

WPS Stresses U.S. Edge in K-12 PrePub Business

A familiar name in pre-pub circles among trade and university press publishers—Westchester Publishing Services (Danbury, CT)—has moved into the PreK-12 market as a development house offering project management and editorial services, as well as composition through final print- and digital-ready files.

“Our primary focus in entering K-12 is with supplemental publishers who, while they want a digital component, don’t have the resources to develop complicated platforms,” Westchester Publishing Services president Paul Crecca told *EM*.

For almost all major supplemental publishers, the business bread and butter is still in print, he added.

Literacy, particularly K-5 English language arts—including ELL and Spanish translations—and social studies are the sweet spots at WPS. The company also has begun doing work in science for the lower grades.

The expansion into the PreK-12 school segment comes after nearly a decade of turmoil and upheaval in the pre-pub space as publishers were transitioning from print to digital. Many of the development houses closed or merged or were acquired by companies in India, as much of the work moved off-shore.

Crecca, the former chief financial officer at supplemental publisher Haight Cross (New York), joined WPS in 2014 and began building up the business. A key component of that business has been the typesetting business in Chennai, India, acquired totally in 2008. There are 300 employees in India and about 70 in the U.S.

Among the WPS clients: Harvard University Press, for which WPS handles almost all of the 135 books HUP publishes each year, and Macmillan (New York) trade, for which WPS handle 100% of the typesetting. Macmillan does editing in-house.

Amid this publishing focus on trade, university presses and think-tank white papers, the word got out into the K-12 market. What resonated, Crecca said, was the U.S. base of the business, particularly in customer service. By 2016, “We reached a point where we said the time has come to look at the K-12 market more closely,” Crecca said.

To move into the market, WPS needed to provide editorial or content development services. To that end, Kevin Gray in May was named director of K-12 publishing services. Gray previously held similar roles at former development houses Mazer Corp. (Dayton, OH), Element (Orlando, FL), MPS (India), and most recently at Cenveo Publishing Services (Columbia, MD).

With Gray on board, WPS teamed up with Marie Brown, the founder of Brown Publishing Network (New York), which in 2011 she sold to Six Red Marbles (Boston). Brown returns to the arena in a consulting capacity as WPS' exclusive editorial project director.

The WPS Edge

Crecca said the differentiator for WPS is the company's fully staffed customer service department in U.S. "This is a selling point," he said.

Not only is WPS U.S. owned, it is U.S.-employee-owned, as of September 2014. Because the value in employee shares is in retirement, there is an impetus to grow the company in order to increase value, Crecca said.

Print/Digital World

From a content development standpoint, it does matter whether a product is developed for digital or print, Gray said, but from a production standpoint, it doesn't matter to WPS. While, WPS doesn't build an LMS, it will work with partners to do so, for instance.

"Of the supplemental publishers we talk to, there is an acknowledgement that for our products to have traction we have to have a digital component—an app or assessment," Crecca said. "The actual content learning material is largely going to be in print."

While there is some confusion in the industry over the market demands for different types of materials and resources, it is a good time to be a supplemental publisher, Gray and Crecca said. They see a lot of opportunity for supplemental publishers to meet needs in niche markets.

While supplemental publishers still have to correlate to standards, they have the flexibility as to how they want to meet those standards and which ones to meet, Crecca said.

Westchester Publishing Services at a Glance ...

- Business: editorial, composition, and digital conversion
 - Founded: 1969
 - Location: Danbury, CT
 - Employees: almost 400: 70, U.S.; 300, Chennai, India
 - Leadership: Dennis Pistone: CEO; Paul Crecca: president and chief financial officer
 - Markets: trade, university presses, K-12
 - Company markers:
 - 2008: acquired Antares Publishing Services (India)
 - 2014: became an employee-owned firm
 - 2016: opened editorial and project management operation in India; acquired Kinetic Publishing Services
 - 2017: launched K-12 Publishing Services division
- Competitive arena: Victory Productions, Six Red Marbles, Cenveo Publishing Services, MPS North America, Lumina Datamatics.