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June 2010

eReview

Center Spotlight



RIT Launches First Phase of Certification Services for Printers

In the first phase of its plan to develop and offer process audits and certification services to North American printers, RIT has launched a Web-based survey to determine the extent printers conform to well-defined printing standards.

Participants will take an online survey, download test forms, conduct a press run and submit printed sheets to RIT for a free "check-up." The online survey is available until May 31. For the press sheet free "check-up," the deadline is June 30.

To participate, visit printlab.rit.edu/psa



Development of the Open Publishing Guide

The Open Publishing Guide (OPG) is unique among the research projects initiated by the Printing Industry Center. Whereas the majority of the Center's efforts focus on experimental research and/or surveys of business practices and literature, the research findings from the OPG are generated as a by-product of its core mission: to be an online resource for non-professionals interested in self-publishing. As outlined in our previous monograph, *The Open Publishing Guide: Creating a Self-Publishing Website Using Open Source Content Management Tools*, the OPG was created to meet a perceived lack of unbiased and easy to understand information for everyday persons who wish to take advantage of print-on-demand technologies in order to publish their own work.

The primary goal of this month's research study, *The Open Publishing Guide—Development: Phase Two (PICRM-2010-05)*, by Patricia Albanese, Matthew Bernius, and Rachael Gootnick, was to discuss all of the anecdotal, qualitative, and quantitative research collected since the public "soft launch" of the OPG in November of 2008. The data collected affirms the initial hypothesis: there is a significant demand on the Internet for high quality, easy-to-read, and—most importantly—actionable information about self-publishing. What was revealed in the data is that the information that users are looking for may be a bit different than was initially expected by the OPG team.

November 2008 – August 2009: "Soft Launch" and Beyond

The period from which we draw our data featured a number of important milestones for the Open Publishing Guide (OPG), beginning with its "soft launch." Soft launching, or releasing a website without publicity, is a common tactic used when offering

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CIAS Bus Trip - Toronto Blue Jays vs. Boston Red Sox Baseball Game

(Rochester, NY) - July 11

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SIGGRAPH Reception

(Los Angeles, CA) - July 27

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CIAS Department of Medical Illustration Alumni Reception

(Portland, OR) - July 29

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To find out about more alumni events, visit the [RIT Alumni Association website!](#)



Print in the Mix

Print in the Mix is "a unique site demonstrating the role of print as a viable information medium in the marketing mix." This **free** resource is published by the Printing Industry Center.

Sample Fast Fact:

*Consumers are **holding on to their print magazines, not ready to join the e-reader revolution, and are open to more relevant and targeted, personalized advertising** according to a new consumer experience study from the Chief Marketing Officer (CMO) Council and sponsored by InfoPrint Solutions Company.*

new services on the Internet. The OPG was publicly available, but no press releases or advertisements were issued. The only way that individuals could reach the site was by entering the site's URL directly into their web browser, following links placed on the Open Publishing Lab and Printing Industry Center websites, or via an Internet search.

There are two primary advantages to soft launching a site such as the OPG. The first is that it provides the site developers with additional testing time, ensuring that everything (rich media applications, links, spelling and grammar) is functioning correctly. The second advantage is that a soft launch allows a content-rich site such as the OPG to continue to build its archive of material while soliciting feedback from a select subset of users. During this period, we ran a number of user tests to gather usability feedback that was used to enhance the look and feel of the site.

The first public announcement of the site came as part of a presentation that the Open Publishing Lab directors gave at the 2009 O'Reilly Tools of Change for Publishing Conference on February 9th in New York City. As a result of the presentation, news about the OPG and other OPL projects were reported via attendees' Twitter feeds and were also picked up on a number of publishing blogs. The site experienced a corresponding surge in traffic.

During this same time, two important features were added to the site. To ensure that the OPG provided the "freshest" possible content, a news feed was added to the Community section of the site. Using Real Simple Syndication (RSS) technology, the Latest News page aggregates interesting self-publishing related news and editorial content from across the web. This self-publishing clearinghouse is updated numerous times throughout the week. Also added to the Community section were a series of discussion boards, whose goal is to encourage conversation between site visitors.

