

Going Digital-First: Book marketing's response to COVID-19

by
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Abstract

This report explores the impacts of COVID-19 on book marketing, and how to take a digital-first marketing approach, using the University of British Columbia Press (UBC Press) as a case study to explore how a scholarly publisher adapts their marketing activities. These adaptations include how UBC Press pivoted by using digital marketing strategies, such as social media, academic campaigns, and Congress from your Couch, and with a collective marketing project as a part of the Association of Canadian University Presses (ACUP). This report outlines the ACUP collective marketing project in its beginning stages from concept to initial designs. It concludes that it is essential for publishers, both trade and scholarly, to adapt strategic and community-focused digital marketing approaches in order to be flexible when faced with sudden changes.

Keywords: Scholarly publishing; digital marketing; COVID-19; UBC Press; the Association of Canadian University Presses

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Introduction

COVID-19 health restrictions have greatly impacted most industries, and the publishing industry is no exception. Industry-wide gatherings such as the London Book Fair and the Bologna Children's Book Fair were cancelled.¹ Event spaces and schools were forced to close, meaning author tours and literary festivals could no longer go forward.² This caused serious concern for independent publishers and artists scheduled for these events. Festivals like Growing Room are only one of many segments of the publishing industry that are feeling the enormous effects of COVID-19. The director of the Growing Room Festival in Vancouver, Jessica Johns, has expressed concern about the loss of income for the authors, who anticipated income from their events, and the festival itself, which depends on donations.³

These restrictions also impacted scholarly publishing, and university presses, such as the University of British Columbia Press (UBC Press), have the added concern of being tied to universities. At the time of this writing, the University of British Columbia (UBC) is offering the majority of their courses online, with only a select few in person.⁴ While students still need to purchase textbooks, whether or not there is a digital version could influence which books professors select for their courses. These are a couple of examples of regular marketing opportunities that scholarly publishers depend upon that have been suddenly altered or made unavailable. Scholarly publishers, including UBC Press, have been forced to quickly evaluate the impact of COVID-19 and what they can do to adapt their business strategies.

1 Becky Toyne, "Canada's book publishers scramble to cope with the impact of coronavirus," *The Globe and Mail*, March 16, 2020, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/books/article-canadas-book-publishers-scramble-to-cope-with-the-impact-of/>.

2 Toyne, "Canada's book publishers scramble to cope with the impact of coronavirus."

3 Toyne, "Canada's book publishers scramble to cope with the impact of coronavirus."

4 "Coronavirus (COVID-19) and UBC's response," The University of British Columbia, updated August 25, 2020, accessed August 27, 2020, <https://covid19.ubc.ca/>.

UBC Press is a scholarly publisher that “produces books integral to Canada’s cultural, political, and social fabric,” and they are best known for publishing in the social sciences.⁵ They are a non-profit organization whose mandate is to publish high-quality, well-respected books that contribute to scholarship and reflect well on the university.⁶ They have published in a wide range of disciplines, including Canadian History, Political Science, and Indigenous History and Current Issues.⁷ While some employees normally work remotely from other areas of the country, most work on the UBC Point Grey campus in Vancouver, BC.

When COVID-19 hit British Columbia in March 2020, a majority of workplaces, including UBC Press, were forced to pivot with little lead time. It seemed that suddenly staff were working from home and could not gather in the office, so businesses had to quickly figure out how to adapt their workflows. During Phase 1 of restrictions, the BC government declared a physical distancing mandate, including guidelines for people, businesses and essential services.⁸ Work-from-home became more common than before. *Publishers Weekly* reported that out of the independent publishers they interviewed, most staff were working remotely.⁹ Across Canada, 3.4 million people who had the ability to maintain their usual hours had transitioned to working from home.¹⁰ Even as provincial governments began to ease restrictions, 2.5 million Canadians were still working from home in

5 “About UBC Press,” About Us, UBC Press, accessed August 4, 2020, <https://www.ubcpres.ca/about-us>.

6 Emily Ann Rielly, “The Marketing Plan in Scholarly Publishing: A Study of the University of British Columbia Press” (MPub Project Report, Simon Fraser University, 2011), 2–3, <http://summit.sfu.ca/item/12084>.

7 “About UBC Press.”

8 “Phase 1 – BC’s Restart Plan,” Public safety and emergency services, Government of British Columbia, updated June 24, 2020, accessed September 14, 2020, https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/emergency-preparedness-response-recovery/covid-19-provincial-support/phase-1?bcgovtm=20200506_GCOPE_AM_COVID_9_NOTIFICATION_BCGOV_BCGOV_EN_BC_NOTIFICATION.

9 Ed Nawotka and Clare Kirch, “Indie Publishers Cope with Covid-19,” *Publishers Weekly*, June 19, 2020, <https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/publisher-news/article/83654-indie-publishers-cope-with-covid.html>.

10 “Labour Force Survey, August 2020,” The Daily, Statistics Canada, updated September 4, 2020, accessed September 14, 2020, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/200904/dq200904a-eng.htm>.

August 2020.¹¹ With this many people working remotely, it was clear that workflows needed to be adapted to match. For example, the new work-from-home structure impacted how the teams at UBC Press would be able to work together. What used to be a quick walk down the hall became an email or message on Slack. The marketing department was particularly affected by work-from-home since they depend on collaboration to strategically market books, which primarily happened during in-person meetings or in passing social situations at the office.

Just like working conditions had to change and adapt, publishers needed to pivot marketing activities to reach readers without in-person discovery and marketing methods. This report uses UBC Press as a case study to explore how a scholarly publisher adapts its marketing strategies in response to the impacts of COVID-19. It also highlights how it is essential for publishers to connect with their communities as a part of their approach. Section 1 provides an overview of how UBC Press conducted their marketing activities under normal circumstances. Section 2 focuses on what the UBC Press marketing team has done to adapt, including changes in workflow and marketing adaptations. Section 3 contextualizes the current market with book discovery statistics from BookNet Canada and examines the conversations surrounding digital marketing strategies through the lens of UBC Press and scholarly publishing. Section 4 summarizes the process and objectives for a collective marketing project for the Association of Canadian University Presses (ACUP). This report is limited in scope to one scholarly publisher at a particular time period during COVID-19 restrictions, and that I, this report's author, was only involved in the ACUP collective marketing project during the initial planning stages. That being said, this report makes a case for how essential it is for publishers to adapt strategic and community-focused digital marketing approaches in order to be flexible when faced with sudden changes.

¹¹ "Labour Force Survey, August 2020."

1 — The Marketing Process at UBC Press

Within the UBC Press marketing department, there is a full team of people that work together to help UBC Press titles reach readers. The marketing and business manager is the main person who coordinates and manages the whole department. The other roles that are involved in implementing marketing activities include the digital publishing coordinator, the sales and inventory manager, the publicity and events manager, the academic marketing manager, the agency and digital marketing coordinator, the catalogues and advertising manager, and the marketing assistant. These roles are integral to UBC Press strategically marketing each of their books.

The UBC Press marketing team gets the author involved fairly early in the planning process. When a UBC Press book goes to the printers, the author is sent an Author Marketing Questionnaire (AMQ).¹² The AMQ is one of the most valuable documents for the UBC Press marketing team because it gathers information from the author to inform the marketing process,¹³ including the author's connections or the names of courses where their book could be adopted. It also helps the marketing team get to know the book and the author's goals.¹⁴ Unless they have trade-market appeal (trade-crossover), scholarly books have a narrower, discipline-specific target market,¹⁵ and knowing the author's goals is one way to help the marketing team figure out how to best reach their target audience.¹⁶ Sending the AMQ to the author early on shows the author that the marketing team is committed to creating relationships with them and help them reach their goals. Creating

12 "Marketing Your Book," Publish With Us, UBC Press, accessed August 4, 2020, <https://www.ubcpress.ca/marketing-your-book>.

13 "Marketing Your Book."

14 "Marketing Your Book."

15 Rielly, "The Marketing Plan in Scholarly Publishing," 3.

16 "Marketing Your Book."

relationships with authors may also contribute to the types of marketing activities UBC Press could pursue that actively involve the author, such as publicity or additional content surrounding the book. For these reasons, the AMQ functions as an essential communication tool.

Another important document that comes into play early in the publishing process is the transmittal form, which contains all essential information about the book. The transmittal form is created by the acquisitions department before being handed off to the production department.¹⁷ This form is reviewed by representatives from the acquisitions, production, and marketing departments at the transmittal meeting, and it contains everything anyone would need to know about the book, such as information about the author, the book's content, and funding.¹⁸ It also has marketing-specific sections that include essential information such as subject areas, selling points, and a short one-line description.¹⁹ These sections inform both the copy and the target audience for UBC Press' marketing strategies.

The information on the transmittal form is also essential for UBC Press' metadata, which is entered into a database called Klopotek. Not only is metadata crucial for distributors and regular accounts that handle UBC Press books, but having effective metadata also supports their books' online presence. It is also necessary for the books that UBC Press distributes that are published by other presses (agencies). Metadata is an important tool for UBC Press and all departments have clear deadlines for each season to ensure their books have correct, strategic, and robust metadata.

Each book is initially given a rating on the transmittal form of either A, B, C, or D by the acquisitions department, depending on factors such as its priority within the list, its significance within its discipline, and its trade-crossover potential. Because this initial rating is created by the acquisitions

17 Rielly, "The Marketing Plan in Scholarly Publishing," 13.

18 Rielly, "The Marketing Plan in Scholarly Publishing," 13.

19 Rielly, "The Marketing Plan in Scholarly Publishing," 14.

department, significance of the book within its discipline is often one of the biggest contributing factors. The marketing department may choose to use a different rating as a reference to reflect the sales potential of the title. If a book has an A or B rating, it is a signal for the marketing department that this book needs to be given more attention than one with a C or D rating.²⁰ This means that what marketing activities UBC Press pursues for a book is highly dependent on the book's rating.

Collaboration is an integral part of UBC Press' marketing approach, and the members of the marketing team depend on each other to bounce around ideas and implement strategies. Some of these exchanges would be a quick walk down the hall or conversation with someone at a nearby desk. The marketing team also holds meetings in the office with the full department to plan the marketing strategy for their list, including pitches for reviews, possible publicity, email campaigns, digital marketing, award submissions, as well as conferences and other in-person events.²¹ Books that are trade-crossovers are the most likely to receive publicity efforts.²² This may include sending media outlets advance reader copies (ARCs) to pitch interviews and review coverage.²³ Trade-crossovers aim to reach a broader public audience; therefore, a publisher would also want to pitch to publications that appeal to a general audience as opposed to scholarly, discipline-specific publications.²⁴

Both scholarly and trade-crossover titles will have a digital marketing strategy. Digital marketing activities usually include an individual page on the UBC Press website, social media and email newsletters efforts, as well as ensuring the book can be found on online book community sites such as 49th Shelf and Goodreads.²⁵ Similar to publicity, the extent of the book's social media

20 Rielly, "The Marketing Plan in Scholarly Publishing," 14.

21 "Marketing Your Book."

22 "Marketing Your Book."

23 "Marketing Your Book."

24 Mollie Broad, "Book publicity: trade vs. academic publishing," *Book Machine* (blog), *Book Machine*, November 16, 2015, <https://bookmachine.org/2015/11/16/book-publicity-trade-vs-academic-publishing/>.

25 "Marketing Your Book."

campaign is dependent on the book's rating, as organic social media content is less targeted than other forms of digital marketing. Email newsletters and email marketing on the other hand can target specific audiences more easily. UBC Press has a number of contact information master-lists, including lists of scholars by discipline and a list of e-newsletter subscribers. Having these lists allows them to make their email campaigns tailored to different audience segments.

These master lists are researched and compiled in house and play an important role in academic marketing for university courses. Books with course potential receive an extensive academic course campaign sent to educators via email.²⁶ These emails include information about the book, a link to a sample chapter, and ordering information for examination copies.²⁷ The marketing team uses their master lists of professors and instructors to create course campaigns that are targeted by academic discipline and research interests. The hope is that the recipient will adopt the book for their course in the upcoming semester, resulting in sales.

UBC Press attends numerous conferences every year and they create significant marketing opportunities for the press.²⁸ Most notable is the annual Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences (Congress), Canada's largest academic gathering with more than 8,000 attendees every year.²⁹ Congress brings together scholars in a range of different fields within the humanities and social sciences, so not only is it an important event for marketing, but it is crucial for the acquisitions department to network with current and potential authors as well.³⁰ Conferences provide an excellent opportunity for authors to reach the most potential readers in one place, and it is good for author-press relationships for both current and potential authors to see publishers present at

26 "Marketing Your Book."

