From Gutenberg to Gates:  
The Transition of Wood Lake Publishing to the Digital Age

Getting the Word Out: From Printing Press to the Internet

The communications revolution of the late twentieth century brought astonishing changes to society. Technological innovations in information distribution such as computerization and the internet are the most visible manifestations of this impact. The internet not only changed the way in which information is distributed, but it also created a thirst for information that appears to be insatiable. At the moment the World Wide Web contains more than half a billion sites. And if the amount of information that is transmitted via the web is not sufficiently overwhelming, we are also inundated with new media. Today’s society can read, listen to music, make phone calls, write letters, and watch movies or television online, often simultaneously.

This is not the first revolution in how information is distributed. Western culture experienced an analogous sea-change in information distribution when Johannes Gutenberg introduced the printing press to Europe in 1439. Over the next century that impact was extensive. Though we often associate Gutenberg with his most famous product, the forty-two line Bible, it may well have been the advent of pamphlets – the ‘blogs’ of their day – that had the most significant effect. Without the breadth of distribution and relative speed of communication that pamphlets allowed the Protestant Reformation, the resulting decline of power and importance of the Roman Catholic Church may never have occurred.¹

Within a century printing presses were at work across Europe and even in the New World. For the first time, the written word was readily available and easily accessible. The fields of science, art, religion, politics, and literature were transformed, and the phenomenon of the popular press was born.²

With far greater speed and visibility the technological innovations of the Digital Age have transformed today’s society in ways that were hard to conceive of even a decade ago.

¹ http://hubpages.com/hub/Gutenberg-Press
With the Internet has come easy access, not only to the written word, but to music, videos and other digitalized information. The world is only a ‘click’ away.

Wood Lake Publishing, an organization founded in the latter days of the period when books were the dominant vehicle for the distribution of information, has attempted to bring itself into the digital age. The following describes that effort.

Wood Lake Publishing – Corporate Background

Wood Lake Publishing is a small, employee owned “ministry, undertaken through publishing”. Established in 1980 in Winfield B.C., the firm’s $3.2 million annual revenue (2007) is derived from the sale of Church School curricula ($2 million), books aimed at the Christian community ($0.5 million) and other speciality publications.

The founders of Wood Lake Books were Ralph Milton, a broadcaster, writer and storyteller and Jim Taylor, a syndicated columnist for weekly newspapers. The two began the venture in order to publish their own works, as they had been unable to interest an existing publisher in doing so. Relying on their connections with the distribution networks of the United Church of Canada they successfully produced and sold the books each had written in sufficient quantities to encourage them to continue the venture, albeit on a small scale, operating out of make-shift home offices in Winfield, B.C. and Toronto, Ontario, respectively.

Two more successful publications that followed closely on their original books, one authored by Milton and another by a former moderator of the United Church, provided further encouragement. The venture did not, however, earn enough revenue to support the founders, who continued to freelance and relied on their spouses to meet living expenses.

Wood Lake did not publish any more books successfully for several years, but kept itself afloat by serving as the publisher of an ecumenical magazine geared to mainline Protestant clergy and speciality books produced by denominations for their members. Small subsidies from the federal Department of Communications available to book publishers also helped as did production and distribution collaborations with other presses, notably Novalis – a Roman Catholic publisher.

In 1986, Wood Lake had its largest success to date with a hymnal geared at mainline Protestant congregations that it developed and published. The initial printing of 165,000 dwarfed the first runs of previous publications which had averaged 2,000 – 3,000.

In 1987, Wood Lake was approached by a team of United Church people from Regina who had created a new curriculum for Church Schools which was integrated with Sunday Worship. It had been twenty years since the United Church had last produced a nationally distributed curriculum and the national body recognized the need for a replacement. The General Council’s approval process was, however, so cumbersome that when the creators approached it about adopting their product as the national church’s new curriculum they were advised to approach Wood Lake and ‘just do it.’

Within a year or so curriculum creation and production became the major product of the firm, generating reliable revenue for the first time. The creators worked with mainline denominations in other countries and by 1990 the Whole People of God curriculum was being distributed to congregations in the United States, Australia and New Zealand.Versions adapted to the needs of Anglicans, Baptists and Roman Catholics also served to augment sales which grew from 1,000 congregations in 1987 to 3,000 in 1990. (A sale to a congregation might
be a single package of material for a rural church or a half dozen or so for a larger urban church.)

