

SSP_EP10_Mix3

Fri, 9/2 10:22AM 24:03

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

people, sales, publishers, customers, lots, andy, role, important, organizations, business, develop, mentorship, scholarly publishing, career, industry, teams, years, questions, licensing, internally

SPEAKERS

Sara Grimme, Andy Douglas, Meredith Adinolfi

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Sara Grimme 00:05

Hi, and welcome to our latest episode of our Scholarly Publishing early career podcast. Thanks so much for joining. A special thank you to the Society for Scholarly Publishing for enabling us to be here. I'm Sarah Grimme from Digital Science at home in London. I'm joined by Meredith Adinolfi from Cell Press, who is calling in from Boston. Hi, Meredith.

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Sara Grimme 00:24

So today's episode will continue with our theme of understanding the essentials in scholarly communications. We'll be joined by Andy Douglas, Vice President of Commercial Partnerships and Strategic Business Development, to talk about all things related to sales, the sales process, and why this is so important for everyone in the publishing industry to understand. Welcome, Andy. I'm looking forward to digging into what it is that you do. I worked with Andy many years ago before the Springer Nature merger when Andy was running classified advertising, or as it was called then, display advertising. Since then, Andy has gone on to hold a number of different roles within sales at Wolters Kluwer and Springer Nature. Andy, it's fantastic to have you here today. Are you able to tell me a little bit about yourself and your career to date to get us started?

M

Meredith Adinolfi 00:24

Hi Sara.

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Andy Douglas 01:09

Of course, thanks. And thanks for having me as well. I've been in the industry for nearly 22 years. My background is in marketing degree. And I've worked in marketing previously. At that point, you thought "you moved to London and the streets are paved with gold and there's lots of opportunity". I was really lucky to land a role at Nature with what was their Nature Publishing

Group. I stayed there for 14 years. I started off as an advertising sales executive and sort of led my way up through a number of different global management positions, mainly in the commercial and sales side of that business. The business merged and became science and education. I reached a pinnacle at that point. I took the opportunity to move to Wolters Kluwer. Four years that I spent there as the Vice President for EMEA, that's the European Middle East and African regions. I headed up their licensing group for Ovid, which was great. A lot of the titles that they own are nursing titles. They act as an aggregator for a lot of other publishers. Lots of other products that we sold through the obvious sales group as well. I had a really good four years. I was tempted back to what is now Springer Nature. I left before the merger. It's a very different company coming back. I've been here for four years. My current role, which is split into two main parts, has just had a bit of a title change. There's a commercial partnerships part of what I look after, which is leading the sales group of around 110 people. We develop relationships for our Marketing Solutions and Research Solutions businesses. The second part of what I do is strategic business development, which is really around advising and working with our product teams and marketing and sales groups to develop go-to-market plans for our Solutions Division. It's a business we've been growing. One we've put particular attention to in recent times with bringing on board Harsh (Jegadeesan), who is our new Chief Solutions Officer.

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Sara Grimme 03:02

Brilliant. Thank you so much, Andy. It's really useful context. We have Andy here today to talk about sales. Based on Andy's experience over the years, to give us the lowdown on what happens in sales. Our first question is, what do people in sales do? And what are all the different roles or products that you can sell in scholarly publishing?

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Andy Douglas 03:23

There's a lot that we do. There are a lot of different roles. I think that's quite exciting from a career perspective. Generally, sales are the primary conduit between organizations and their customers, and that can be a range of different levels. A lot of high-level sales that we do are with very senior people within organizations. Some sales are very transactional or one-offs. There's also part of sales that could be looking after B2C. The business-to-consumer parts of things like e-commerce. It really depends on the real roles and responsibilities within different organizations and different sales groups. The responsibilities differ quite a lot. They are always involved in developing and nurturing relationships. I think that's the core of what our teams are about. Not just nurturing the relationships with customers, but hopefully becoming an extension of their organization by making sure we're partnering with them for them to succeed. Meeting the needs that they have as well.