27 "Marketing Your Book."

28 "Marketing Your Book."

29 "About the Federation," About, Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences, accessed August 26, 2020, <http://www.ideas-idees.ca/about/about-the-federation>.

30 Rielly, "The Marketing Plan in Scholarly Publishing," 52–53.

these events.³¹ In addition to conferences, launches and other events are also important marketing opportunities for UBC Press. Any event that allows people to gather to talk about the book creates an avenue for authors to connect with their audiences and helps drive book sales.

Lastly, UBC Press makes sure to submit books for awards for which they are eligible.³² These awards may include, but not be limited to, the Donald Smiley Prize, the Donner Book Prize, and the CHOICE Outstanding Academic Title.³³ Scholars are generally more aware of awards in their discipline, so award submissions are an important part of UBC Press' marketing strategy.³⁴ Any award wins or short-lists can also be utilized in future marketing activities or can boost the book's online presence through metadata elements, such as key words and descriptive copy. Awards create buzz around the book and therefore will also help to increase its visibility through search.

These are the marketing activities that UBC Press would primarily depend on under usual circumstances. The challenge with COVID-19 restrictions was that they changed what activities the marketing team could pursue and how they were able to collaborate with each other. The team has had to adapt their workflow processes to work together effectively, but it had become clear that it was necessary to also adapt a more digital-first approach to their marketing strategies.

2 – UBC Press' COVID-19 Response

Independent presses of all sizes have been forced to pivot and change their marketing plans for their upcoming titles. Page Two started offering a service for authors to bulk sell ebooks to clients and event organizers for their online talks.³⁵ UTP, a scholarly publisher that is UBC Press' competitor

31 Rielly, "The Marketing Plan in Scholarly Publishing," 48.

32 "Marketing Your Book."

33 Rielly, "The Marketing Plan in Scholarly Publishing," 34-35.

34 Rielly, "The Marketing Plan in Scholarly Publishing," 33.

35 Smith Publicity, "COVID-19 Lessons and the Future of Publishing," July 29, 2020, in *All Things Book Marketing*, podcast, podcast audio, 33:46, <https://podcasts.apple.com/ca/podcast/all-things-book-marketing/id1148778363?i=1000486493439>.

in the social sciences, designed virtual displays on their YouTube channel and invested in creating more content for their blog.³⁶ This section will look at what UBC Press has done to adapt to the new normal. While all departments at UBC Press had to pivot in some way, this section is focused specifically on digital adaptations by the marketing department, and this information is based primarily on informal interviews I conducted in mid-July 2020.

Workflow Adaptations

The UBC Press staff began working from home in mid-March 2020 to adhere to social distancing guidelines. When this happened, the marketing team quickly worked to figure out how they were going to leverage their tools to transition to work-from-home life. While workflow adaptations may not be directly related to work output in all aspects of the book publishing industry, marketing departments at publishers like UBC Press depend on being able to collaborate effectively. An unexpected event like COVID-19 requires workflow adaptations just as much as strategy adaptations for marketing departments to meet their goals.

Therefore, a significant change for the marketing and business manager was to figure out how the department would be able to work collaboratively from home and adapt their technology to suit their needs.³⁷ On top of having twice a week check-ins and bi-weekly marketing meetings over video conferencing, they started leveraging Asana and Slack more.³⁸ Paired together, Asana and Slack have been essential for keeping the UBC Press marketing team connected and functional.

Asana is a workflow management platform that contains a variety of features, such as timelines, portfolios, and templates, that help users work as a team to reach their deadlines and

36 BookNet Canada, "Weathering the COVID-19 storm: University of Toronto Press," *BookNet Canada* (blog), *BookNet Canada*, June 24, 2020, <https://www.booknetcanada.ca/blog/2020/6/24/weathering-the-covid-19-storm-university-of-toronto-press>.

37 Laraine Coates, interview with the author, July 16, 2020.

38 Coates, interview with the author.

goals.³⁹ The UBC Press marketing team primarily uses Asana to keep projects on track and delegate tasks among team members. Asana gives them a tangible view of how each of their ongoing projects and strategies are progressing with everyone working remotely from their homes.

While Slack is another application that was created as a way to streamline workflow, UBC Press uses it more as a communication tool to stay in touch with colleagues both within departments and across the entire press. They do this through channels, where users can create different topic sections and follow what is relevant to their work or social time.⁴⁰ The marketing team has their own specific channel where they check in with each other, bounce ideas around, and keep everyone up to date if someone is going to be unavailable. Slack essentially filled the gap created by not being able to communicate with each other within an office setting, while Asana aids in the collaborative aspects of UBC Press marketing strategies.

The way that the UBC Press marketing team adopted Asana and Slack has proved to be an effective workflow adaptation, and they have expressed interest in continuing to use these tools post-COVID-19.⁴¹ While the communication and collaboration aspects are ideal for work-from-home, both Asana and Slack can also be easily integrated back into the office setting to further support marketing projects and strategies.

Marketing Adaptations

This section covers the adaptations that the UBC Press marketing team have made to their marketing activities. They started with looking to digital strategies, as well as rewriting the AMQ and encouraging their authors to think digital-first.⁴² Authors have also experienced a lot of uncertainty due to changes

39 “Asana Work Management - Features, Uses & Product,” Asana, accessed September 7, 2020, <https://asana.com/product>.

40 “Features,” Slack, accessed September 8, 2020, <https://slack.com/intl/en-ca/features>.

41 Megan Malashewsky, interview with the author, July 8, 2020.

42 Coates, interview with the author.

in the media landscape and available promotional opportunities for their books. Not only is the AMQ a valuable document for the marketing team, but it is also the first major touch point that marketing has with the author. Altering the AMQ to suit this new marketing landscape was key to communicating with authors how UBC Press is responding to COVID-19 restrictions. Having clear communication with your authors is not only essential for good publisher-author relationships, but it helps reassure authors that their books are not being forgotten. The UBC Press team also learned that direct-to-consumer outreach would become more crucial than ever with the absence of in-person events, and the uncertainty in the bookstore and library markets.⁴³ They have made different changes depending on what audience they are trying to reach but maintaining communication with their authors and contacts within their communities had been at the core of many of their decisions.

One of the first pivots that the marketing team made was increasing social media and digital marketing activities. UBC Press had the benefit of already having established social media accounts, which the agency and digital marketing manager had been posting on and maintaining. Already having these accounts created an easier transition to digital-first than they would have experienced otherwise.⁴⁴ Without an established online presence, they would have needed to do significantly more work developing one before they could use it as an effective marketing channel. They began posting more frequently on channels such as Instagram, in addition to increasing the number of email marketing campaigns through their contact lists and e-newsletter subscribers.⁴⁵ This is another excellent example about how the UBC Press marketing team is drawing from resources they already had to boost their digital efforts.

Already having an established online presence and contact lists definitely gave UBC Press an

43 Coates, interview with the author.

44 Liz Hudson, interview with the author, July 8, 2020.

45 Malashewsky, interview with the author.

edge when adapting to a digital-first strategy. However, it was essential that they also ensured their digital marketing activities were strategic.

UBC Press ensured they were being strategic with their digital-first activities by increasing how much they were using analytics to track user behaviours, website visits, and conversions.⁴⁶ A greater focus on analytics allowed them to compare those analytics with the previous year or comparable periods and shift their activities accordingly.⁴⁷ They saw some changes to web and social media traffic, but they would be cautious to relate this to COVID-19.⁴⁸ There had been an increase in visitors to the website and engagement with campaigns.⁴⁹ More online campaigns and discount codes, such as “Cabin Fever” and “Stay Home,” also helped drive traffic to the website.⁵⁰ However, they were also tracking analytics differently than they were previously, which also needed to be taken into consideration when they compared periods of engagement.⁵¹ The longer they track analytics the more they accurately can compare different engagement periods. This is an adaptation that the UBC Press team will continue to see benefits from farther down the line. Without focusing on analytics, it would be more difficult to know how effective adaptations are or how web-user behaviours are changing. Tracking analytics gives the marketing team tangible data to evaluate the effectiveness of their digital marketing strategies, even the ones that may not translate directly to sales.

Metadata has been an important tool for the UBC Press team even before COVID-19, particularly in ensuring their books present well online. Another focus for UBC Press’ digital-first approach has been creating digital-friendly copy for their titles.⁵² This included making sure that

46 Malashewsky, interview with the author.

47 Malashewsky, interview with the author.

48 Malashewsky, interview with the author.

49 Malashewsky, interview with the author.

50 David Ly, interview with the author, July 9, 2020.

51 Malashewsky, interview with the author.

52 Krista Bergstorm, interview with the author, July 10, 2020.

descriptive copy enticed readers by starting with the most compelling aspects of the book. Potential readers are also likely encountering book covers for the first time online, so UBC Press also needed to consider how a book's cover would look digitally. Descriptive copy and book covers are essential to how the book is going to meet readers in the digital space, and ineffective online presentation could significantly impact a book's reach.

One of the questions that the catalogues and advertising manager had when planning advertising was whether the budget should be allocated in the same way. Would it be reasonable to spend a lot of money on digital if it gets more eyes?⁵³ They continued advertising in regular outlets, such as *BC Bookworld* and *BC Studies*.⁵⁴ However, they have also mixed it up to be more targeted and are also pursuing digital ads as comps on top of print ads.⁵⁵ What changes they make will still depend on what forms of ads that they are able to get. At the time of our interview, they were still exploring other ways they could take a digital approach for advertising.

Out of all sales channels for university presses, the course adoption channel has likely been the most impacted by COVID-19. While the work for academic marketing was primarily done online and over email anyway, in-person class cancellations and professors working from home changed how academic marketing was received.⁵⁶ Academic marketing strategies needed to be adjusted to consider online classes.

Maintaining relationships with professors and bookstores has always been a high priority for UBC Press, regardless of COVID-19.⁵⁷ To ensure communication during these uncertain times, the academic marketing manager added a note to their email correspondence. This note mentioned

53 Gerilee McBride, interview with the author, July 9, 2020.

54 McBride, interview with the author.

55 McBride, interview with the author.

56 Ly, interview with the author.

57 Harmony Johnson, interview with the author, July 17, 2020.

that a majority of courses at UBC would be online in fall 2020, and if the recipient's university is closed as well, students can order their books through the UBC Press website.⁵⁸ If the book is a UBC Press title, this blurb would also highlight an ebook option, as UBC Press only distributes print titles for its agency publishers.⁵⁹ The following is an example of what the academic marketing manager sent to professors who had already adopted a UBC Press title, which they would then modify if the professor has requested an exam copy:

We have heard word here at UBC that most classes will be held online for the upcoming Fall 2020 session, so I wanted to let you know that your students can order books directly from our website, should the University of Victoria also be operating online. Your students can purchase the e-book directly from our website as well.⁶⁰

UBC Press is also no longer shipping exam copies out of the office, but they are being shipped out by UTP Distribution, where UBC Press warehouses their books.⁶¹ They have also signed on with Campus Ebookstore (CEI) to offer ebook sales through the University bookstore.⁶² What is of particular interest to UBC Press is that CEI provides links to purchase and the ability to rent, which is something that the academic marketing manager planned on promoting as well.⁶³ Both of these adaptations helped streamline the course campaign process when the office is closed, and they take into consideration students' needs as a significant portion of UBC Press' target market.

The publicist and events manager's main priorities were to figure out how to continue outreach and how to transition in-person activities into an online environment.⁶⁴ They did not do a lot of media outreach initially, as the news cycle was understandably chaotic due to frequent COVID-19

58 Johnson, interview with the author.

59 Johnson, interview with the author.

60 Johnson, interview with the author.

61 Johnson, interview with the author.

62 Johnson, interview with the author.

63 Johnson, interview with the author.

64 Kerry Kilmartin, interview with the author, July 10, 2020.

coverage and media outlets needing to make their own adaptations.⁶⁵ Once things had started to settle down, they started to circle back and do media outreach for titles that were missed, which the media that typically review or cover UBC Press titles were understanding about.⁶⁶ According to the UBC Press website, they are offering both print and digital versions of their ARCs for media to request via email. Already having digital review copies (DRCs) puts UBC Press in a great position to send out copies to media quickly without worrying about people going into a physical office.