By the late 1990’s Wood Lake began planning for a curriculum to replace the Whole People of God. The new product Seasons of the Spirit went into development in 1996 and was available to customers by September of 2002. This new product is now thought to be reaching the end of its life cycle in 2009 and although its sales continue to account for some 60% of total revenue, the firm recognizes the need to plan for a replacement – either a new curriculum product or another source of revenue.

With curricula development as Wood Lake’s major product the need for staff to print, collate, ship, and serve customers increased. Whereas the printing of books has generally been outsourced much more of the physical production of curricula is handled by staff. By 2005 the firm was employing some 25 people and occupied a building with office, production and warehouse space that it had acquired in February of 1998.

While curriculum publishing came to provide the major portion of revenue for Wood Lake, the firm’s heart continued to lie with the publication of books. This devotion, originating with the founders, was carried on by the employee/owners. Books in our culture are not merely a delivery mechanism for information. For many people they carry totemic meaning as cultural icons. Many participants in the publishing industry are such devotees and, like Wood Lake, struggle to make any money at all from their efforts. Without the subsidies available from government (another sign of our cultural devotion to books), Wood Lake would never have shown a profit from its book sales alone. And the revenue generated from book sales would never have supported the growth of the firm to its current size.

Thanks to the revenue generated by curriculum sales Wood Lake has been able to maintain a structure that allowed it to publish books at a small loss or at break even for many years. By 2008, however, the increasingly onerous return policies of major chain stores, the loss of denominational distribution networks, and the decline in membership and resources of the mainline Protestant denominations made it apparent that book publishing would become a larger drag on revenues and Wood Lake made the decision to cease publishing books. This direction was foreshadowed in March, 2006 when Wood Lake changed its name from Wood Lake Books to Wood Lake Publishing – although at the time the decision had been made to reflect that Wood Lake was doing much more than just publishing books.

While the emotional ties with books kept the firm struggling in that market longer than pure economics might have dictated, those ties did not prevent Wood Lake from seeking to position itself as an innovator in the dissemination of information to its constituency through other means. In 1993 they began online distribution of a preaching resource published four to six times a year in magazine format. Using TELOS, an online messaging service established by a United Church minister and a member of his congregation, the magazine was distributed to subscribing ministers throughout Canada and the United States.

In 1993, Wood Lake established a website as well in an effort to connect with the growing online community and to find new distribution channels for the material Wood Lake was committed to producing.

**Marketing Challenges and the Digital Crossroads**

Wood Lake Publishing’s primary marketing effort until the early 1990s was to mail promotional literature for their books and curricula to a list of some 10,200 Canadian churches. Management recognized even at that time that their marketing strategy was not effective. The
costs associated with this form of marketing (printing and postage) rose continuously while the orders generated declined in number. In other words, even if it had been effective in the firm’s early years, it became an unviable strategy. Faced with this dilemma, management decided to experiment hoping to generate a better return on their mailing dollars by targeting potential customers selectively. They divided their mailing list into categories according to characteristics of the congregations and targeted different mailings based on seasons of the church year and holidays. The change of direct mailing strategy failed, however, to generate the type of response and sales they hoped for. Toward the end of the marketing experiment, a consultant retained by management put it thusly:

We might as well stand on the roof of the building and throw out ten dollar bills. It would be a faster way – less painful too – to get rid of all that cash.

Wood Lake asserts that their strength lies in the editorial, design and packaging work they bring to the production of their products, books and curricula. Marketing, however, was always a challenge for them. This created a dilemma wherein they had to choose to continue down the current path, knowing that it was like ‘throwing money out the window’ – or to follow the advice of their consultant who was urging them to explore the possibilities of the World Wide Web (WWW). Although the WWW was emerging at that time, it was still very much in its infancy and much of the potential that it soon revealed for connecting people and conveying information could hardly have been guessed at.

In early 1993, the first version of Mosaic, a graphical web browser, was released. This technology helped enable the spread of information over the internet. Considering the advice of their consultant, the Wood Lake management team saw the potential of internet technology as an effective marketing tool. Given the exhaustion of their efforts to revitalize their direct mailing strategy, its minimal results and increasing costs, they made the decision to take a ‘leap of faith’ and migrate to the digital age of marketing.