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Andy Douglas 04:18

From a product perspective, the types of areas that we talk about, particularly within scholarly publishing for sales tend to be with the licensing teams. They're the people that are working with customers to provide access to things like journals, books, and databases. That's where most of the revenue comes from for most of the publishers that are working within this space. There are lots of other different sales functions as well. The area that I currently look after is not the licensing group. I worked in the licensing teams in the past, but my teams are looking

after the majority of the business, which isn't that core area. They are things like marketing solutions, which we determine as advertising sponsorship, custom media events and conferences, and also solutions. I think there are a lot of other people getting into this space as well, which is around how do we support services for institutions. In our space, we've got editing services, training services for researchers, consulting, analytics, and data analytic skills. As an extension, you could see that other sales roles might include things like third-party licensing. That might be business-to-business or within the industry and the ecosystem. Again, that is people utilizing data or information within different publishers and building out products off the back of that. I think, obviously, things like Clarivate. You have products like Web of Science. Without access to other people's data and information, you wouldn't be able to produce those types of things. There are licensing roles in there as well.

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Andy Douglas 04:43

Essentially, we're relationship managers and solution specialists. We know our business or our products best. There's a really good book by Daniel Pink, "To Sell is Human." Sales is often seen as just an overly commercial area of the business, particularly within scholarly publishing. What we're effectively saying is negotiating with partners. But that happens on a daily basis with everybody. Sales isn't a dirty word. People are often negotiating with families about getting time and all the things that might happen at home and with your flatmates. Equally, we're often negotiating within the workplace and ensuring that projects are prioritized over other aspects as well. People are doing sales on an ongoing basis. But within this context is very much about the relationship, managing customers, and making sure their needs are met in the best way possible. That's a great way of having both successful relationships and long-term ones as well.

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Sara Grimme 06:43

It's really clear there is tremendous variety in the different roles within sales, which I suspect will be enlightening to many listeners. Building on from that: Why is this job important for our industry?

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Andy Douglas 06:56

I think all jobs within the industry are important because it's one part of an ecosystem. That is really important to be aware of, because of a lot of the work we do internally. For example, we partner with internal partners, with our publishing and editorial teams. We're obviously forward-facing. The most customer-facing parts of the organization typically. We are the ones that are often getting lots of market feedback. That helps in terms of product development. It helps in terms of best meeting the needs of our clients. Also in pivoting or changing things we might need to develop internally to make sure we've got a better proposition that meets market needs. There's both an external and an internal face to what the sales groups do.

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Andy Douglas 07:40

The salespeople know that the higher you get up within a hierarchy, the further you get away from day-to-day conversations. Those anecdotal pieces of information you get back because of

from day to day conversations. Those anecdotal pieces of information you get back because of the sales team are really important because the test the market is given an indicator as to what's going on out there and helps organizations pivot and change and make sure we're meeting customer needs over a long period of time. I think it's important for customers because it gives us some information about work that we might be doing that's coming up.

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Andy Douglas 08:05

But equally, I would say salespeople tend to over-talk or people think they over-talk. One of the things we always say to our sales groups are "you've got two ears and one mouth for a reason". Listening is a really important skill for absorbing information.

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Sara Grimme 08:19

Absolutely. Thank you.

M

Meredith Adinolfi 08:21

Andy, I love what you said about your role being relationship manager and solution manager. I want to dig into that for a moment. Can you talk a little bit more about your interactions with the customer? Based on those interactions, how that allows you to translate the needs of the customer back to the publisher?

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Andy Douglas 08:40

Yes, thanks. The questionings really important. We tend to talk with our sales groups about open and closed questions. Open questions allow you to get lots of information about what's going on, and that's where the listening part of our role comes in. An example of an open question is just asking customers and working with them as a partner about what their strategies might be and what's important to them in terms of prioritization, either this year or the forthcoming next three years or so something like that. This allows you to gather lots of good information and also acts as a partner. If you're not asking those types of questions or getting that kind of information back from customers, as product experts, they're not in a great position to put matches in place, or even in some cases, that might not be a match. If a strategy that an organization has doesn't match any of the products we might have, that's not a bad thing. But at least you've identified that early on. I think that those open questions and allowing customers to provide some feedback to you about what's important to them. It's about matching our solutions, whatever those might be, and really helping those organizations with the work that they're trying to do. That can be an extension of an organization to help them be successful. That's often a great way of just maintaining really strong, long-term relationships with people as well.

