

# Increasing the Value of Scholarly Books

A Case for Chapter-Level Metadata in Humanities  
and Social Science Publishing

White Paper  
October 2016

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## Introduction

What is the value of a scholarly book and how can publishers increase that value?

Historically, publishers have only had the ability to judge a book by its sales, equating the value of each book to the single-unit sales total.

Academics, particularly in the Humanities and Social Sciences (H/SS), depend on books for their research, but as authors, how do they know the full impact of their work?

Analytic tools for single-title performance are now emerging via ebook and A&I aggregation platforms, while some large publishers are also developing their own in-house resources to measure a book's reach.

As these measurements for success are becoming more commonplace, new pressures for improving a book's performance are emerging. Through enhanced metadata at the chapter level – particularly abstracts – publishers have a clear opportunity to drive usage, provide value to authors, and enrich the user experience.

Publishers Communication Group (PCG) has created this white paper, *Increasing the Value of Scholarly Books*, to examine the return on investment publishers in H/SS fields may gain by adding chapter-level abstracts and curated keywords to their metadata.

**PCG ultimately concludes that there are multiple and long-term benefits to publishers for enhanced chapter-level metadata and that demand for these assets is rapidly increasing. These benefits include:**

- **Greater Revenue**
- **Increased discoverability and book usage**
- **Relatedness among a publisher's content, regardless of format**
- **Insights to librarians to assist in purchasing decisions**
- **Improved author relationships**
- **Support of the next generation of academics in their research habits.**

## Methodology

Viewpoints from a variety of stakeholders relevant to metadata, discovery, and usage across academic publishing were collected. PCG spoke with various publishers who are already using chapter-level abstracts to best understand internal decisions, pain points, investment requirements, ability to measure usage, and ultimately revenue benefit.

PCG interviewed platform providers, discovery services, aggregators, and industry thought-leaders for their insights.

Lastly, librarians and academics directly involved in using abstracts were interviewed. Focusing on those working in the (H/SS), real-life examples were collected on how frequently chapter-level abstracts may be used, what benefit they might offer both younger and veteran researchers, and lastly how availability of these abstracts might drive sales.

A combination of in-person discussions, phone interviews, and/or written surveys were conducted.

**“Maybe [publishers] have been ignoring a whole piece of the publishing sphere when we don't measure book citations”**

Martijn Roelandse,  
Head of Publishing Innovation,  
Springer Nature

## Retaining the Importance of the Book to Academic Research

The importance, and demand, for the book as a resource for academic research is evident and long lasting. Increased discoverability of a book by enhanced metadata will only add to that value. Scholarly publishers are arriving at the same conclusion via different routes but are in general alignment that chapter-level abstracts are necessary in driving value for books – across both H/SS and STM (Science, Technology, and Medical) publishing.

A recent Springer Nature study revealed that, on average, for all English language books published since 1960, a Springer Nature **book will have on average 20 citations compared to a journal article with 11 citations.**<sup>1</sup>



## Decision Points for Publishers

When launching their digitized monograph collection Oxford Scholarship Online ([www.oxfordscholarship.com](http://www.oxfordscholarship.com)), Oxford University Press hoped to replicate the user experience and traffic of journals by embedding chapter-level abstracts in its discovery functions. OUP strove to deliver “**the most relevant content as quickly as possible**” to researchers, according to Brian Hughes, Senior Marketing Manager, Global Academic.

The 2003 launch of OSO included 700 recently published monographs in four initial H/SS subject areas. The abstracts were externally commissioned and took less than a year to assemble, although some authors preferred to create their own chapter abstracts. All abstracts were vetted and approved by OUP editors. At the time, competitors were only posting static PDFs. By offering searchable abstracts, OUP established an advantage in searches and discoverability.

Cambridge University Press also launched a pilot program with enhanced metadata by working with an external vendor to create 6000 chapter abstracts from 240 high-profile, high-usage books.

Chris Fell, Digital Publishing Director, Academic, shared that their goals were to “**increase e-commerce, discoverability, and relatedness.**” In other words, they wanted to improve the customer experience, particularly on their own platform ([www.cambridge.org/core/](http://www.cambridge.org/core/)) and understood that more granular metadata would help researchers identify relevant content with greater ease and speed.

Wiley had additional reasons for creating chapter-level abstracts, according to Jason Markos, Director of Platform Capabilities:

- Their content was behind a pay-wall and they needed a way to showcase what was available.
- They were looking for ways to make it easier for Google to index Wiley books.

Wiley, who had already been working on an enrichment program decided to partner with a content-specialist vendor to create both the abstracts and a standard logic across the metadata.

<sup>1</sup>Book data is from CrossRef; Journal data from Thompson-Reuters.

Markos explained, **“If books are better described, we can build better services around related content and improve browse capabilities.”**

What about smaller publishers who have these same goals but have limited resources and may not be able to commission an outside vendor to create abstracts?