As discussed previously, events are important for promoting new titles, and conferences in particular are essential for author relations and book sales.⁶⁷ One of the ways that the publicist and events manager has filled the gap left by cancelled conferences is by doing conference outreach.⁶⁸ They worked together with the manager of the marketing department and the acquisitions team to create conference-specific email campaigns to send to their contact lists, including conference organizers.⁶⁹ At the time of our discussion, they had also started online events by planning and running one from start to finish to see what worked. This event took a lot of time to plan due to it being an event for a collection with twelve participants, many of whom have not done an online event before.⁷⁰ Since then, UBC Press has hosted a number of events online via Zoom.⁷¹ A positive side effect of having to pivot to digital was that they were now able to reach people who otherwise could not attend the events in-person and host panels that would not be possible without large gatherings like conferences.

65 Kilmartin, interview with the author.

66 Kilmartin, interview with the author.

67 Kilmartin, interview with the author.

68 Kilmartin, interview with the author.

69 Kilmartin, interview with the author.

70 Kilmartin, interview with the author.

71 “Events,” News & Events, UBC Press, accessed October 11, 2020, <https://www.ubcpres.ca/events>.

Conferences are huge for a scholarly press, and the cancellation of Congress significantly affected both marketing and editorial at UBC Press.⁷² Congress is an event that brings the two departments together to promote titles and is a special experience for authors to see their book at the conference booth.⁷³ UBC Press created a digital outreach strategy called Congress from your Couch to help fill the gap left by the cancellation of conferences. Congress from your Couch was more than a list of books on a website. It contained author created “Special Features” and “Quick Pitch” videos, links to the current catalogue and featured titles, and information on how to order exam copies.⁷⁴

As Congress from your Couch was a digital marketing initiative, the agency and digital marketing manager was responsible for acquiring the content for this project. In addition to being a promotional opportunity for the press, Congress from your Couch also showcased authors that suddenly had fewer marketing opportunities. To do this, the agency and digital marketing manager reached out to Spring 2020 authors and other UBC Press authors for digital content.⁷⁵ Some examples of the kind of content they were looking for were elevator pitches, videos and slideshows, and other pieces of writing.⁷⁶ As a bonus, UBC Press now has a collection digital content that can be repurposed for other initiatives in the future. The cancellation of conferences has been a significant loss for UBC Press, both in sales and the visibility of their authors. Although there were no in-person interactions, Congress from your Couch left the impression on the marketing team that it filled the gap in terms of the visibility of UBC Press and recently published titles by functioning as an online conference booth with engaging content.⁷⁷ It may not have translated to the same level of sales as in-person Congress,

72 Hudson, interview with the author.

73 Malashewsky, interview with the author.

74 “Congress from your Couch,” News & Events, UBC Press, accessed August 4, 2020, <https://www.ubcpres.ca/congress2020>.

75 Malashewsky, interview with the author.

76 Malashewsky, interview with the author.

77 Coates, interview with the author.

but Congress from your Couch had proven different kinds of digital content could be used to effectively market scholarly books. Having dynamic, engaging content sets UBC Press' unique virtual Congress booth apart from the dozens of booklists sent out by other university presses.

The UBC Press marketing team has learned what has been working for them and what may be beneficial beyond the period of COVID-19 restrictions. Video calls have allowed them to better connect with their agency publishers in a way that they had not been able to due to the physical distance between cities. These calls give both parties the opportunity to ask more questions and get to know each other in a way they may not have been encouraged to before.⁷⁸ Digital outreach and more direct-to-consumer marketing are other communication streams that the team would like to continue.⁷⁹ This would also include more hands-on engagement with authors earlier on in the publication process for digital and social media strategies.⁸⁰ This could include requesting content from authors similar to the “Quick Pitch” videos created for Congress from your Couch.⁸¹ They also intend to continue tracking analytics for digital marketing activities to evaluate their effectiveness. There is an opportunity to look further into how to optimize the structure and access for ebooks, is particularly important for online courses using a UBC Press title.⁸² Lastly, for events and conferences, the publicist and events manager would like to see the continuing of conference outreach and a hybrid in-person/online model.⁸³ Having digital outreach and a hybrid approach to events would allow people to attend who previously would not be able to due to scheduling, affordability, or not being able to travel.⁸⁴ The marketing manager is continuously amazed at how

78 Hudson, interview with the author.

79 Coates, interview with the author.

80 Malashewsky, interview with the author.

81 Malashewsky, interview with the author.

82 Ly, interview with the author.

83 Kilmartin, interview with the author.

84 Kilmartin, interview with the author.

their colleagues have met the challenges presented by COVID-19 and have come together to collaborate on new ideas.⁸⁵ It is clear from both the changes that they made and the adaptations they hope to carry forward, that the UBC Press marketing team is in-tune with what they needed to do to support both UBC Press and their communities.

3 — Digital Marketing Best Practices

When it was clear that COVID-19 restrictions were going to last longer than a few weeks, publishers had to start adapting to reader's limited or non-existent in-person interactions with books. This section focuses primarily on recommendations for digital-first marketing approaches made by marketing professionals within the publishing industry, evaluated through the lens of scholarly publishing and UBC Press' COVID-19 response. However, it is also essential to contextualize these recommendations with changes in reader behaviours due to COVID-19. Reader behaviours, particularly in terms of book discovery, influence and inform marketing decisions, so understanding the impacts of COVID-19 will help publishers understand what challenges they may face when reaching readers. It is important to note that a majority of digital-first marketing recommendations and the COVID-19 reader behaviour surveys are from trade-focused sources. However, this information is also relevant to scholarly publishing because, while there are some key differences, knowing your target audience and marketing to them is applicable to all forms of publishing.

Book Discovery Statistics

Earlier this year, BookNet Canada released their *Canadian Leisure & Reading Survey*, a quantitative survey that was intended to represent the leisure and reading activities of the Canadian population.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Coates, interview with the author.

⁸⁶ BookNet Canada, *Canadian Leisure & Reading Study 2020* (Toronto: BookNet Canada, 2020), 3. <https://www.booknetcanada.ca/canadian-leisure-and-reading-2020>.

BookNet surveyed a total of 1,266 Canadian ages 18 and older about how they spent their leisure time during 2019.⁸⁷ Out of these 1,266, BookNet identified 1,000 respondents as “readers,” meaning that they read or listened to a book or books during 2019.⁸⁸ Because a majority of COVID-19 restrictions were implemented in Canada in early 2020, this survey provides the most accurate depiction of how Canadians were consuming and interacting with books prior to restrictions.

The top three ways that readers discovered books were word-of-mouth, bookstores, and public libraries, followed by online book retailers and social media.⁸⁹ Figure 1 shows popular book discovery methods as found in the *Canadian Leisure & Reading Survey*.

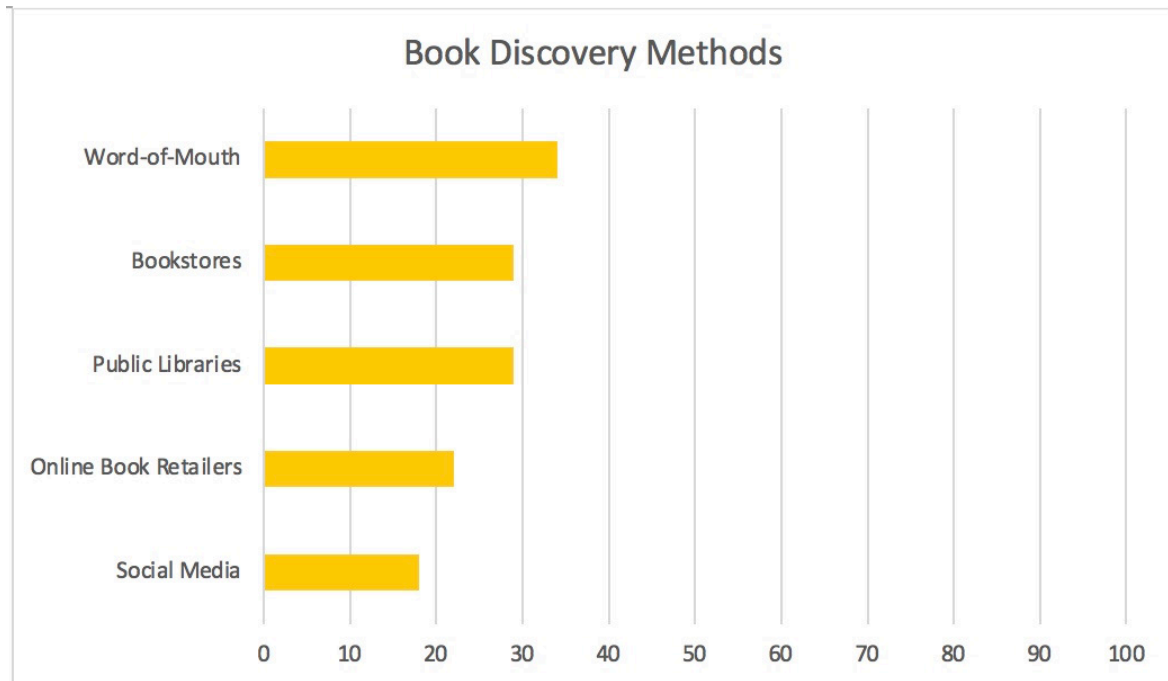


Figure 1. A graph created by the author based on book discovery statistics from BookNet Canada’s *Canadian Reading & Leisure Study 2020*. (BookNet Canada, *Canadian Leisure & Reading Study 2020* (Toronto: BookNet Canada, 2020), 20, <https://www.booknetcanada.ca/canadian-leisure-and-reading-2020>).

87 BookNet Canada, *Canadian Leisure*, 3.

88 BookNet Canada, *Canadian Leisure*, 3.

89 BookNet Canada, *Canadian Leisure*, 20.

Readers who preferred print books discovered books primarily through print media or in person, while digital readers were more likely to discover books online.⁹⁰ Scholarly books are generally stocked in fewer bookstores, due to their niche audiences, so there would arguably be fewer opportunities for in-person discovery. However, the connection between format preference and whether the reader discovers a book through print or online media certainly could be applied to readers of scholarly books as well because it is more about the reader's preference for print or digital than the content.

From a marketing perspective, the *Canadian Leisure & Reading Survey* shows that investing in strategies that make a publisher's book visible through in-person and print discovery was still just as, if not more important than making sure the book is visible online. It was no surprise that word-of-mouth was the top method of discovery in this survey, and there are many possible contributing factors as to how a book becomes discoverable through word-of-mouth. The survey found that readers who read a larger number of books were more likely to discover books through online communities and online media or websites.⁹¹ There is a strong possibility that these readers also enjoy discussing books and will also tell their friends about what they are reading. Therefore, one could argue that a publisher's engagement on social media and other online book communities is an effective way they can use digital marketing to influence word-of-mouth.

In response to the impact of COVID-19, BookNet Canada fielded a short survey to 748 Canadians from March 30th to April 9th, 2020 to see if there were any changes in reader behaviours.⁹² By comparing the results of this survey with the *Canadian Leisure & Reading Survey*, we have a general idea of how readers have been affected by COVID-19 and can see whether marketing strategies would need to be adapted to reach readers.

90 BookNet Canada, *Canadian Leisure*, 21.

91 BookNet Canada, *Canadian Leisure*, 22–23.

92 Shimona Hirschberg, "The impact of COVID-19 on reading," *BookNet Canada* (blog), *BookNet Canada*, April 15, 2020, <https://www.booknetcanada.ca/blog/2020/4/15/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-reading>.

BookNet asked the 748 respondents whether they read or listened to at least one book within the last month, and 450 respondents said they had.⁹³ In this survey, BookNet has classified readers with a reading frequency of 1–5 books as “light readers,” and readers who read six or more as “heavy readers.”⁹⁴ Light readers made up eighty percent of respondents.⁹⁵ Eighty-six percent of readers were working from home, social distancing, and in either isolation or quarantine.⁹⁶ With a large majority of readers in their homes, it was clear that marketers would need to meet them there. The easiest way to do so is through digital methods.

Both readers of trade and scholarly titles were likely experiencing a shift towards digital discovery methods. Many readers have commented that they were generally seeking out books more than they were previously and searching online more.⁹⁷ While word-of-mouth was consistently the most popular way that readers discovered new books (36%), online methods were understandably more popular than they were previously.⁹⁸ Figure 2 outlines popular book discovery methods during the survey period.

93 Hirschberg, “The impact of COVID-19 on reading.”

94 Shimona Hirschberg, “The impact of COVID-19 on reading, part 2,” *BookNet Canada* (blog), *BookNet Canada*, May 5, 2020, <https://www.booknetcanada.ca/blog/2020/5/5/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-reading-part-2>.