M

Meredith Adinolfi 10:03

Great point about open questions. I really like that phrasing of the extension of the organization. I feel like that's a really important nuance. Continuing on this theme of

relationships, can you talk a little bit about your role in facilitating a relationship between librarians and publishers, or companies and publishers, or really any other entity or end user and the publisher?

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Andy Douglas 10:24

I think we play a really important part in terms of managing their interactions with customers and the feedback into publishers. We're obviously part of publishing groups. So we're on the publisher side in that sense. But I think that role is more important now than it ever has been particularly because as I said earlier sales are the eyes and ears of the business because they are the closest and interacting with customers and markets.

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Andy Douglas 10:50

That relationship with libraries, in particular over the last few years, has changed fairly dramatically in terms of where it had been previously. We're helping and trying to facilitate change that's going on within the industry so that everybody benefits from that. I'm talking about largely the move towards open access, but obviously, there's still lots of subscription business that's being also done. I think the role we play as sales is in listening to what librarians want, what they need, or what consortiums want and need. Then trying to best manage that internally so that everybody has a positive outcome to those kinds of discussions. Getting ahead of those questions and that feedback early is really important on both sides so that you can manage expectations. There's always going to be some form of compromise. But hopefully everybody wins from those kinds of discussions.

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Andy Douglas 11:40

So sales plays important role, because it always sits on the publisher's side. They obviously want to get deals done. They want to make sure that customers are happy. There are often internal discussions that we will be having on the publisher side, that we're obviously fighting or sometimes fighting the corner for customers. We're sometimes their voice internally as well. So it's a really important role in trying to distinguish the priorities for everybody and making sure that everybody comes out of those kinds of conversations really well and gets what they need from that.

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Andy Douglas 12:09

That's from the library perspective. On the corporate side, we're dealing with lots of different types of stakeholders. On the marketing solution side, things like sponsorship or advertising. Again, playing that part of trying to understand what people's requirements and needs are so we can best fulfill them and put a solution together that going to really fit the bill. Hopefully, making those people look good within their organization and get the results that they want.

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Andy Douglas 12:32

Making out the UN Sustainable Development Goals, which is a big thing for publishers that want

we've got the UN Sustainable Development Goals, which is a big thing for publishers that were at the forefront of publishing research around lots of those topics in lots of different areas. But equally, there's lots of research being done at institutions. There's lots of work being done at corporate organizations. Where there is a mutual benefit in partnering with a corporate organization, for example, in trying to promote some of the work that's being done, in terms of the research they may be doing or some of the initiatives they may have. We play a part in trying to facilitate partnerships there that can help showcase that as well as the work that publishers are doing. It's an interesting position because sometimes you're playing devil's advocate in terms of taking customers' side so you can get things in their thoughts promoted internally. But obviously, we're also always acting on the side of the publisher as well, to make sure that the publishers get what they need from those kinds of relationships. It's an interesting role because you're employed and working for publishers. You're there to try and make everybody feel and look good off the back of contracts that are signed, and projects that are put together.

M

Meredith Adinolfi 13:32

You brought out a really important point about being a voice and an advocate for the customer, which is something people may not often think about in relation to sales roles. So appreciate that that came out. Andy, you alluded a little bit to this in your answer about open access kind of emerging, as opposed to subscription models. I'm just wondering if you can talk a little bit about how emerging business models and new things in the industry, such as open access have changed your job.

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Andy Douglas 13:59

That's a great question. Because it's changed. I think at the meta-level, it's not changed dramatically. We're still helping meet the needs of customers. That's what we are generally working towards. But at the micro-level, it's changed quite a lot. People have had to develop lots of different knowledge and skill sets on topics that are still new to lots of people> They've needed to be developed on the fly. We're learning at the same time as our partners and customers are learning about these things. How best can we make that work? Now more than ever, there's great awareness about the understanding of those different business models. Some are still finding their feet. But there are lots of great contracts or deals that have been done, where you can see that there is a benefit for everybody working together and trying to meet everybody's needs in these cases.

