

Key issues

Just because Open Access books are digital does not mean that they can necessarily be found. In the case of smaller and scholar-led presses, the intense work with authors on their manuscripts and the push to get texts through production can mean that issues of discovery and dissemination become neglected. As Joe Deville, Jeroen Sondervan, Graham Stone, and Sofie Wennströmand colleagues observe, [in a 2019 article](#):

[t]here is a perception that, because they are both digital and readily shareable, open access texts are inherently discoverable. In some respects, however, discovery and dissemination remains the most significant ongoing challenge for open access book publishing.

A well-thought through approach to discovery (working to increase the ‘findability’ of books) and dissemination (making the books available in and accessible via more places) has the potential to radically increase the routes for potential readers to find a publisher’s books. It also makes the most of the fact that, by being Open Access texts, they can circulate much more easily than conventional academic books.

Part of this will include working with distributors to ensure that hard copies are available to buy in a variety of locations – potentially both online and in bookstores. Examples of approaches to distribution are included as case studies. Good metadata management plays an important part in this, helping readers more readily find books they might be interested in.

However, for publishers, it is digital dissemination that has greater potential when it comes to increasing readership. For Open Access publishers, this will often mean more than just posting digital copies of Open Access books to a publisher’s own website. A clear metadata management workflow plays an important role in making digital books more discoverable. However, this works best when a publisher’s books are disseminated via a range of third-party platforms.

Disseminating digital formats via third parties

There is a range of platforms that either index or directly host books that can be integrated into a dissemination strategy. This in turn will help make a publisher’s books more discoverable. Smaller and scholar-led Open Access presses may in particular want to consider services that do not require a substantial financial outlay, as well as those specifically designed to support Open Access content and/or not-for-profit publishing.

Here are some suggestions for key services to consider:

- [Directory of Open Access Books](#) (DOAB): Perhaps the most important indexing service for Open Access books, and is run by [OAPEN](#). If publishers meet the directory's Open Access and peer review requirements, they may submit their metadata for inclusion in the catalogue. The Directory of Open Access Books itself provides a searchable books database and its content is often also integrated into library catalogues
- [Project MUSE](#): Many Open Access publishers host their books on Project Muse, alongside versions on their own website. Project Muse is a host of journal and book content, run as a not-for-profit by [John Hopkins University](#) and aimed specifically at not-for-profit publishers. Hosting content on Project Muse can considerably improve the discoverability of texts, as well as the chance of content being indexed in databases such as [Google Scholar](#). Project Muse is not free, but as a non-profit, prices are low compared to commercial services.
- [OpenEdition](#): Providing Open Access books and journals hosting for many European university presses under a freemium model. It includes books and journals in a wide range of European languages for the humanities and social sciences ([NUP Toolkit](#))
- [Zenodo](#): A repository specifically designed to support open science, established in a collaboration between [CERN](#) and [OpenAIRE](#). It provides a free and simple-to-use way of archiving content, as well as enhancing the discoverability of books.

There are, though, many other aggregators and distribution channels that can be used and considered to help disseminate digital books.

[Open Book Publishers](#) provides a model of best practice. Alongside hosting content directly on their website, it uses nine metadata aggregators, and eleven ebook retail/distribution platforms to disseminate its books to a wide variety of locations. For smaller publishers, such a fully-fledged dissemination strategy may be something to aim for in the medium term. Open Book Publishers helpfully provides [a comprehensive overview of its approach](#), for others to follow as needed.

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