Berrett-Koehler Publishers focus on progressive leadership and management studies. Rather than create new abstracts for each chapter from their front and backlist when they prepared to launch their ebook collection, BKpedia (<http://bkconnection.bkpedia.com>), they worked with a vendor to extract the first 200 words of each chapter and used these excerpts as the chapter abstracts. The vendor also helped them verify the integrity of the files and ensure an easy process through ingestion to their platform and dissemination to third-parties.

According to Johanna Vondeling, Vice-President of International Sales and Business Development, “it’s not a perfect solution but it dramatically increases discoverability.”

## Prioritizing Metadata Decisions

In launching a pilot program, publishers need to decide for which books they will create chapter-level metadata. Should they select a clutch of related books or create abstracts from the entire backlist or start with the most recent publications?

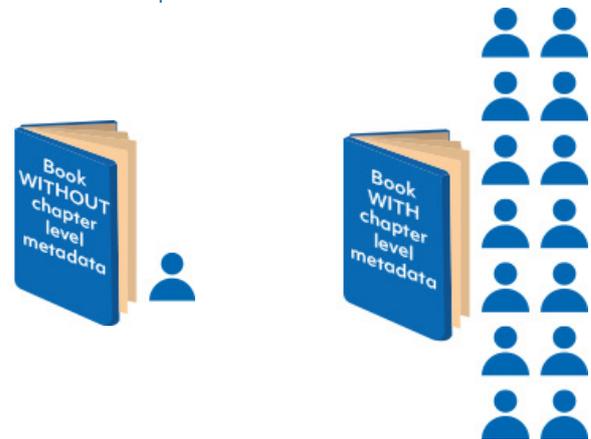
OUP focused on recent monographs in the subject areas originally featured in OSO; CUP’s marketing team evaluated and identified titles with the most potential; and Berrett-Koehler included all titles in their ebook collection.

Wiley’s team also included the books with the most potential across all subject domains in H/SS and STM. They looked for opportunities that could benefit from deeper granularity and also considered how various user-types would engage with the content.

At this stage, according to Markos, there’s still not significant evidence to suggest that there’s any greater benefit to investing in frontlist over backlist – if a choice has to be made. A new book may inherently have high spikes in activity but what causes those spikes is hard to pinpoint because as an industry there remains a lack of benchmarking tools.

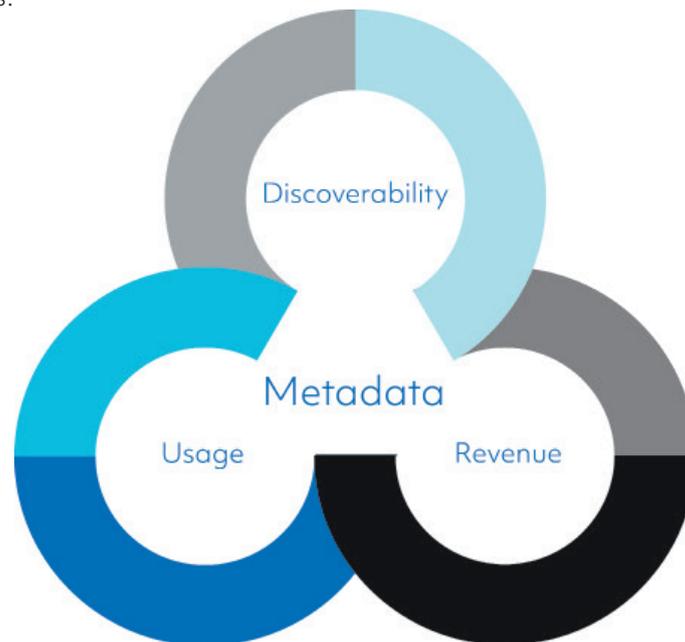
Bridget Page, Product Manager of Discovery & Metadata Solutions at EBSCO, agreed that the more chapter-level metadata a publisher can provide, the better. She reported, **“Customers want both book and chapter records**, and they’d like them to be linked somehow so that you can access the book metadata even if your search only returns a chapter record.”

In an *Against the Grain* article from June, 2016, Alan Jarvis, Publishing Director at Taylor & Francis, reported that a handbook hosted on Routledge Handbooks Online which includes chapter-level metadata was **“fourteen times more likely to be used”** than titles on other T&F platforms without chapter-level metadata.



They want the option to 'zoom-out' from within their discovery service to review the book record and other chapters in the book. It's similar to the concept of 'recommended for you' where if you like one chapter in a particular book, you might also be interested in other topics in the same book.

Likewise, being able to supply discover services with the metadata that can link back to publishers' platforms is important. If publishers' platforms provide chapter-level indexing, they will also want to ensure discovery tools like EBSCO's EDS receive chapter metadata so cross-search functionality is seamless for end-users.



## Increasing Sales Through Metadata

In the spring of 2015, Springer Nature launched Bookmetrix, a dynamic reporting tool for tracking book citations. According to Martijn Roelandse, Springer Nature wanted to address authors' concerns of why they should write books (versus journal articles).

Other than sales reports, book authors up to this point had little information on the impact and reach of their work within their communities. But via Bookmetrix, Spring Nature authors can now track and report on their academic reach to their funders and university administrators. Spring Nature is currently working with Brill to include their book data and hopes to partner with additional scholarly publishers.