**The Decision to Become Early Adopters**

With the recognition that they needed a new approach combined with the sense that there was little to lose due to lack of previous marketing success, the management team proposed to the shareholders that they change their existing marketing strategy by embracing the WWW. This decision, if approved by the shareholders would, they hoped, propel Wood Lake Publishing as an early adopter or pioneer into the forefront of what is known today as e-commerce.

Management took this idea to shareholders because of the amount of money involved. Needless to say, the shareholders voted in favor, however, there was some resistance to spending the amount of money envisioned by the management team. Initially, the overall cost was projected to be approximately $1,000,000.

We knew going in that it was a lot of money but it seemed like the thing to do at the time and of course it wasn’t out of line. (Director of Art and Marketing)

The shareholders accepted management’s recommendation with enthusiasm, despite the size of the monetary risk in relation to the small size of the firm.
I think it was part of the optimism of the time that people, including our consultant, were really optimistic about the potential of the web. Our opportunity was to sort of own the religious part of the web. Now that sounds kind of crazy to think that we could own it. But it was not ownership in the sense of monetary ownership that we were hoping for but in the sense of being a big if not dominant presence. (Associate Publisher)

The idea was that Wood Lake with its position in the mainline church and a reputation for a certain kind of theology, a certain kind of approach, would be a trusted and recognized name and thus become a portal for information and an e-librarian for that big scary web world. (Publisher)

As a way of mitigating the risk the management team was directed to seek out partners who would share the cost, the risk, and the benefits derived from the Web.

In those early days of web technology we spent a lot of time seeking partners (both funding and technical partnerships) who would share the risk and return. (Publisher)

Despite these efforts, Wood Lake did not manage to find any partners and so was faced with the decision to go it alone.

**Embracing the Web – Phase One**

In 1993-94, Wood Lake Publishing made their first effort towards e-commerce by developing the capacity to put their catalogue, that is their list of books and other products – not the products themselves – online. One of the implications of this major commitment of the firm’s resources to entering the digital age is that in 2009 they are still using the technology and website structure developed in the mid-1990s. The competitive edge sought by early entry into the digital age carried a cost in that it locked the firm into a technology that soon became outdated. They were left playing catch up as innovations, which were constantly lowering the price of software and hardware as they increased its flexibility and utility, served to raise user expectations about the quality of web interface to a level beyond that which Wood Lake’s platform supported. In other words, the initial website was an expensive venture.

Overall this initial endeavor was not costly in terms of time; it was very costly in monetary terms. It was big chunk of change for Wood Lake and I do not think we realized how big a chunk of change it was at that point. It kind of kept snowballing...

The original overall cost of the project was a million dollars and Wood Lake downsized it to half a million primarily because they were unable to find the necessary funding partners to expand the project.

Wood Lake contributed both management time and administrative support for the development of the website as well as a total of half a million dollars in costs for consulting fees, software and related expenses. In addition, they hired a design company which did the original logo, the graphics and overall appearance of the website. Additional costs were incurred in marketing the website to their customer base. These latter efforts included using their existing direct mail list to announce their web presence. Ironically, although the website was originally conceived as a more effective way to reach their customers, it did not replace their reliance on
direct mail. The web served as a supplementary marketing venue used by a small segment of customers. Migration to the new platform did not happen quickly.

Initially there was print marketing, there was mail marketing, there was snail mail marketing to get the word out – to drive people to the site as well as to promote periodical promotions, ads and so on.... (Publisher)

Development Process – First Attempt

The objective in the early stage was to develop a website to serve as a readily accessible catalogue where customers could have access to promotional material for the full range of print resources: books, curricula and specialty products and the capacity to order them for hard copy delivery. In pursuit of that goal Wood Lake decided to build a ‘dynamic database’, which would allow individuals to access the curriculum offerings on line and then customize the product to their needs. The initial idea of having a catalogue available thus began to expand to a more interactive servicing of customer needs.

The firm continues to believe that this direction “is the way to go although ten years later we have made little progress [with customers customizing their products]”. There remains a strong preference on the part of users for voice-to-voice interface in exploring, designing and ordering product offerings.