A

Andy Douglas 14:44

But it has changed what we do quite dramatically. Lots of skill sets have had to be developed on the fly. It's given rise to lots of other opportunities as well. A lot of the things we'll be working on won't be just the traditional publishing side of the businesses but also developing services that can help institutions, researchers and organizations do their jobs better. How can we make sure that people publish in the journal of choice if they wish to do so? How can we better support researchers in making sure they've got career development? That's just one aspect of it. The kind of things we have been doing has been about working with people on editorial on how to edit papers better, so there's a greater likelihood of success in the

submission to the journals that they wish to submit to, doing training courses, and lots of other things. I think what publishers are seeing is this opportunity beyond what the normal core business would have been like 20 years ago.

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Andy Douglas 15:39

But equally, there's lots of other smaller organizations that are doing similar things. That's exciting from a sales perspective. Lots of different products. Lots of things, and different things to learn about. You can see that some of those things might come into play when you're talking about transformative agreements or some of the sort of larger deals that are also being had that aren't just focusing just on access to or how people publish content. Also, how do we support and communicate as well. One of the big things you'll tend to see in research grants is research impact. There are lots of things and organizations out there that can help with making sure that people are aware and showcasing the impact that research is having, which is really important for publishers. It's really important for researchers and research organizations as well. It's a massive shift from where we were 20 years ago when I first started. It was quite restrictive in the types of business models that were out there. But with the advent of digital, which any of the early careers people listening to this, they probably didn't realize that the internet's not been around forever. But everything was being done by print in the late 90s and early 2000s until everything went digital. That was a massive shift. Now we're seeing a massive shift with open access as well. These are exciting times to be in this industry. I think it'll throw up lots of opportunity in the future as well as things develop.

M

Meredith Adinolfi 16:54

Yeah, well said a lot more to think about and learn about, but also a lot more options to offer.

A

Andy Douglas 16:59

Yeah, absolutely. I think flexibility is going to be really key. For example, on the commercial sides of the business, that does throw lots of opportunities, because there's going to be lots of specialist skills that are going to be required that weren't even thought about five or 10 years ago. It means from a career path perspective, people can start to forge different career paths than just a very linear one. You can take lots of different routes, particularly if you keep an eye on what's coming up in the future as well.

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Sara Grimme 17:27

Andy, you've touched on how proud you are of the work that you've done in being the voice of the customer and making sure both the customer and the publisher win. When you think back on your career, what was the most important achievement that you've had? And why?

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Andy Douglas 17:44

Yes, that's a really difficult question to answer. You look back and you can't remember some of the early stuff. Memory fades as you age. I think developing staff and developing people is one

the early stuff. Memory fades as you age. I think developing staff and developing people is one of the things I'm really proud of. I have been very lucky in my career to work with some great mentors and great managers. Certainly, in the teams I've worked in or as part of my groups, we invest a lot in the team and make sure that we develop them over the long run. The industry is quite small. So if people are staying within that, there are not lots of places people go. If you're in the industry for 40 or 50 years, which some of us may be, by the time we get to the end of our careers, there's only so many places you can go. Therefore you're going to bump into people. The aspect of developing people and seeing people succeed is really always been very important. Often, you hope that's always going to be the organization you're at and you can help grow there. But people will move around. If they're staying within the industry, you may well be working with them at some point in the future. People come back. I started at what was Nature Publishing Group, and I'm now back at what is Springer Nature. There's still a lot of colleagues here that were here when I first started 15 or 20 years ago. I think that the development of staff is key.

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Andy Douglas 19:00

But also paying back. I've mentored people. I've been lucky to have good mentors, so this is something I really believe in. I've mentored people, both formally and informally. I was lucky last year to become an SDN mentor for the year. That was a really rewarding experience.

