K-12 BLUEPRINT

OER and Traditional Publishing

An Educause Review article detailed Mercy College's change from major publisher resources to OER materials. Algebra courses, for instance, dropped their previously used licenses and textbooks, saving students $125,000 the first year. (Mercy, however, received a fair amount of support in their implementation of OER, which was funded through a grant.)

Traditional textbook publishers often had to saddle large content creation and distribution costs, and must charge institutions accordingly. With Open Educational Resources (OER) providing free, easily accessed content, how will traditional publishers evolve their business model?

OER is a huge paradigm shift in education. But does it mark the end of traditional textbook industry? Not necessarily. Publishers can utilize their networks to create resources — especially those with embedded video or otherwise rich media — with generally higher production values. OER can also be a bit of a scavenger hunt, with uncurated resources that educators need to corral into some kind of course, or adapt to meet their own unique needs.

Many schools also need product support, multiple formats, consistent updates and quality control. These consideration favor publishers willing to evolve to meet new challenges and demands to guarantee a positive user experience. Publishers should also focus on what they do well, such as creating and locating resources that successfully explain educational concepts or create high-quality, cohesive interactive experiences. Solid instructional design fueled by real-time data can also give publishers a leg up on OER.

Open resources rely on more supporting services to make them usable. This includes implementation help and institutional support. But these advantages not withstanding, OER is here to stay. Resources or relationships that rely on exclusivity run in opposition to the spirit of open licensing. Yet there is still room for savvy publishers to acknowledge education in an OER world and build unique products and services that solidify their relevance.