The effort to provide more control and more options for customers had an unforeseen negative impact in that it made the website “cumbersome in terms of...the design perspective...it is very restrictive in terms of what you can do...the templates...are fixed and rigid and it requires a bit more programming...also it is a killer for search engines...” Not only was the website design technology labour intensive for the host, users found it difficult to navigate. Most significantly it was difficult to configure the site in a way that made it a likely target for search engines, thus potential customers were less likely to ‘hit’ on it. Early entry into the digital age, when the role of search engines was little understood, resulted in locking the firm into a technology whose limitations became more apparent as succeeding generations of web based platforms with greater flexibility and ease of use were developed and introduced in the rapidly expanding World Wide Web.

Despite the hurdles and limitations encountered in the early development phase, Wood Lake continued their efforts to develop the website. Finding ways to work with its limitations they have continued to offer online content using this platform. Initially, the online content was done by subscription in the form of an online Sunday Bulletin builder. The customer congregation would create their own order of service Sunday by Sunday. It was:

A digital version of that which was a relatively fresh idea at the time in terms of a concept. People could go on-line and search the database to find things that were in the archive of Wood Lake and in the archive of our business partners. All that data was put into the database and tagged so people could go and call up material out of our periodicals, our old preaching resources and out of our curricula. They could find prayers and things like that and so create their bulletin online. (Publisher)

In addition there were other products delivered online such as their children’s workshop bulletin which came at no cost to a customer who had subscribed to Ralph Milton’s ‘Rumors’, a weekly emailed preaching resource offered at no cost by one of the co-founders in
Also, they created ‘Chat Groups’ such as ‘eTalk’ and provided a daily devotional drawn from books published by Wood Lake. These free products and services were offered as a means to meet customer needs at little or no additional cost and thus draw them into the website with the expectation that there they would come across other offerings that the firm was selling.

**Coming of Age – SpiritSeasons.com**

In 2002, Wood Lake Publishing launched another website (SpiritSeasons.com) to support their newly launched curriculum *Seasons of the Spirit*. In development for five years, the new curriculum was a replacement for *The Whole People of God*, the paper-based product that had been the firm’s mainstay for fifteen years. This website was designed and developed solely to support their curriculum project. *Seasons of the Spirit* was developed in partnership with a variety of mainline Christian denominations from English speaking countries around the world. It was a “real international web, sort of a brave new world and we were really excited about the congregational readiness for web delivery and for its potential interactivity. It was an audacious undertaking in itself” (Associate Publisher).

Spiritseasons.com was developed as a catalogue for potential customers to peruse Wood Lake products online. The main page of the site has recently been improved to invite users to migrate to ‘sesonsonline.ca’ if they are interested in on-line delivery of the product. Customers wanting a disk or print version are redirected to their local distributor.

Wood Lake itself supports online delivery directly. It also provides disk or print versions to customers in its distribution area (Canada). Customers outside of Canada are directed to regional resellers and denominational distributors. Each of these sellers is required to have a Season’s presence on their own websites. The structure of spiritseasons.com is “exactly the same as the initial Wood Lake website because it uses the same architecture,” (Director of Art and Marketing). The original site was designed as a means of delivering some content but primarily as a means of allowing customers to order products. For instance individuals could sign up to receive an e-mailed ‘tip of the week’ directed to “educators, clergy, worship leaders, and outreach leaders.”

A key objective of the firm at the time that “seasonsonline.ca” was launched for the 2008-09 year was to shift sales from hard products to on-line delivery. Customers have, however, proved slow to pick up on this new direction.

We really did think that more people would buy online. That is why we developed the new site. Every year the product is new. We update the catalog and all those order forms online and we put samples up every year so we have always hoped that people would do more online but they haven’t through us and they haven’t done that much through their own distributors either... (Publisher)

According to the Associate Publisher, Wood Lake found that a majority of the market was not ready for online delivery. They overestimated the market potential for online product delivery.

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3 Quote from SpiritSeasons.com.
We thought that it would advance more quickly than it did. We actually found a lot of our market was not that ready for online delivery. We thought that the web content delivery would go at a much faster pace and would develop more broadly than it has but we really have not been able to take advantage of that through the spiritseasons.com website.

