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Unconverted: outsourcing ebook production at a university press

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Abstract:

The University of British Columbia Press (UBC Press), like many other university presses (UPs), has been outsourcing ebook production since it first started publishing in digital form in the late 1990s. For over a decade, these files have been created by companies hired through third parties—initially, through content aggregators; recently, through the Association of Canadian Publishers. At first, outsourcing was a sensible way for UBC Press to enter into e-publishing: the practice was not too inconvenient and cost effective, but it also fit with the Press's own freelance-model. However, by 2011, it had become evident that outsourcing to large houses had a number of drawbacks. In its most recent outsourcing experience, UBC Press had to deal with poorly formatted files, protracted production timelines, and distribution, which has in turn threatened the reputation of the press and the quality of its ebooks. Added to these problems are greater, industry-wide disadvantages that result from outsourcing en masse, such as a dependence on cheap overseas labor and missed opportunities for professionalization and skill development among

domestic workforce. In the face of these problems, individual publishers will must put various short-term solutions in place and consider making changes to production workflows if they are to achieve greater quality assurance and control their own e-publishing programs.

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