95 Hirschberg, “The impact of COVID-19 on reading.”

96 Hirschberg, “The impact of COVID-19 on reading.”

97 Hirschberg, “The impact of COVID-19 on reading.”

98 Hirschberg, “The impact of COVID-19 on reading.”

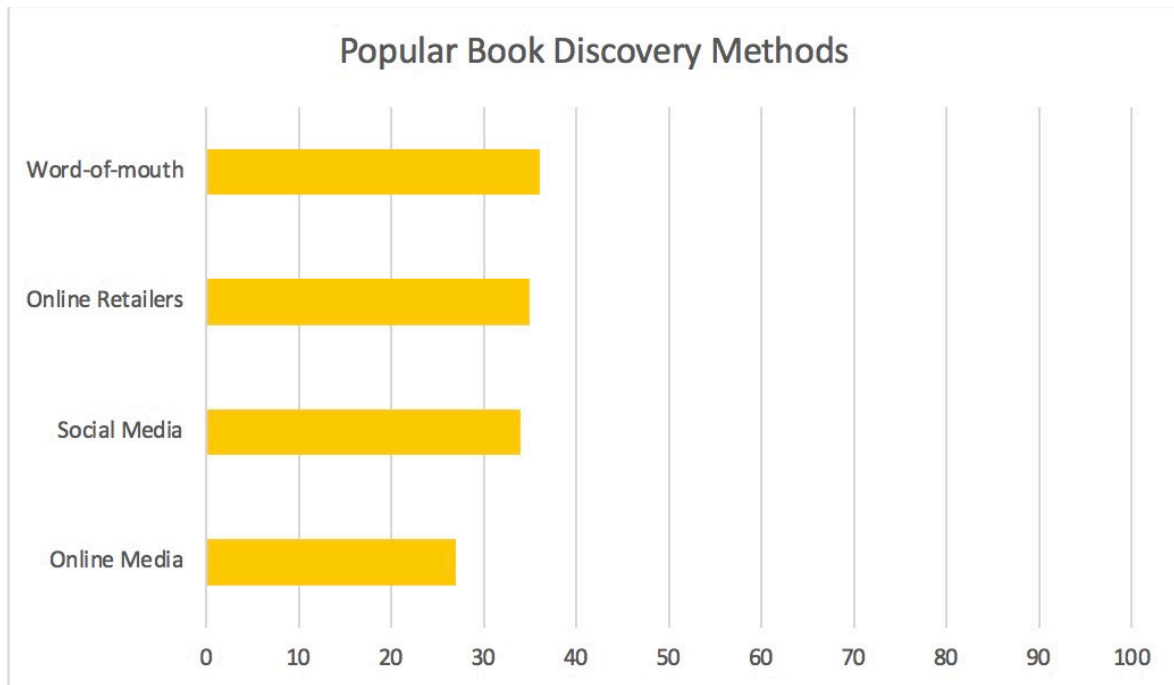


Figure 2. A graph created by the author based on book discovery statistics from Hirschberg’s blog post on BookNet Canada. (Shimona Hirschberg, “The impact of COVID-19 on reading,” *BookNet Canada* (blog), *BookNet Canada*, April 15, 2020, <https://www.booknetcanada.ca/blog/2020/4/15/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-reading>).

While there may be other factors involved, there was a connection between increased online discovery and people staying at home. There is no reason to believe that this would not apply to scholarly publishing as well, since their target audiences were also spending more time at home. Based on what BookNet Canada has discovered, there is definitely an opportunity for publishers to take a digital-first marketing approach to reach readers, particularly on social media, while most in-person marketing strategies are unavailable.

Digital-first Marketing Approach

With websites, metadata, and social media becoming more crucial aspects of marketing strategies, it seems that a digital-first approach has already increasingly been demanded of publishers even before COVID-19. That said, COVID-19 has only highlighted the need for publishers to have an

established online presence.⁹⁹ Publishers must be able to reach readers in the digital space. This section primarily focuses on different possible components of a digital-first marketing approach, evaluated through the lens of scholarly publishing and UBC Press' COVID-19 response.

It is clear from BookNet's impact of COVID-19 survey that more readers were discovering books online. However, online discovery methods have the added challenge of readers being surrounded by distractions—they could be on a completely different website or app with a simple click. Therefore, it is essential that independent publishers are serious, strategic, and creative about their digital presence to meet their readers online.¹⁰⁰ Before COVID-19, independent publishers had already had difficulty adopting best practices for digital marketing and e-commerce,¹⁰¹ whether because of time or financial resources. However, with in-person marketing strategies being unavailable, one of the most strategic things publishers can do at this time is reallocate whatever resources they can to digital strategies. Some publishers may also be in better positions to pivot than others depending on the resources they have available. It may take time and publishers may not be able to pivot everything to digital right away due to reduced capacity and the reality that working in the middle of a pandemic is hard on staff well-being. Even though staff are now working from home, it does not mean that their well-being and mental health have been any less affected by COVID-19. However, redirecting at least some resources towards any of the digital strategies described in this section will help publishers put in the frameworks to adapt their business now, and allow them to pivot more quickly in the future.

99 Smith Publicity, "COVID-19 Lessons and the Future of Publishing."

100 Jennifer Abel Kovitz, "What Can Independent Presses Do to Survive These Uncertain Times?" *ZG Stories* (blog), *Medium*, April 23, 2020, <https://medium.com/zg-stories/what-can-independent-presses-do-to-survive-these-uncertain-times-35651809f175>.

101 Jennifer Abel Kovitz, "More Essential Digital Marketing Strategies for Independent Presses," *ZG Stories* (blog), *Medium*, April 27, 2020, <https://medium.com/zg-stories/more-essential-digital-marketing-strategies-for-independent-presses-7e60bbaebf9f>.

One of the most crucial elements in online discovery of books is metadata, and robust metadata is also one of the most cost-effective ways publishers can optimize their book's visibility. This is particularly crucial for online retailers due to the growing use of algorithms and AI. On a general level, accurate metadata makes sure that retailers sort titles correctly in their system and put a publisher's book in front of the right readers.¹⁰² So when there are mistakes in how a book appears online, it is likely due to inaccurate metadata. When done right, metadata can be one of the best, most cost-effective investments that an independent publisher can make because detailed, consistently updated metadata can significantly drive sales for print and digital titles by improving discoverability via search and how their books present online.¹⁰³ This is something that UBC Press makes a priority and does effectively, as they have clear metadata deadlines to ensure that all necessary metadata is present and done to standard.

Having effective metadata goes beyond Book Industry Standards and Communications (BISAC) codes and comparative titles; it also includes other elements such as subtitles and descriptive copy.¹⁰⁴ The purpose of the metadata recommendations in this report is to boost discoverability and communicate effectively with potential readers through online retailers, such as Amazon, Indigo, and Kobo. Because both trade and scholarly titles are available on these sites, the advice geared toward trade publishers is also applicable to scholarly publishers.

Subtitles are already common in scholarly publishing, but they are more than an expected convention. Subtitles are great for providing additional context, allowing for more artistic titles, and

102 Alison Baverstock and Susannah Bowen, *How to Market Books*, 6th ed. (New York: Routledge, 2019), 105, <https://doi-org.proxy.lib.sfu.ca/10.4324/9780429487002>.

103 Kovitz, "What Can Independent Presses Do to Survive These Uncertain Times?"

104 Kovitz, "What Can Independent Presses Do to Survive These Uncertain Times?"

boosting discoverability when properly tagged.¹⁰⁵ Having the appropriate words or phrasing in the subtitle will help readers understand clearly what the book is about, and ensure that it appears in search results. For publishers, boosting visibility in search results should be one of the main goals of metadata.

Arguably one of the most crucial ways for publishers to optimize their metadata is through their descriptive copy. UBC Press made digital-friendly copy a priority in their digital-first approach, and publishers must consider where and how their copy is going to appear when writing their descriptions. It is one of the easiest ways that both scholarly and trade publishers can make their books competitive through digital retailers. Many online vendors use AI for cataloging, which may only scan the first 25 words, and Amazon will only display about the first 80–120 words, hiding the rest underneath a “read more” button.¹⁰⁶ This means that anything past the first 120 words likely will not be seen by potential readers, so it is crucial to lead with compelling buzzwords and promotional content. Some things to consider prioritizing in those first 80–120 words include blurbs, review praise, up-to-date award wins and nominations, and any other key phrases relevant to the book that will entice readers.¹⁰⁷ Giving special attention to those first 25-120 words is one of the ways that publishers can give their books the best chance to perform well against vendor AI and algorithms.

In addition to strategically configuring metadata for discoverability, having a presence on social media is essential to any digital-first strategy. This is also true for scholarly publishers like UBC Press, who already have an established presence on social media. Communication and community have been key factors for publishers’ digital marketing decisions, and maintaining a

105 BookNet Canada, “BNC Reblog: How to support marketing while maintaining metadata integrity,” *BookNet Canada* (blog), *BookNet Canada*, August 27, 2020, <https://www.booknetcanada.ca/blog/2020/8/27/bnc-reblog-how-to-support-marketing-while-maintaining-metadata-integrity>.

106 Kovitz, “What Can Independent Presses Do to Survive These Uncertain Times?”

107 Kovitz, “What Can Independent Presses Do to Survive These Uncertain Times?”

community of active, engaged followers is helpful for understanding what readers want.¹⁰⁸ However, publishers also need to be strategic about how they post and engage on social media. The number of posts that a publisher needs to create per day varies by the platform, as posting five times a day is more effective on Twitter than it would be on Facebook.¹⁰⁹ This is not to say that social media is easy. Impressions (the number of times a post is seen) could be high, but engagement is often low.¹¹⁰ While engagement does not necessarily translate to sales, it helps boost visibility on social media and it can be difficult for a publisher to boost their engagement numbers through organic content. Social media advertising and promotion provide another avenue through which publishers can reach readers on social media platforms. Social media promotion has become one of the top paid strategies for discoverability compared to other promotional methods.¹¹¹ In order to be strategic and use social media advertising to sell more books, publishers should pay to boost content that has been a/b tested for a specific campaign, rather than their regular organic content.¹¹² That said, the benefits of social media creating a closer communication channel between the publisher and readers outweigh the difficulties of creating engagement on regular organic content, making social media an integral part of a digital-first approach.

While social media advertising can seem to cast a wider net, publishers' email marketing strategies need to be highly targeted and thoughtful.¹¹³ E-newsletters are favourable for many digital marketing strategies because they reach target audiences directly, and recipients have already

108 Sybil Nolan and Alexandra Dane, "A Sharper Conversation: Book Publishers' Use of Social Media Marketing in the Age of the Algorithm," *Media International Australia Incorporating Culture & Policy* 168 no. 1 (July 2018): 163, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1329878X18783008>.

109 Baverstock and Bowen, *How to Market Books*, 244.

110 Baverstock and Bowen, *How to Market Books*, 243.

111 Joshua Norman Oliveira, "The Balancing Act: A Study of Journalism, Marketing, & Publishing in Digital Content Marketing" (MPub Project Report, Simon Fraser University, 2017), 13, <http://summit.sfu.ca/item/17279>.

112 Kovitz, "More Essential Digital Marketing Strategies for Independent Press."

113 Kovitz, "More Essential Digital Marketing Strategies for Independent Press."

consented to be a subscriber.¹¹⁴ Different types of email communications should be tailored and targeted to suit different types of contact lists (e.g., consumers, libraries, booksellers, etc.), and creating a basic email schedule or calendar will help publishers ensure not to overwhelm their team or their audience.¹¹⁵ It is important not to squeeze every media hit or every piece of possible information into e-newsletters.¹¹⁶ Rather, it is more effective to think thematically and tailor content to what is more relevant to the audience.¹¹⁷ Email marketing is a strategy that is used by scholarly publishers like UBC Press to stay in touch with their communities and to market books to instructors through academic course campaigns.