With such tracking tools, book publishers are now able to monitor usage, but is usage an indicator of sales? Making the connection between usage and sales has never been easy. Books – print and digital – can be purchased from so many sources which makes it difficult, but not impossible, to track from where the content was first discovered.

Wiley takes the view that driving high usage will ultimately lead to sales, and therefore publishers need to **take action by continually enhancing metadata** to make it meaningful. Digital licensing deals, for example, are built around demand for content. If publishers don't make their data relevant, retaining customers' interest will be difficult and revenue could be jeopardized.

In the previously mentioned June, 2016 issue of *Against the Grain*, JSTOR shows just how enhanced metadata can increase sales. Managing Director Laura Brown cited that within half of a year, they experienced a **40% increase in DDA** (Demand-Driven Acquisition) after JSTOR began a pilot program to co-display book chapter and journal article search results but with little distinction between the format type.



Librarians also reported to JSTOR that they were seeing continued demand for books already acquired through DDA, according to Frank Smith, JSTOR's Director of Books.

On the sales promotion side, like many publishers, OUP closely analyzes data to identify a research request, including an examination of chapter abstract usage and requests that are denied or 'turned away'. This evidence-based approach helps OUP better understand the user journey and ensure its products are responsive to user needs. Equipped with turn-away data, sales representatives are then able to promote titles to library selectors with a data-based, tailored case for improving access.

At Springer Nature, they also depend on usage reports to develop marketing campaigns. "In the past we said it was a great book and that's how we marketed it; now we can see which are the books most in demand," reported Roelandse.

As the industry continues to develop improved tools for understanding book usage, there are already tangible signs that through improved chapter discoverability, **sales are increasing for publishers; librarians are reassured they have purchased relevant content; and authors' citations are increasing.**

## Library Considerations

H/SS librarians value chapter abstracts because "these are such book-based disciplines which point students back to the collections," said Patrick Williams, Librarian for Literature, Rhetoric, and Digital Humanities at Syracuse University. He went on to say, **"If I was looking at resources that included chapter abstracts, I'd be very excited."**

Scholars at all levels have an interest in chapter abstracts, according to Williams:

- As younger scholars grow accustomed to the interfaces on platforms such as ProQuest (which currently includes some chapter metadata), the expectation is that demand for this metadata will rise.
- For advanced researchers, they are more likely to look at the whole book if they find content in several chapters that might be useful.

As for the Social Sciences at Syracuse, Bonnie Ryan, Associate Librarian, feels that edited volumes could benefit from chapter abstracts as these books represent many arguments. For her researchers, it is "vitally important" to be able to assess the material, the research methodology, and a general overview in a snapshot.

Ryan is not a fan of the 150 to 200-word extract from the beginning of a chapter as a substitute for an originally-created abstract because "it might not contain the key words or the context of a subject area." She did cite management as one potential exception since business book authors tend to state their case upfront.

Like publishers, librarians are using usage statistics to help with purchasing decisions. Williams reviews these analytics to track how researchers and students are discovering books. The results, from both full book and chapter details, help Williams identify potential gaps in his collection. Without the enhanced metadata, Williams might not know about demand for specific books.

Both Williams and Ryan encourage more publishers to supply chapter abstracts.

**"The more info for the users, the better the research,"** said Ryan, echoing similar feedback from EBSCO.

## End-User Considerations

At a time when many publishers are currently focused on the **next generation of researchers** and are looking for ways to engage with younger academics, chapter abstracts may be an attractive offer.

Similar to the librarians' views, academics felt that younger scholars would "rely on abstracts to orient them as they do not always understand the point of some research articles," said Dr. Suzanne Scheld, professor of anthropology at California State University, Northridge.

She continued, "Adding abstracts as a permanent feature to chapters of a book is a good idea considering that in this digital age, readers probably approach chapter books like edited volumes or journals, diving into only the most relevant chapters and leaving the rest unread. Abstracts will improve this experience."

Dr. Victoria Papa, professor of literature at Northeastern University believes that the "younger generation are also more experienced readers of digital discourse, which in general is short and concise. **I think that younger scholars would 'naturally' gravitate towards abstracts** as a research tool."

For more seasoned academics, chapter abstracts are useful for those working in interdisciplinary fields who may not be as familiar with the literature outside their core field.

As for the impact on sales, researchers projected that they would be more likely to purchase a book – or request their library to purchase – once they could see that a majority of the chapters would be relevant to their work.

## Summary

Publishers wanting to develop long-term content strategies to increase the value of their scholarly book programs must consider chapter-level metadata, particularly abstracts, to stay competitive.

The long-term benefits of investing in abstracts for the backlist and building production workflows into new releases are supported by publishers, aggregators, librarians, and researchers alike.

As technology rapidly changes, and publishers face increased pressure to grow revenue, abstracts are a clear opportunity for publishers to meet these demands.

**For further information about this study, please contact PCG at [inquire@pcgplus.com](mailto:inquire@pcgplus.com).**