The OPG then officially launched on May 2nd at the [2009 Imagine RIT: Innovation + Creativity Festival](#), with a public announcement and two exhibits where OPG creators were on hand to answer questions and talk to attendees. This event provided us with a wealth of qualitative feedback, both on the site itself and also on its utility for people who were interested in publishing their own works but didn't know where to start. Again, following the festival, the site experienced a rise in traffic.

However, during the summer, the OPG experienced a seasonal downturn in traffic. This reduction was mitigated by a lecture program given by Rachael Gootnick at the Henrietta Public Library

[Read the full fast fact here.](#)

Have you visited **Print in the Mix** yet? Find out how this site can help you 'make the case' for print!

printinthemix.rit.edu

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Industry Education & Training

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[Orientation to the Graphic Arts](#)

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[Color Printing Fundamentals](#)

📅 October 20 - 22

[Lithographic Troubleshooting](#)

📅 October 26 - 28

as part of a marketing effort to "take the OPG" to where its niche audience resides. While it is too early to quantitatively judge the results of this effort, the talks provided an invaluable source for qualitative feedback. Several Rochester-area libraries also have promotional bookmarks about the OPG available.

Discussion of Quantitative Findings from Site Statistics

The specific statistics that are of the most value to a website are measured in terms of *unique visitors* and *unique visits* to the site. These two categories allow us to measure how many individual users visit the website and how often those visits occur. "Unique" is a critical concept in web statistics, allowing us to differentiate between 100 people visiting a website once, and a single person visiting the website 100 times. These statistics, along with others that will be discussed below, allow us to understand user movements and select user behaviors at both the site and the page level.

It is important to note that these traffic reports are quantitative statistics. Therefore, we use the phrases "user movements" and "select user behaviors" as a reminder that they are best at providing information about "who" was "where" at a given time. These reports also provide information about where the user came from, how long they spent at our site, and their navigation within our site. From this we can make a number of educated guesses about our content. However, it is not good practice to use these reports for making qualitative judgments such as "whether or not a visitor liked the content" or if a given page was "useful." Results from our qualitative research will be discussed in the next section.

In addition to selecting what traffic data one wishes to analyze, the other critical variable to consider is over which intervals to measure data. The two primary units we have chosen for this report are *weeks* and *months*. Because week over week traffic is similar in terms of pattern (if not the proportion of unique visitors), it is a more stable measure than looking at daily traffic, which fluctuates significantly (and predictably) from Monday to Sunday.

For the first 108 weeks, the OPG averaged 72 unique visitors a week and had an average of 14% week-over-week growth in unique visitors (see [Figure 1](#)). The highest number of unique visitors, 151, was recorded the week of February 22, corresponding with the O'Reilly Tools of Change conference. On eight separate occasions the site received over 100 unique visitors per week. On average, 39% of each week's unique visitors returned for at least one more visit during the same week.

[Digital Printing Bootcamp](#)

For more information on these and other programs, or to register for any of these programs, visit

printlab.rit.edu

About the eReview

The eReview is a monthly publication of the Printing Industry Center at RIT for registered Affiliate companies. Articles are also published in the quarterly printed publication *PrintReview*.

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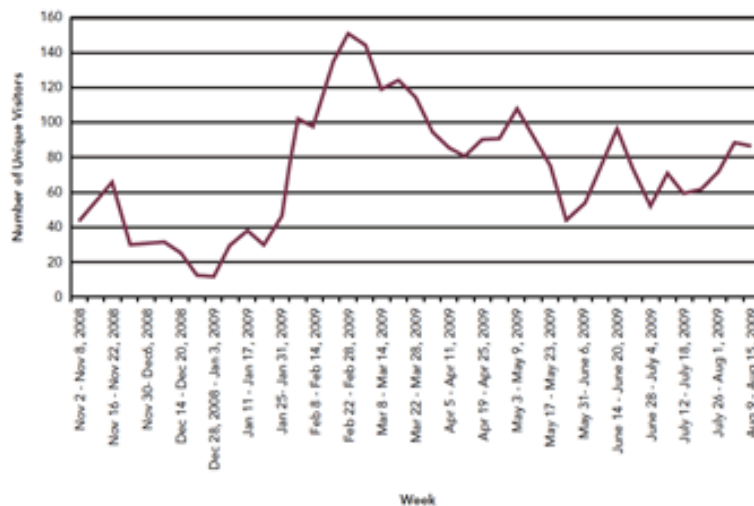
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Figure 1. Unique visitors by week