On the other hand, on the product side we have been able to take advantage of the web to do things. For example, fifty-two weeks of the year there is a posting [called Spirit Sightings] and it comes up a weekend prior to each Sunday. That posting relates some world news to the Bible lection which is the chosen bible passage read for the upcoming Sunday. Those are posted and then of course they are archived. They are a great way to keep updating a program that is developed up to two years before it is used. It is a way to keep it really current and so the web gives you an ability to do that in a cost effective way that just would not be practicable with a print-only product. We just couldn’t be mailing out Spirit Sightings to people every day. And so the website has been used more for content enhancement, primarily with Seasons of the Spirit, than content delivery. (Associate Publisher)

Wood Lake’s management team saw that in order to help their customers migrate to the on-line product their approach to marketing Seasons of the Spirit needed to be different. And they feared that the project would not be sustainable unless the majority of customers accepted online delivery, so making the shift happen was a high priority. Management realized that some of their customer base would be “nervous about the move to web-based delivery while others complained about the enhancements being only available online. So we were a bit nervous about the response being not merely indifferent, but hostile.”

While it is difficult to discover the reason for customer resistance to online delivery, demographics are likely a significant contributing factor. Membership in mainline Protestant churches in Canada and the United States is predominantly elderly. Congregations are primarily small (fewer than 100 members) and 75% of them are rural. In other words, the customer group is not one that is open to change and many are late adopters of internet technology. In many areas high speed internet service has been slow to arrive and many congregations operate with antiquated computers, often donated by members when upgrading their own. Thus there is both a technical as well as a psychological barrier to adoption of online delivery.

Several initiatives have sought to help shift customers to the online version. The most obvious is a discount in the price. The online version is priced 10% below the disk version, which in turn is priced 10% below the print version. More significantly, as already mentioned, Wood Lake developed and launched in 2008 an independent website with significantly updated and improved architecture and hosting for Seasons of the Spirit.

The management team decided not to abandon the ‘old Seasons site’ (spiritseasons.com) because it provides “so much product support for Seasons customers on that site”. Instead of redirecting all customers to the new site, with its higher end graphic interface and a clear focus on on-line delivery,

...we decided for the disk and print customers to let them keep going to the site they are used to. As for the customers to whom the product is delivered online, however, we did not want them to get into dealing with two sites. Therefore parts of the sites are mirrored, however, only the new site, seasononline.ca, has full product delivery. (Publisher)
Thus two sites are maintained for the same curriculum product. The older site spiritseasons.com is a traditional ‘order from the catalogue’ site that redirects those interested in the online product to seasonsonline.ca. The possibility of customer confusion because of two sites offering the same products in different formats is acknowledged, but no research has been done to see if it is a reality.

There are significant benefits to Wood Lake in having customers choose the online version of the product and use seasonsonline.ca:

Customers who have gone to seasonsonline.ca have helped us immensely in that they pay up front as they order and so we were helped with our cash flow in February and March when cash flows are really low. So it is good for us... (Director of Art and Marketing)

With online sales Wood Lake incurs no production costs for physical products; an obvious advantage. There are certainly production costs for the content and the online enhancements. The only exception is that sheet music and posters must still be mailed out in hard copy format. Another benefit of the online pricing model is that it helps cash flow through pre-payment for online purchases.

Yet another advantage is that through the more interactive site Wood Lake develops more understanding of who their customers are and how they can serve them. “We can answer their questions, we can help them know about other things we are doing and we can boost our direct customer sales.” (Publisher)

Wood Lake does receive some negative feedback from their print copy distributors who “have no love for seasonsonline.ca because it means lost revenue for them.” Because Wood Lake depends on their distributors for the distribution of many of the print and disk versions this is not an insignificant issue. It is an indicator of Wood Lake’s commitment to moving into online distribution that they accept the impact on these important relationships nonetheless. Wood Lake has sought to compensate the distributors for lost sales by giving them 7.5% (roughly their profit on selling Wood Lake paper products) of each online sale within their territory.

The truth of it is that they do nothing, absolutely nothing to get 7.5% except to give us the customer which has a minimal cost, however, we have just about completed all the annual distributor reviews for this fall and it just has not been a huge problem because it has soothed their fears a little bit. It is a political issue and a practical issue for distributors who are also trying to survive. (Publisher)

At present, however, 90% of Wood Lake’s customers choose to stay with the print or disk product even though the cost is higher than the digital option. The relatively small portion of sales that are online may thus account in part for the maintenance of relationships with their distributors.