Social media has been consistently present in marketing strategies partly due to data analytics, ensuring that social media is used in a way that is targeted and strategic.¹¹⁸ However, tracking analytics goes beyond social media and is an essential tool to evaluate the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies. UBC Press has invested more energy into tracking analytics, and it is just as beneficial for a scholarly publisher to be able to evaluate their digital strategies as it is for a trade publisher. The analytics that a publisher tracks could include anything from Facebook likes to website traffic.¹¹⁹ It all depends on their goals. Whether it is through Google Analytics or another application, analytics must be tracked and measured over a period of time, as analytics for a single time frame loses relevance due to lack of comparable data.¹²⁰ When there is a wider view of a variety of data points available, analytics can show marketers what is working in their strategy

114 Oliveira, “The Balancing Act: A Study of Journalism, Marketing, & Publishing in Digital Content Marketing,” 13.

115 Kovitz, “More Essential Digital Marketing Strategies for Independent Press.”

116 Kovitz, “More Essential Digital Marketing Strategies for Independent Press.”

117 Kovitz, “More Essential Digital Marketing Strategies for Independent Press.”

118 Nolan and Dane, “A Sharper Conversation,” 153-154.

119 Jon Simpson, “Tracking Your Marketing Efforts: Why It’s Important And How To Start,” *Forbes*, October 6, 2017, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesagencycouncil/2017/10/06/tracking-your-marketing-efforts-why-its-important-and-how-to-start/#2f305e3a31e8>.

120 Simpson, “Tracking Your Marketing Efforts.”

and what is not,¹²¹ which would be valuable information when making adaptations during times of uncertainty such as the ones caused by COVID-19.

While options for media outreach may not necessarily look the same due to restrictions, it is still an effective marketing channel to have in place because there is often no major cost, especially when using digital review copies (DRCs).¹²² Media outlets are also more commonly accepting DRCs, and redirecting resources to platforms like Edelweiss and NetGalley has helped publishers provide them.¹²³ Kovitz argues that it is more important to create a robust presence on Edelweiss than to invest in NetGalley, unless the publisher is invested in the library market or has regular contacts that use NetGalley.¹²⁴ However, these platforms are not often used by scholarly publishers within the ACUP. According to their websites, some ACUP members, such as UBC Press, can be contacted by email for DRCs, while others, such as the University of Alberta Press, appear to only offer print reader copies. The University of Toronto Press (UTP) appears to be the only one that uses either of these platforms. UTP uses Edelweiss for cataloguing for booksellers¹²⁵ and NetGalley for DRCs.¹²⁶ From looking at the ACUP presses, we can see that, while Edelweiss and NetGalley are utilized in trade publishing, these platforms may not be the best fit for scholarly publishers. While using platforms such as Edelweiss and NetGalley may not be a good fit for scholarly publishing as a whole, it would be worth it for scholarly publishers to pursue DRCs that can be sent through email like in the case of UBC Press, who sends DRCs using their ebook management system. If a publisher

121 Sherman, "Understanding the Importance of Digital Analytics," *Lyfe Marketing* (blog), *Lyfe Marketing*, October 8, 2019, <https://www.lyfemarketing.com/blog/digital-marketing-analytics/>.

122 Thomas Woll, *Publishing for Profit: Successful Bottom-line Management for Book Publishers*, 5th ed. (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2014), 225, iBooks.

123 Kovitz, "More Essential Digital Marketing Strategies for Independent Press."

124 Kovitz, "More Essential Digital Marketing Strategies for Independent Press."

125 "For Booksellers," University of Toronto Press, accessed October 11, 2020, <https://utorontopress.com/ca/for-booksellers>.

126 "Media and Review Copies," University of Toronto Press, accessed October 11, 2020, <https://utorontopress.com/ca/media-and-review-copies>.

already has a management system to send out ebooks, DRCs are generally inexpensive to produce and can be easily emailed to both media and regular contacts upon request.

Publishers with direct-to-consumer e-commerce can leverage it in response to the loss of sales through other channels they usually depend on.¹²⁷ Direct-to-consumer e-commerce is also more common in scholarly publishing than trade, so there is an opportunity for scholarly publishers in particular to leverage this resource. Having the ability to do direct-to-consumer e-commerce gives publishers the opportunity to create themed promotions that can then be promoted via email or social media.¹²⁸ A couple trade examples of this are Arsenal Pulp Press offering 25% off and free shipping for all print titles with a minimum \$50 purchase,¹²⁹ and Caitlin Press offering Flash Book Sales every two weeks from June 1st to September 4th.¹³⁰ A great scholarly example is the Duke University Press Fall Sale, where customers can purchase books and journal issues at 50% off.¹³¹ Direct-to-consumer sales may be even more effective for scholarly publishers, as publisher names have greater notoriety among scholars than trade publishers have with general readers. These are just a few examples of independent presses using promotions to provide an incentive for consumers, but if a publisher can afford it, director-to-consumer e-commerce is a great way for them to drive traffic to their website and capture a greater sales margin than what they would receive through online retailers.

127 Kovitz, “More Essential Digital Marketing Strategies for Independent Press.”

128 Kovitz, “More Essential Digital Marketing Strategies for Independent Press.”

129 “Limited time offer: 25% off in-print titles plus free shipping.” Arsenal Pulp Press, updated September 1, 2020, accessed September 8, 2020, <https://arsenalpulp.com/News/2020/Limited-time-offer-25-off-in-print-titles-plus-free-shipping>.

130 Admin, “Flash Book Sales: Back in BC — Aug 24 – Sept 4,” *Caitlin Press* (blog), *Caitlin Press*, August 24, 2020, <https://caitlin-press.com/flash-book-sales-9-back-in-bc/>.

131 “Duke University Press – Fall2020 Sale,” Duke University Press, accessed November 12, 2020, <https://www.dukeupress.edu/Sales/Fall2020-Sale>.

Lastly, author events are a significant sales driver for many publishers, and, while they cannot happen in person any time soon, meaningful events can still happen online.¹³² Livestreams are nothing new. Facebook Live, YouTube Live, and Instagram Live were three of the most common livestreaming platforms even before COVID-19. The major drawback of using these platforms to host online events is that they are either difficult or impossible to ticket, and using Instagram requires more cross-platform or main feed promotion since users are only alerted of livestreams in real-time.¹³³ From examining the events pages on the ACUP member presses' websites and social media, social media platforms are uncommon for how these publishers host events. Some use Facebook to promote events, but only UTP had an event in Fall 2020 in partnership with Indigo that, according to Indigo's Instagram Stories, was hosted on Instagram Live. This event was for a book published under UTP's trade imprint and hosted by Indigo, so it seems that it is the trade market factor that made Indigo choose Instagram Live as a suitable platform for this event.

There are a few less popular platforms, such as Crowdcast or Hot Docs Cinema, but Zoom is by far the most commonly used platform among ACUP members. Zoom has the flexibility of offering two different event options—meetings (similar to a group Facetime call) and webinars that can be streamed on YouTube Live or Facebook Live as well.¹³⁴ Out of these different options, Zoom is also the easiest to ticket through services like Eventbrite.¹³⁵ If the press does not have access through their institution, the main deterrent from using Zoom is that it there is additional cost in order to access many features. However, we can see from how popular Zoom

132 "COVID-19 Support for Our Publishers," Edelweiss+ by Above the Treeline, Above the Treeline, accessed August 15, 2020, <https://www.abovethetreeline.com/covid-19-publisher-support/>.

133 Ariel Hudnall, "Part 1: How To Choose Online Platforms for Literary Events," *ZG Stories* (blog), *Medium*, May 4, 2020, <https://medium.com/zg-stories/part-1-how-to-choose-online-platforms-for-literary-events-dc419f849b30>.

134 Hudnall, "Part 1: How To Choose Online Platforms for Literary Events."

135 Hudnall, "Part 1: How To Choose Online Platforms for Literary Events."

has become for online events that this is not a significant deterrent.

A common talking point in reference to online events, mostly in relation to Zoom, has been creating a safe space for both authors and attendees. It is even more crucial that publishers and bookstores take responsibility for creating a safe space if the featured author or authors come from a racialized or marginalized group. With Zoom's popularity, cases of "Zoombombing" (or "Zoom raiding") have become more common.¹³⁶ Zoombombing is defined as the weaponization of Zoom for online abuse, often involving profanity, racism, and shocking images.¹³⁷ Unfortunately, literary events are just as targeted by Zoombombing. On August 19th, 2020, an open event for Jordan Ifueko's debut novel, *Raybearer*, was Zoom-bombed as soon as the event started, including salsa music and repeated racial slurs directed at the authors.¹³⁸ In past events, the moderator was able to control guest microphones and videos, but the Zoom bombers prevented the moderator from accessing the controls.¹³⁹ If a publisher plans to use Zoom, or any online platform, for an event, it is essential that they take every precaution to prevent assaults like Zoombombing. Requiring registration to receive a private Zoom link and using the webinar format are a couple examples of ways that hosts can ensure the event will be a safe space for everyone involved.

Regardless of which platform a publisher chooses, it is important that they choose the platform that suits their needs and is easily accessible by their audience. Formal launch events are not as common in scholarly publishing as they are in trade publishing. The choice to host an event would likely depend on whether the book is a priority on the publisher's list, it is a hot button topic,

136 Taylor Lorenz and Davy Alba, "'Zoombombing' Becomes a Dangerous Organized Effort," *The New York Times*, April 3, 2020, updated April 7, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/03/technology/zoom-harassment-abuse-racism-fbi-warning.html>.

137 Lorenz and Alba, "'Zoombombing' Becomes a Dangerous Organized Effort."

138 Melissa Kravitz Hoeffner, "Racist Zoom Bombers Dismantle Word Author Event," *Greenpointers*, August 21, 2020, <https://greenpointers.com/2020/08/21/racist-zoom-bombers-dismantle-word-author-event/>.

139 Hoeffner, "Racist Zoom Bombers Dismantle Word Author Event."

or the author is interested in hosting the event. From examining the event pages on the ACUP presses' websites, at the time of this writing, not all members are hosting online events. However, with the loss of conferences and the amount of discussion surrounding online events, there may be more pressure on scholarly publishers to try and host one.

Taking a digital-first marketing approach is one of the best ways for publishers to continue to connect with readers when most people are staying home. While a publisher can do every digital strategy outlined above, it is also crucial for publishers to stay in touch with their community, as everyone is experiencing the same uncertainty. This could look like checking in with independent bookstores about their plans and following them on social media.¹⁴⁰ Authors, particularly ones with a Spring/Summer 2020 publication date, are understandably anxious about the future of their books, so publishers over-communicating with authors or agents about their COVID-19 strategies can help maintain those relationships.¹⁴¹ In a cultural industry like book publishing, most businesses depend on their communities within the industry and it is important to maintain community and work collectively when possible, even if that does not translate to sales.

4 — Infrastructure for the Future: ACUP Collective Project

In addition to adapting their own marketing activities, UBC Press has also pursued a collective marketing endeavour with other scholarly presses. UBC Press is a member of the ACUP, which is an association that acts as a collective voice for scholarly publishing.¹⁴² It is safe to assume that many other ACUP presses have been affected by COVID-19, similar to UBC Press. In response to these impacts, the marketing directors from three university presses—Laraine Coates (UBC Press), Erin

140 Kovitz, “What Can Independent Presses Do to Survive These Uncertain Times?”

141 Kovitz, “What Can Independent Presses Do to Survive These Uncertain Times?”

142 “ACUP / APUC – Association of Canadian University Presses / Association des presses universitaires canadiennes,” Association of Canadian University Presses, accessed September 1, 2020, <http://acup-apuc.ca/>.

Rolfs (McGill-Queen's University Press), and Clare Hitchens (Wilfrid Laurier Press)—came up with the idea of having a collective marketing website for the ACUP. I worked closely with Laraine on the initial planning stages as a part of my summer work placement at UBC Press, and myself plus the three marketing directors named above made up the project team in the initials stage. This section outlines the purpose of the project, as well as my design considerations and process for creating the initial design, and what the team envisions for the future of this project.

Purpose

This website would have the following goals and objectives: to be a place for scholars to find books in their disciplines, to be a place to connect with what is happening with university presses more broadly, and to be a site that can be easily set up and managed. We knew that it would need to be simple enough that ACUP members could easily update their content, but we also wanted it to be more than a university press website or a collective list of books. We envisioned that it would essentially function as a virtual showcase for all member presses that would highlight the contributions that the ACUP and their authors are making to Canadian scholarship. I made sure that I kept in mind the vision of both what we initially wanted and what this project could become when I started the design process.

Web Design Considerations

When conceptualizing the design, we went through a series of wireframing mock-ups for the potential site. I had gone through multiple drafts, but the most notable drafts were the round of mock-ups prior to sending them to the marketing managers from other ACUP Presses (Appendix A), and the final round of mock-ups with changes based on feedback received on the mock-ups in Appendix A (Appendix B).