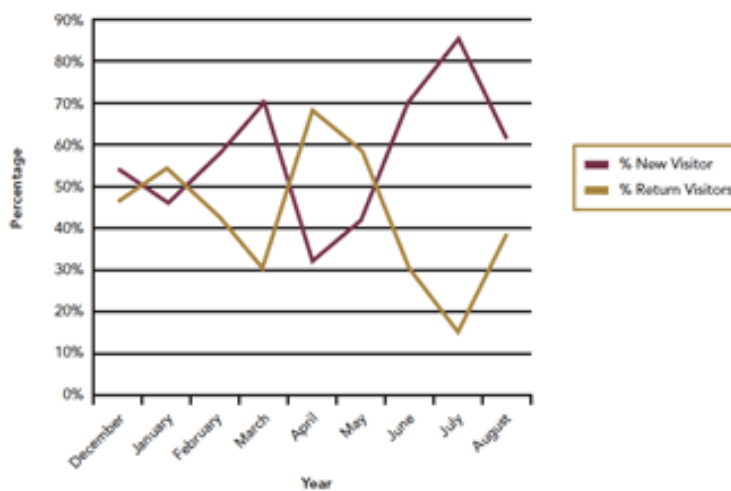
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When we shift from the weekly to the monthly view, our average return rate rises from 37% to 43%. As demonstrated in [Figure 2](#), from December of 2008 to June of 2008 the OPG saw relatively consistent growth in the number of unique monthly visitors who returned at least one more time during that month. March is a predictable outlier due to the influx of new traffic due to the Tools of Change conference.

Figure 2. Percent of returning visitors by month

[click to see image larger](#)



When we look at traffic patterns at the page level in terms of total number of visits to a page ([Table 1](#)), the three most popular sections of the site by far are the Public Domain Resources, Print On Demand Profiles, and the Self-Publishing Advisor. Looking to the top ten pages, more than half of the top most requested pages focus on learning about various content and print-on-demand resources.

Table 1. Top pages based on total number of visits

Rochester, NY 14623

Ph: 585-475-2733

Fax: 585-475-7279

Web: <http://print.rit.edu>

Email: printing@rit.edu

Twitter: [RITprintcenter](#)

About the Center

Dedicated to the study of major business environment influences in the printing industry precipitated by new technologies and societal changes, the Printing Industry Center at RIT addresses the concerns of the printing industry through educational outreach and research initiatives.

Support for the Center comes from:

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Ranking	Page	Total Visits
1	Public Domain Resources	1366
2	Print On Demand Profiles	983
3	Self-Publishing Advisor	733
4	Latest News	637
5	Free Software Tools	543
6	Publishing Step By Step - Layout & Design	511
7	What is Publishing Step By Step?	430
8	Marketing Resources	390
9	About	358
10	Public Domain Pictures.net	271

When we evaluate content based on the average number of visitors per month, some subtle but noteworthy shifts occur. Connect and Share and Author Community, two pages added later to the site as part of our community features rise to the number three and four spots respectively; our community Forums enter into the seventh slot (see [Table 2](#)).

Table 2. Top pages based on average number of visits per month

[click to see image larger](#)

Ranking	Page	Avg. Visits/Mo.
1	Public Domain Resources	137
2	Print On Demand Profiles	98
3	Connect and Share	78
4	Author Community	77
5	Self-Publishing Advisor	73
6	Help	66
7	Forums	65
8	Latest News	64
9	Publishing Steps	62
10	References	56

What both tables reveal is the popularity of the reference content, including the self-publishing information. With the exception of the home page, Public Domain Resources and Print On Demand Profiles are the two most popular pages on the site by a significant margin. It's also worth noting that there is also a noticeable difference in popularity between those two pages.

