Publishing in the Digital Age

Jane Friedman

The publishing industry and reading behaviors are changing in the Fourth Industrial Revolution. People who work in the publishing industry need to consider how their readers consume content in the Digital Age, what their preference are in literary tastes and book prices. Here is what Professor Jane Friedman had to say on the topic at Knowledge Summit 2017:

I think authors are struggling to compile the terminology and keywords. If you work in publishing for a long time, you have experience and understanding of the issue of category identification, but this is all about traditional books. If you are an author who has not published books before, you will find the issue of categorization and classification completely unnatural for you. So, more market research is needed to determine the best time and method to publish your book. Authors also have an advantage that publishers do not have in that they understand the readers and the way they talk about their books or other similar books. They can choose keywords that will enrich the search for their books and make them show up more effectively in searches on Amazon and other websites.

I think that publishers focus on the issue of classification and categorization. They put their books under the category of ‘General Stories’ to generate new sales. They do not mention anything about the content, characters, or anything targeting a particular reader. Certainly, there are many publishers who
I think that publishers focus on the issue of classification and categorization. They put their books under the category of ‘General Stories’ to generate new sales. We want to know all the information about the interaction of readers with books and how they move from one book to another. I think that search tools right now are very basic for readers. This does not benefit anyone at all. They involve some randomness that rely on keywords and categories provided by the reader. However, they are inadequate. There is also a real problem in the U.S. and the UK where people put e-books on Amazon and other sites that are not actual books. This complex process negatively affects reader search engines.

I think there are no studies about how reading behaviors have changed due to audio books, but this is certainly a tangible phenomenon. Audio book sales have increased in the U.S. by 30–40 percent over the past three years but they still account for a very small percentage of the total market, just one or two percent. There is more focus in the U.S. on audio books, including using radio as a marketing tool to motivate people to buy them. There is also cooperation with Amazon in this area.

Sales of fictional literature have slightly decreased in recent years, while sales have increased in other areas. This indicates that search tools are probably not good enough or prices not suitable, that prices are not being determined in a way that encourages people to take the risk. There is usually a dynamic pricing process; the higher the prices, the higher the interest. When prices are low, then there is a need to encourage more demand.

About Jane Friedman

Professor of Writing, Media, and Publishing at the University of Cincinnati and University of Virginia. Ms. Friedman has served on panels for the National Endowment for the Arts and the Creative Work Fund, is a regular columnist for Publishers Weekly and maintains an award-winning blog for writers (JaneFriedman.com).