Before creating the wireframing, it was important for us to consider the target audience and what expectations they may be bringing with them. Whenever I start a design project, one of the first things I ask myself is who is the audience and what will they expect. The main target audience for this project was scholars. While people working at scholarly publishers will likely also view this website, they are not the primary audience. If the purpose of this website is for scholars to connect with what is happening across the ACUP, they would likely expect to find out what is new, and who is publishing in their area of expertise. They would also want to be able to filter content, so they can narrow it down by their field. If they have a project that they are interested in working on, they would also want to know who is publishing in their field and how to contact them. The ACUP has many members that publish in a wide variety of different disciplines, so I knew that being able to filter information would be important to the user.

More broadly, I considered elements of effective user interface (UI) design since scholars would also be web-users in this case, regardless of discipline. Knowing the target audience is one of the essential elements of good UI design. In addition to this, intuitive navigation, consistency, and familiar UI elements are important when designing online platforms and content.¹⁴³ This means having navigation that does not disrupt the user experience, consistent design elements like colours, icons, and typefaces, and familiar elements that users may see on the web elsewhere.¹⁴⁴ An example of a familiar UI element is the hamburger menu, as users will typically associate a hamburger menu with a way to open up a menu.¹⁴⁵ The hamburger menu is also an example of how familiar UI elements were applied to the mock-ups for the ACUP project, as it was present in multiple heading options.

143 Inkbot Design, “What Makes A Good User Interface? 13 UI Design Principles,” *Inkbot Design* (blog), *Medium*, January 24, 2020, <https://medium.com/@inkbotdesign/what-makes-a-good-user-interface-13-ui-design-principles-b156b1fb4c13>.

144 Inkbot Design, “What Makes A Good User Interface? 13 UI Design Principles.”

145 Inkbot Design, “What Makes A Good User Interface? 13 UI Design Principles.”

With these expectations in mind, I took inspiration from What’s On At Tate,¹⁴⁶ Left Book Club,¹⁴⁷ the UBC Press Congress from your Couch,¹⁴⁸ and trade publishing-focused sites such as Book Riot¹⁴⁹ and Riveted by Simon Teen¹⁵⁰ to create the mock-ups for the ACUP collective site. These mock-ups emphasize using significant whitespace to ensure that text is clear and readable and that the colour palette reflected the same visual identity as the main ACUP website so that users can see the connection between the two. All versions have a type of a banner at the top, which was intended to be a colourful banner or carousel that would flip through the latest news or promotions.

In this first round of mock-ups, there were two main types of pages—“Press” pages and “Subject” pages—that could be filtered from the main page using a drop-down menu. The intention of the “Press” pages is for the ACUP presses to choose what content appears on their individual pages. Content on the “Press” pages could include links to catalogues and books, a blurb about the press and social media links, news/blog posts, contact information (acquisitions editors, exam copies, etc.), space for links to non-book content (e.g., podcasts or open access material), featured titles, and author blurbs or other fun content from authors. “Subject” pages on the other hand are intended to reflect what is happening in that discipline. Content on the “Subject” pages could include news in the discipline across all presses, a list of presses publishing in that field, and new books. After receiving feedback on initial iterations from Laraine, I added a “Book” page to the mock-ups where users could find a variety of information about the book and author, as well as a link to the presses’ websites to purchase.

The Appendix A mock-ups were sent to the marketing managers at the other ACUP presses for feedback. It was clear that we needed to find a balance of a website that is simple and easy to

146 “What’s On At Tate,” Tate, accessed September 1, 2020, <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on>.

147 Left Book Club, accessed September 1, 2020, <https://www.leftbookclub.com/>.

148 “Congress from your Couch.”

149 “Book Riot | Book Recommendations and Reviews,” Book Riot, accessed September 1, 2020, <https://bookriot.com/>.

150 “Riveted by Simon Teen,” Simon & Schuster Inc, accessed September 1, 2020, <https://rivetedlit.com/>.

maintain, and a website that will have enough content to make this project worth it for everyone. Another concern that came up was the number of subjects, as some presses have significantly more subject categories than others, which would make a list of “Subject” pages less user-friendly. The managers also voted on which versions of the different pages they preferred. With this feedback in mind, we created the final round of wireframing mock-ups to send to potential web developers for this project.

Process

In order for this to be a viable project, it was important that we secured funding. It was initially the COVID response fund the Department of Canadian Heritage (DCH) announced that had prompted the idea of doing something collectively as the ACUP that addressed the loss of conferences and the role that conferences play in the scholarly community. However, this funding did not materialize, and the marketing directors decided to pursue alternate options, such as the Canada Council for the Arts.

I started the design process by researching different collective websites, virtual exhibits, and book-related websites to get an idea of what was already out there. Based on initial ideas from Laraine, I then went through the process of sketching and creating the wireframing mock-ups in Adobe InDesign, as described in the previous section. We went through about four rounds of these initial iterations before they were sent to the rest of the ACUP marketing managers for feedback.

At this point, we also started trying to figure out how the metadata would work. It was important for us to know who was using what version of ONline Information eXchange (ONIX) and if they were using subject categories other than BISAC codes. Having quality metadata

defined by ONIX standards is essentially a way to communicate information meaningfully.¹⁵¹

Metadata is an important aspect of creating a strategic online presence. Therefore, in order to create an effective collective website, it was crucial that we knew how each ACUP press communicated their metadata.

After receiving responses from the ACUP marketing managers, I consolidated their feedback into a single document and this feedback contributed to the wireframing version seen in Appendix B. This version was sent again to Laraine for approval before it was sent, along with a proposal, to web developers. At this time, the project team was looking at either Readerbound or Supdadu to handle web development. It was at this point that my work with UBC Press on this project ended. However, to my knowledge, this project is still on-going with Readerbound as the web developer.

Collective Marketing for the Future

At the time of this writing, the project has not officially launched, but this project could prove to be an example of how a community of presses can come together to create an initiative to adapt to changes in the marketing landscape such as those created by COVID-19 restrictions. For the initial launch, the hope was for the website or platform to be more basic, rather than something ground-breaking.¹⁵² We wanted to build a foundation that the ACUP can continuously add to and create an interactive space for scholars to find out what is happening and what is new, as well as a space for conversation and collaboration.¹⁵³ This project was originally conceptualized as a website, but they have also been exploring the idea of it being an interactive platform for scholars.

151 “What is quality metadata?” YouTube video, 28:14, “BookNet Canada,” April 24, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q75lkfz7Z3s&feature=youtu.be>.

152 Coates, interview with the author.

153 Coates, interview with the author.

Conclusion

COVID-19 had a significant impact on publishing, and scholarly publishers are no exception. More people are spending time online, and at the beginning of social distancing and stay-at-home recommendations, these changes were clearly reflected in how readers had shifted to discovering more books online.¹⁵⁴ To respond to these changes in readers, it has become more important for publishers to take a digital-first approach to their marketing. This includes improving discoverability through robust metadata and descriptive copy, as well as designing for the web, investing in digital marketing strategies, and transitioning events online. As a scholarly publisher, UBC Press has been successful in adapting their marketing approach and have adopted tracking to be able to continuously evaluate the effectiveness of their digital strategies. They have also shown how collective marketing could unite presses that are going through the same experience of conferences being cancelled, and how thinking about community is just as important as thinking about the individual. While this report only captures a snapshot in a time where COVID-19 continues to create on-going uncertainty, it proves that having digital-first strategies in place is essential for publishers, scholarly and otherwise, to remain flexible and adaptable going forward. One of the realizations that has come out of COVID-19 is the importance of community, and how taking care of the community and maintaining connections with authors, readers, and everyone operating within the book publishing industry is essential. The flexibility of being able to adapt with digital-first marketing approaches, both independently and collectively, is one way for publishers to accomplish this and support their communities.

154 Hirschberg, “The impact of COVID-19 on reading.”

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Appendix A:

**ACUP Collective Marketing
Project: Wireframe mock-ups prior
to marketing managers' feedback**

Home Page Option 1

☰ Title of Site 🔍

Banner or rotating carousel of latest promotions

Blurb about purpose: seque restor arum facia vid esequatet plab illandicit, conseni maximint, et voluptatior ra del istio core porib

What's on with ACUP?


Subject

Press

Search

News

Home Page Option 2

☰  🔍

Banner: Title of site

Blurb about purpose: Litem reicabore seque restor arum facia vid esequatet plab illandicit, conseni t voluptatior ra del istio core poribus aliq

What's on with ACUP?

Subject

Press

Search

Subject Page







☰ Title of Site 🔍

Subject

Who publishes in Subject?

Press Name	Press Name	Press Name
Press Name	Press Name	Press Name
Press Name	Press Name	Press Name
Press Name	Press Name	Press Name

Featured Titles

Subject Page Cont.

		
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What's new?

06/16/2020: Remolupt aquidun destorerum dolendenis dolorupta disquas quo quossequat omnimpresto consequas aliquibusam voluptatae suntia dolorem lam volenim quamus dolesero et audandi

05/29/2020: Lor aria volut idelenestium litas peria que aut dolorem acietum dollati consequ ibusdaecto eos ese suntemporor rem estio et opta eatem si dolupta veratempora iundi nihilibeate duntis eos

Home About FAQ

Press Page Option 1

☰ Title of Site 🔍

Press Name

Featured Titles

Subjects

Subject	Subject	Subject
Subject	Subject	Subject
Subject	Subject	Subject
Subject	Subject	Subject

Press Page Option 2

☰ Title of Site 🔍

Press Name

Featured Titles

Catalogue

Talk to us!

Blurb from the Acquisitions team: Sedis sendit, ullori antium que ligenis res ditatemodit quatur? Ectur sin nullis is dunt. Ovitium quatempos ipit lati occatibus magnam et ipsapis vendam, apis et lam eum lam, ommo delest,

Contact:

Contact:

Contact:

Subjects

Subject
Subject
Subject
Subject
Subject
Subject
Subject

Above continued

Talk to us!

Blurb from the Acquisitions team: Sedis sendit, ullori antium que ligenis res ditatemodit quatur? Ectur sin nullis is dunt. Ovitium quatempos ipit lati occatibus magnam et ipsapis vendam, apis et lam eum lam, ommo delest,

Contact:

Contact:

Contact:

What's new?

06/16/2020: Remolupt aquidun destorerum dolendenis dolorupta disquas quo quossequat omnimporesto consequas aliquibusam voluptatae suntia dolorem lam volenim quamus doleserro et audandi

05/29/2020: Lor aria volut idelenestium litas peria que aut dolorem acietum dollati consequi busdaecto eos ese suntemporpor rem estio et opta eatem si dolupta veratemporia iundi nihilibeate duntis eos

Catalogues

Above continued

What's new?

06/16/2020: Remolupt aquidun destorerum dolendenis dolorupta disquas quo quossequat omnimporesto consequas aliquibusam voluptatae suntia dolorem lam

05/29/2020: Remolupt aquidun destorerum dolendenis dolorupta disquas quo quossequat omnimporesto consequas aliquibusam voluptatae suntia dolorem lam

