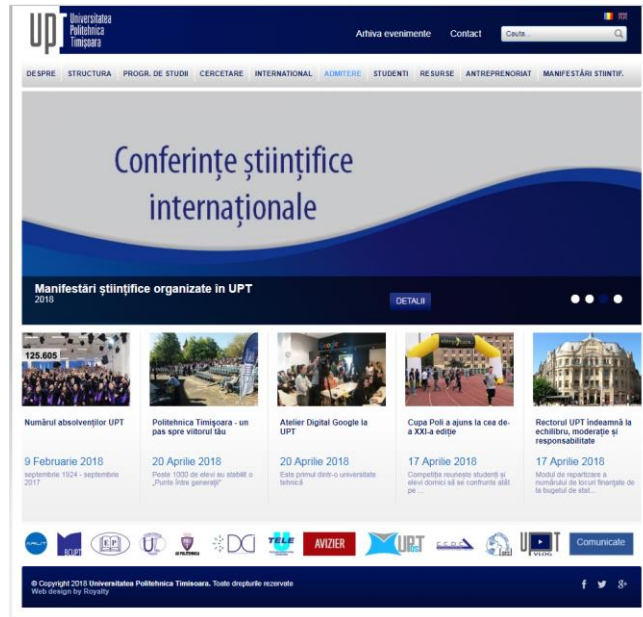
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Annexes

The homepage of POLITEHNICA University (print screen, 19.04.2018)



The homepage of POLITEHNICA Publishing House (print screen, 19.04.2018):