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Andy Douglas 19:19

Beyond that, if it was going to be one more thing, it will be the way that in which people have dealt with the last couple of years. Just the fact that business has been good. But we've managed to support people, and get the teams, and clients through what has been really tough and difficult circumstances for individuals. I'm proud of the way in which we've all dealt with that and help the teams that we work with and the clients we work with. That's something I'm reflecting on. Yet, you might look back in five years' time and think actually it was incredibly tough. When things are back to normal, there's probably a better time to reflect than it is right now.

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Sara Grimme 19:57

It's fascinating that what you talk about as being your proudest achievement is that mentorship or that leadership role rather than a specific element of the job. This is something that we've spoken about quite a lot on the podcast. The importance of mentorship. The importance of having advocates in a business more senior to you. One thing I would call out to anyone listening who isn't quite sure where to go next or needs that bit of advice, take what Andy has just said. Talk to the people around you and more senior to you and make sure you're asking for help and asking for that mentorship. It sounds to me like people are more than willing to give their time and feel immensely proud of that.

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Andy Douglas 20:24

I completely agree with that, and that's not always going to be the case. But the majority of the people I've worked with, and again, we work in an industry where I find it to be very friendly

and open. People do want to help. Choose someone you really admire. Someone you think has got skills you want to develop. If you spot someone you think that they're really good at something you want to be good at, they're the kind of people you want to go and learn from. The worst thing that can happen is people say no. I don't think I've ever found that. Certainly, if somebody came to me and asked me for some help or some advice, I would find the time to do that. I would make sure that it's not just a one-off conversation, but something that we could keep going. So yeah, I think great advice, Sara.

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Sara Grimme 21:14

Thanks so much, Andy, it's really great that you're able to validate that. It's a nice segue into our last question, which is what advice would you give to someone who's curious about a career in sales?

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Andy Douglas 21:25

I'd say follow the advice we just talked about in terms of trying to find a mentor. Go and speak to somebody in sales. Find out a bit more about what they do, what it's like, and what do they like. Not all jobs are 100% perfect either. Find out what they dislike, because there may well be things you don't want to pick up. Beyond that, try to get them to take you on a sales call. If they're going out talking to a customer, or in the current situation often there's a lot of people doing video calls, try and get in on a video call and just listen in on what they talk about. Tag along to a meeting at a conference that might be coming up. People are all starting to meet face to face. If you enjoy that customer interaction, I think you'll probably enjoy sales as a career choice. Go and find somebody to try to get a customer interaction if you can. If you're an expert on a product area or something you currently work on, customers are generally happy for other people to sit in on meetings as long as it's not like 500 people on a call. If you're the extra person on a call, even if you're not saying anything, that's not a bad thing. You'll get to learn a lot by listening to those interactions with customers. I think it's a good thing to try.

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Sara Grimme 22:35

Thanks so much, Andy, this has been absolutely fantastic. For me, the big highlight has been listening to you talk about how sales is that voice of the customer. I really hope that that's what people take away and understand how incredibly valuable that role is across our whole industry. Meredith, do you have any final thoughts that you'd like to add?

M

Meredith Adinolfi 22:56

Thank you very much, Andy. I agree with Sara. The customer focus nature of how you answered these questions was really refreshing. I think it's going to be interesting for our audience.

A

Andy Douglas 23:06

That's great to hear. It's pleased that you're able to receive some of these messages as well.

That's great to hear. I'm pleased that we're able to convey some of those messages as well. Thanks so much for having me. If anyone does want to reach out to me about mentorship, I'm on LinkedIn. You can find me there or elsewhere. I am more than happy to connect with people.

M

Meredith Adinolfi 23:19

We want to thank Andy so much for taking the time to be here to talk to us about his career and his role and the critical function that sales plays in scholarly publishing. I think Sara and I both particularly enjoyed Andy's perspective on the customer focus nature of sales roles. That's not something we often talk about in that area of the business. So that was great to hear more from Andy about. We hope you've also enjoyed hearing from Andy as we continue covering the foundational elements of some of the key functions in our industry. Thank you all for listening. We'll see you back here soon for our next episode.