One explanation for the popularity of the Resource content can be attributed to one of the methods that visitors use to get to the OPG. Since the launch of the site, over 450 unique visitors have been directed to the OPG via Google and other search engines. [Table 3](#) displays the top 15 keywords used to find the site with the corresponding percentage of search engine traffic that they have

driven:

Table 3. Top search engine keyword by total percentage of referrals

[click to see image larger](#)

Ranking	Search Keyword	Pct. of Total Search Engine Traffic
1	open publishing guide	16%
2	bartleby dictionary	15%
3	open publishing guide toc*	12%
4	rit opg	5%
5	book1one**	4%
6	opg opl rit	4%
7	public domain clip art	4%
8	public domain clipart	2%
9	smultron column mode***	2%
10	public domain pictures	2%
11	free software	2%
12	step layout	1%
13	bartleby's dictionary	1%
14	public domain cliparts	1%
15	on demand photobook publishers	1%

* "toc" is short for Tools of Change. ** A print on-demand site. *** A Mac text editor.

Excluding searches based on the name of the OPG, it's clear to see that the vast majority of search engine traffic to the OPG is the result of different self-publishing support resource keywords.

The last quantitative data point of note is the amount of time that a visitor spends on the OPG. On average, a visitor to the OPG will spend seven minutes on the site. Considering the traffic patterns discussed above, many of those visitors are using the OPG to find resources to assist them with a publishing task at hand. Given that the OPG's role in such a transaction is directing visitors to other sites, a seven-minute stop suggests that beyond links, the Guide is offering interesting enough content to hold its visitor's attention for a short time.

Again, as discussed above, we cannot make a value judgment as to whether a visitor considers the time well spent. However, it does suggest that additional research should be performed to better understand what is occurring during the time that a visitor is on the site.

Discussion of Qualitative Findings from Interpersonal Interactions

In addition to this quantitative data, the OPG team collected and used qualitative data to further develop the site. There were three primary sources for this data collection. The first source was the OPG's web feedback mechanism. Visitors to the site are

encouraged to provide their opinions about the site using a web form. A wide range of feedback has come into the site via this mechanism. It appears that the primary interest of these users was getting tactical information and assistance in self-publishing.

The second source of qualitative feedback was from a series of usability tests that were conducted by Rachael Gootnick during the winter and spring of 2009. Participants in the testing were asked to accomplish four tasks at the OPG while Gootnick watched, recorded their progress, and asked them a number of questions. The specific tasks were meant to mimic challenges faced by everyday persons who are engaged in self-publishing.

This testing provided some valuable information about how users interact with the site. In particular, it became apparent that once a volunteer discovered the search function, this became their first method of choice for seeking specific information within the site. Overall, the volunteers who took part in the usability study were positive about their experience with the site.

In addition to the direct feedback and the feedback gained through user testing, we have also collected feedback from individuals at various live events. All of the feedback we collected at these events was extremely positive.

The majority of the feedback also indicated that the content was written at an appropriate level so as to be useful. Most people were also impressed that the site was a free service.

Conclusions and the Future of the Guide

As previously articulated, the goal of the Open Publishing Guide (OPG) was to create a web resource for non-technical individuals who are interested in self-publishing. In looking at the quantitative and qualitative data it is clear that, in this respect, the site has been a success. Not only have people directly communicated how valuable they found the content, the overall web traffic patterns have demonstrated that the OPG's highest "value" content is its' resource material.

Unfortunately, the fact remains that while the general feedback on the OPG's content is good, overall web traffic to the site is low. There are multiple approaches available to increase traffic to the content, which are discussed [within the full monograph](#).

The other challenge that the OPG faces is the question of ongoing maintenance. The OPG does not have an ongoing funding plan. While users have been impressed by the content, it is highly unlikely that enough of them would be willing to pay for access to consider that as a viable funding option. And, while the OPG has begun some experiments with community-generated content and

editing, this has yet to prove itself as a sustainable method for content update. One potential funding possibility would be to investigate a premium service for individuals who are interested in contracting hands-on self-publishing assistance. Another revenue model would be to integrate advertisements into the site.

It would be a great loss to not be able to find a way for this content to live on in one form or another, especially given the warm reception that has received so far. While print-on-demand continues to become more mainstream, it is clear that its audience of consumers would be far greater if more people could overcome their "low publishing self-esteem." Based on all of our data, it is apparent that the OPG is an important tool in helping people to overcome their self-doubt and to start down the path to self-publishing.

2009-2010 Research Monographs

To read about this research in detail, download the monograph from: <http://print.rit.edu/pubs/picrm201005.pdf>

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