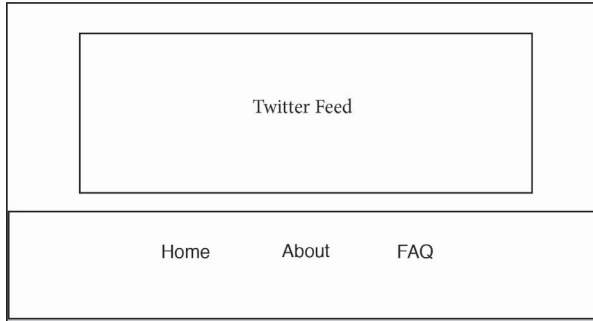
Twitter Feed

Home

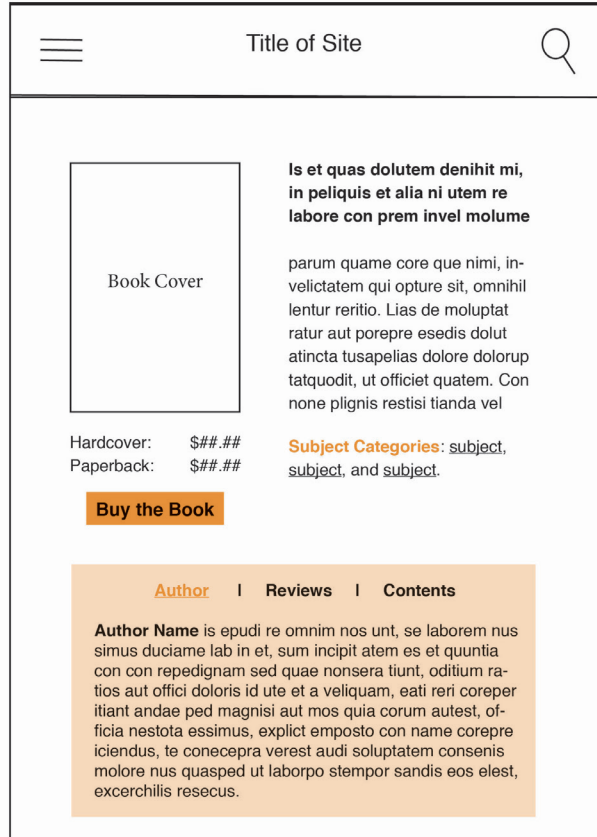
About

FAQ

Above continued

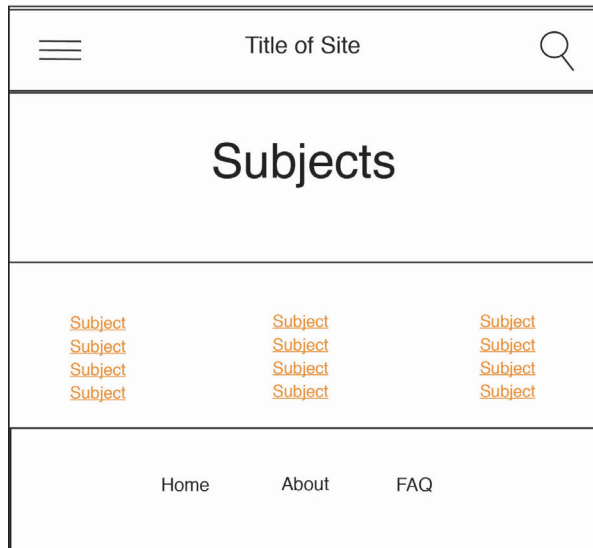


Book Page



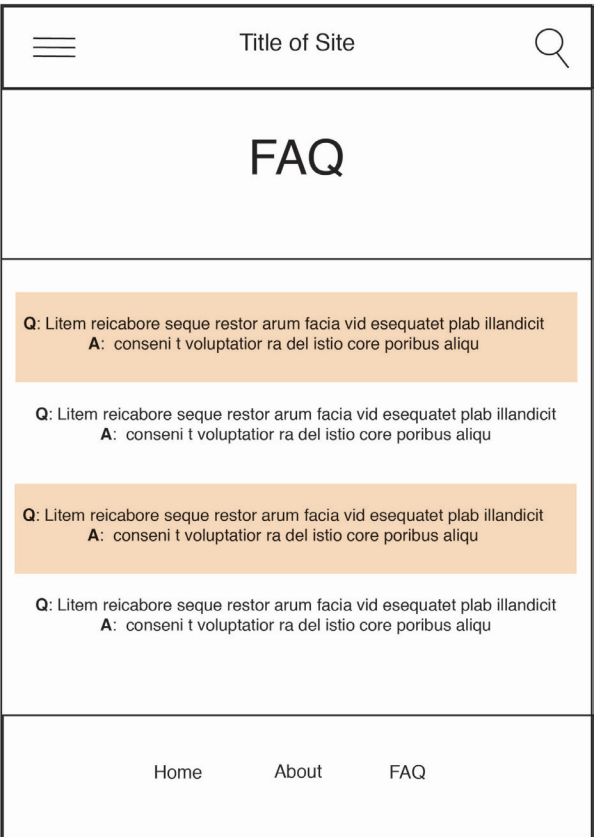
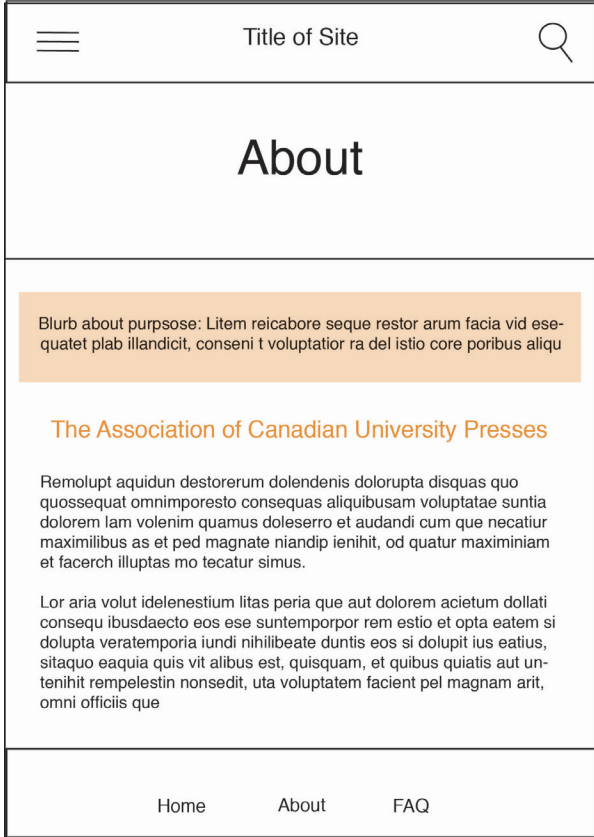
In the case of no drop down menus, items in the navigation bar or hamburger menu would link to these pages.

Subjects list page



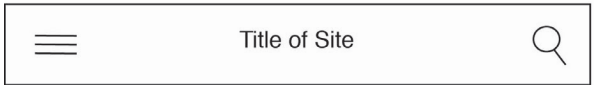
Presses list page



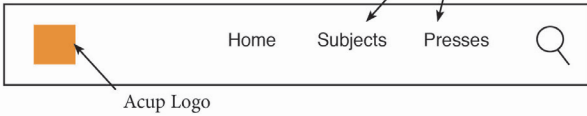


Headers

Option 1



Option 2



Option 3

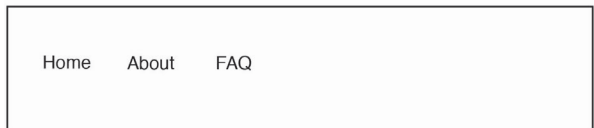


Option 4



Footers

Option 1



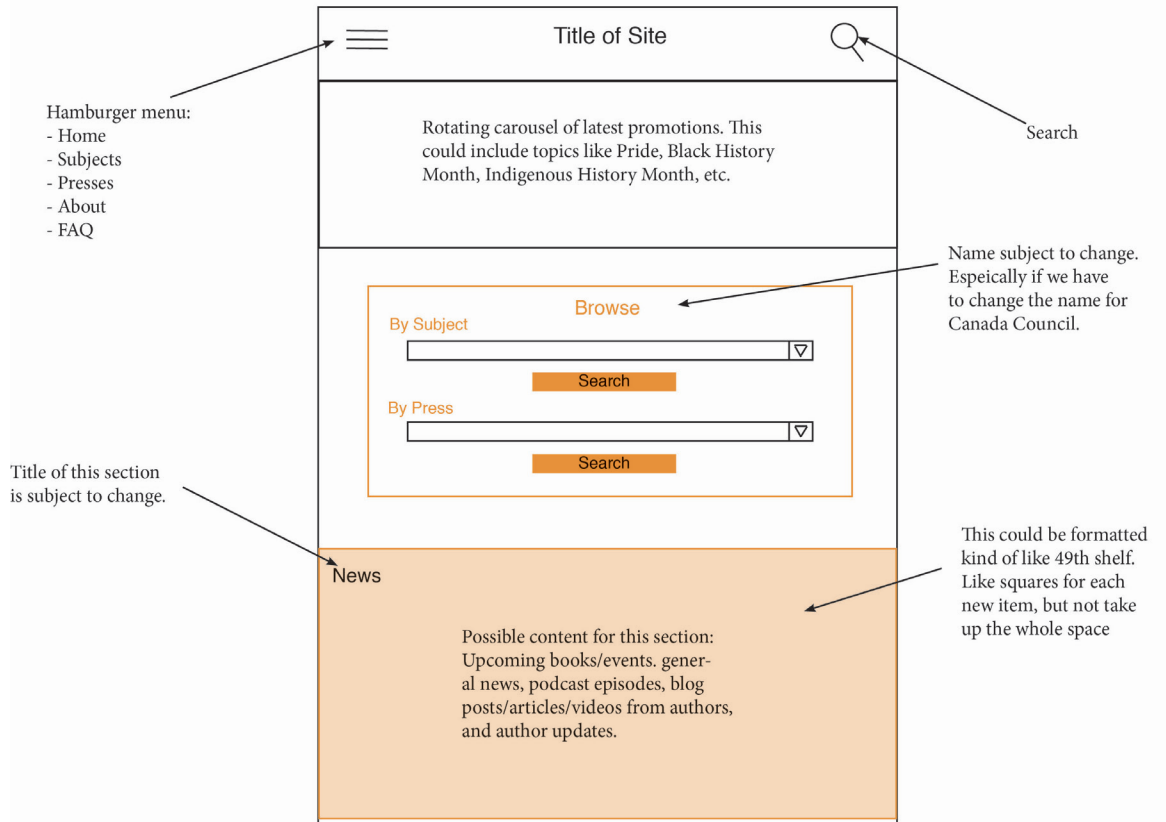
Option 2



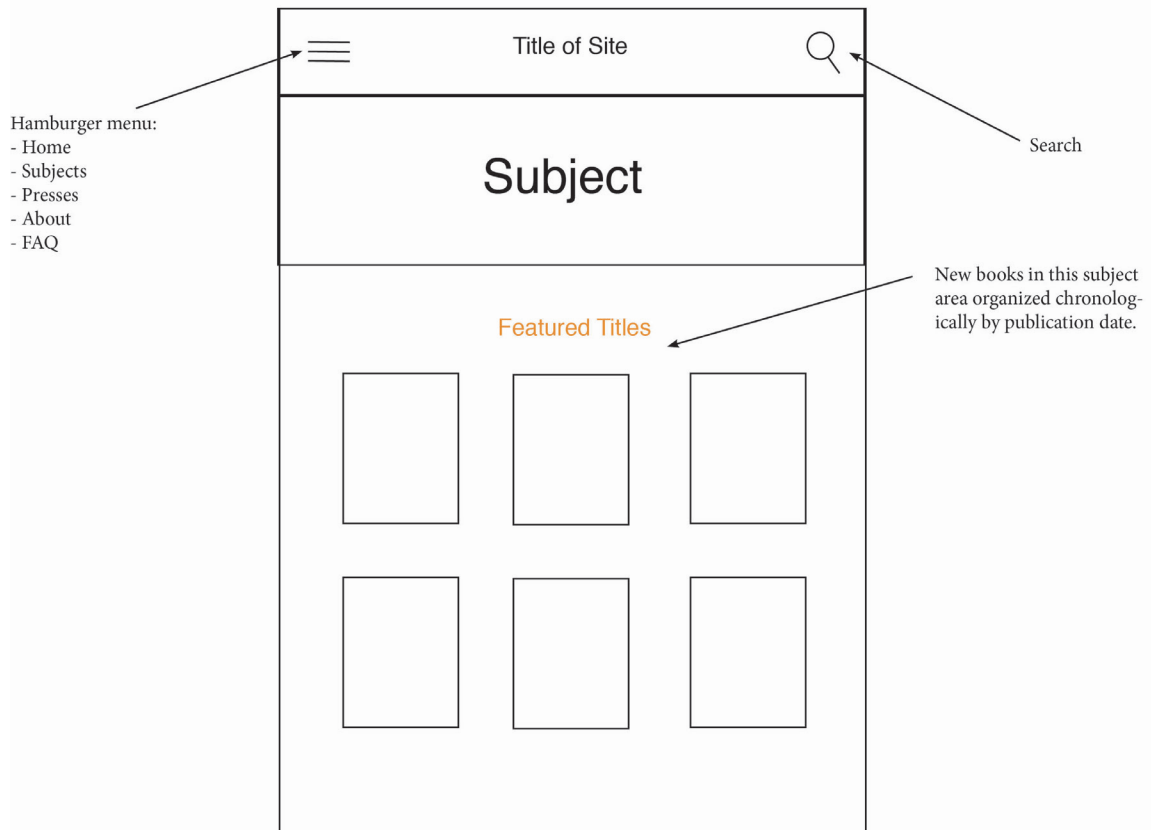
Appendix B:

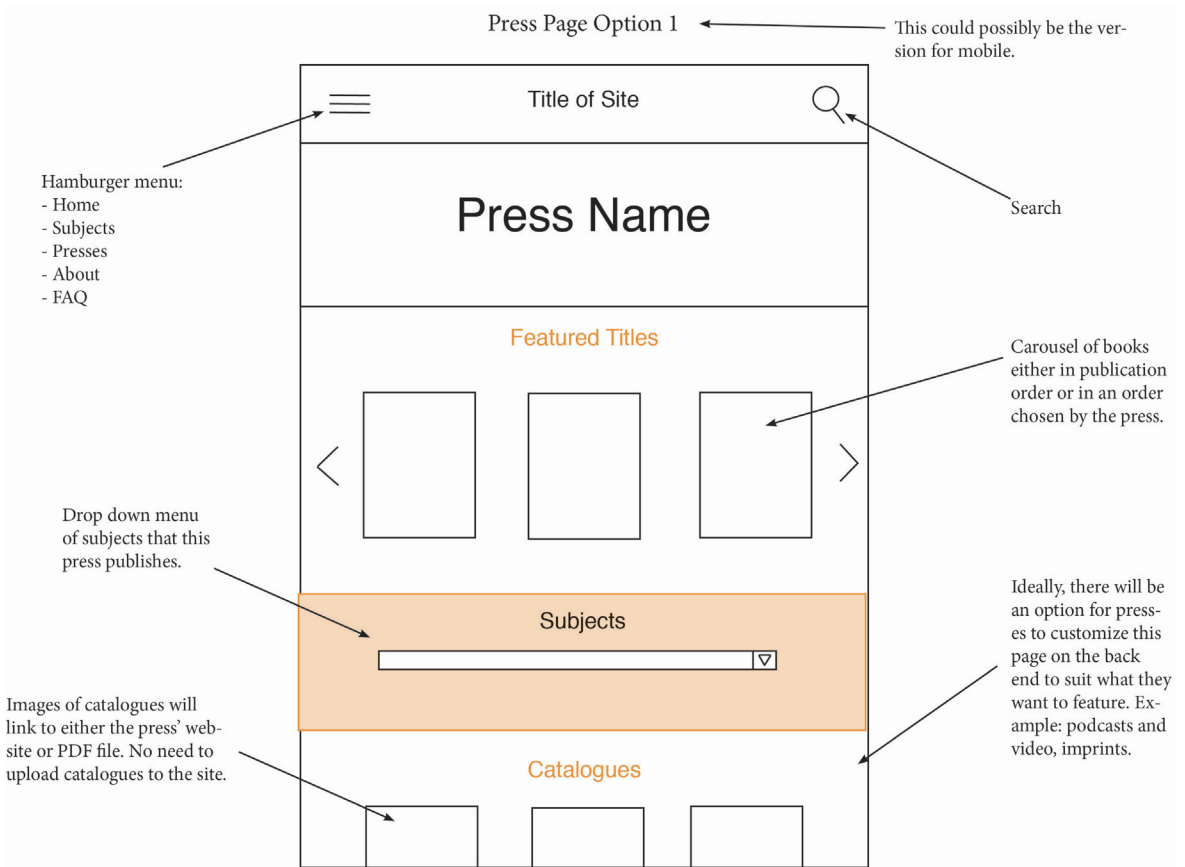
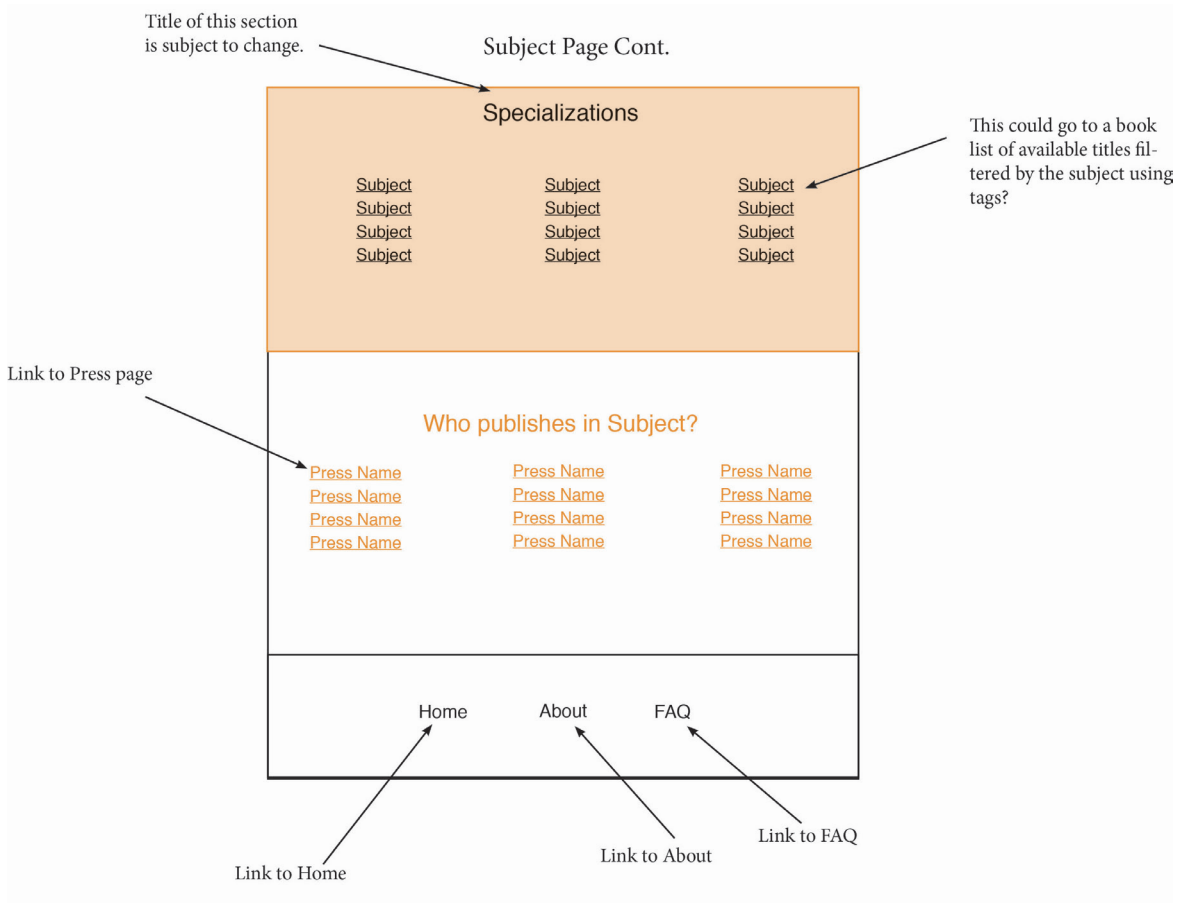
ACUP Collective Marketing Project: Wireframe mock-ups after marketing managers' feedback

Home Page



Subject Page





Above continued

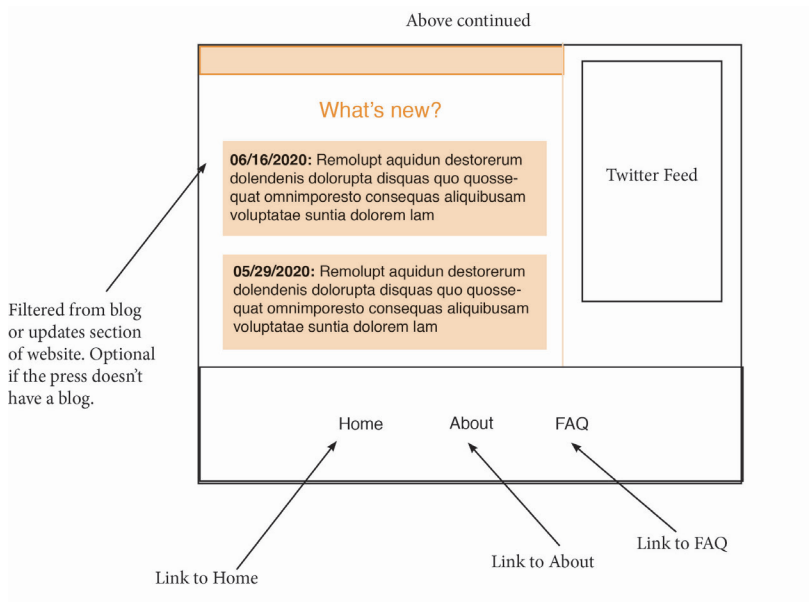
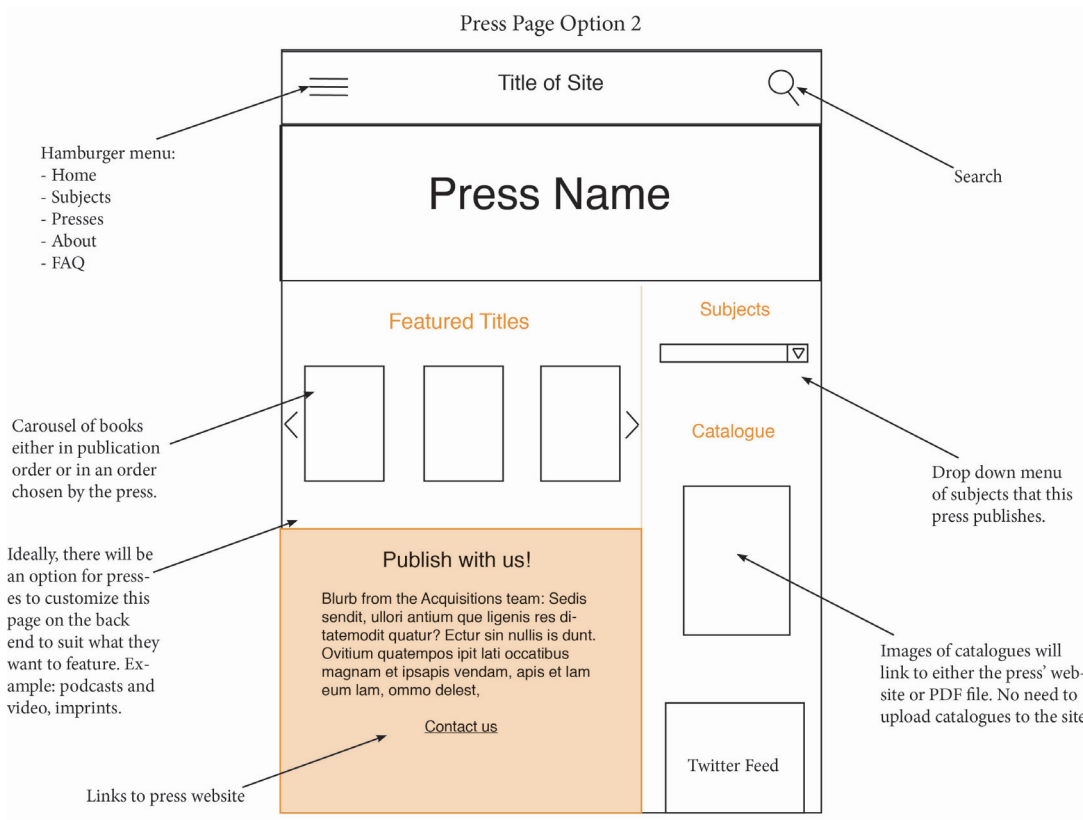
The wireframe shows a rectangular container. At the top, there are three empty rectangular boxes. Below them is the heading "Publish with us!" in orange. Underneath is a paragraph of placeholder text in orange, followed by a "Contact" link in orange. Below this is a shaded orange box with the heading "What's new?". It contains two entries: one dated "06/16/2020" and another dated "05/29/2020", both with placeholder text. At the bottom of the container is another empty rectangular box.

Links to press website

Filtered from blog or updates section of website. Optional if the press doesn't have a blog.

Above continued

The wireframe shows a rectangular container. Inside, there is a large rectangular box labeled "Twitter Feed". Below this box is a horizontal bar containing three navigation links: "Home", "About", and "FAQ". Arrows point from external labels to these links: "Link to Home" points to "Home", "Link to About" points to "About", and "Link to FAQ" points to "FAQ".



☰ Title of Site 🔍

About

Blurb about purpose: Litem reicabore seque restor arum facia vid esequatet plab illandicit, conseni t voluptatior ra del istio core poribus aliqu

The Association of Canadian University Presses

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Home About FAQ

☰ Title of Site 🔍

FAQ

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Home About FAQ

Headers

Might be best to go with this option since we're going to need a new name and not ACUP

Option 1

☰ Title of Site 🔍

Option 4

☰ 🔍

Footers

Home About FAQ