Current Phase of the Transition

Wood Lake management decided to test the global market by using three congregations in England that were existing customers for the paper product as trial sites for seasonsonline.ca.
The hope is to get a sense from them of their experience adapting to the online delivered version. A clear advantage of online delivery that bodes well for international sales is, of course, that it does not matter where the customers are located – the products can be delivered and supported instantaneously.

The seasonsonline.ca site has been designed in a way that attracts more ‘hits’ by search engine users. This may account for some international interest appearing, such as a large Methodist church in Africa which has expressed some interest in Wood Lake products. At the moment the firm has not tried to promote the online delivery of the Seasons of the Spirit curriculum outside of North America because “we do have the practical problem of getting printed music and printed posters to those buyers. We are currently looking for about a half dozen churches in Australia and New Zealand who will test the product so that we will have their feedback.” (Publisher)

From these test sites management will be able to determine what works for them and what does not. “This North/South hemisphere thing is really tricky with curriculum so we have an eye towards the world” (Publisher). The ‘practical problem’ mentioned relates to restrictions, required by copyright considerations, on distributing some material online. Thus even online customers receive some of their materials through the mail in hard copy versions.

**Lessons Learned**

Making the transition to the digital age was a painful experience for Wood Lake Publishing. While the firm recognizes that the transition was necessary, given the rapid shift away from print delivery of information in the publishing industry, they question the wisdom of being ‘early adopters’. “We were the first in the religious mainline Christian publishing world to go online and we invested big. That was painful and especially for a company of our size it turned out be an expensive lesson…” (Associate Publisher & Publisher).

On the positive side, the firm learned that there is,

...something incredibly important about choice for today’s buyers. Our most progressive audience still lives in small communities with dial up and they have said really clearly to us as recently as last January at our focus group ‘don’t give me anything online. I cannot deal with it, I do not want it but I still want your content.’

There is something about the power of choice that we had not anticipated. I am almost certain if all we had done this year was bump up our print prices seventeen percent we would have had a huge loss of customers. Instead of just facing a higher price, however, they had the option not to pay the seventeen percent increase since the disk or on-line version was available at a lower price. That seems to have resulted in very little complaint about what was after all a fairly significant price increase, even though most customers stayed with the print version and took the higher price. (Publisher).

Wood Lake’s experience emphasizes the need to know your market and its readiness for innovation because, “obviously even back then there were people going online and making it, doing better than we were. I think our market just wasn’t there” (Associate Publisher). Merely knowing that is not enough, however, to provide a firm with clear direction on when to introduce an innovation. Despite the concentration of their customers in geographic and demographic regions that make adoption slower, there are also many customers who are ready, willing and able to adopt and who may be lost to other online providers if the firm is slow to move into the digital age.
Whether one is an early adopter or not, it is important to always be looking at and exploring new ideas and technologies. Choosing not to move to a new technology should be done consciously and after careful consideration, not as a default position because one is not paying attention.

Maybe we wouldn’t do what we did before in hiring all these people to get us set up with our first website. But we do need to be looking at new ways of doing things (Director of Art and Marketing).

**Musing on the Future**

In retrospect, it is interesting to note that Wood Lake’s first website took a year to develop at a cost of half a million dollars with extensive use of outside consultants while the latest website seasononline.ca, which is highly functional and beautiful, took approximately two and half months for a local web design firm to develop at a cost of $20,000.

Wood Lake Publishing has made the decision to continue moving boldly into the digital publishing age. Their initial experience, while it delivered some costly lessons, left them convinced of the possibilities of new technology. In addition to the attractions of online and disk delivery of information there is the reality that the publishing industry is facing some wrenching changes. Amazon’s recently introduced ‘Kindle,’ a product for accessing books purchased electronically, is enjoying some initial success and may mark the advent of the long anticipated electronic book. Major publishing houses are reorganizing and downsizing. These developments suggest that while Gutenberg’s invention will not soon fall silent, its 600 year domination of how humans read may be near its end.

Wood Lake, like many small firms, struggles to keep doing what it is currently having some success with, while simultaneously scanning the horizon for new innovations that it can adopt to develop products for its customer base. One innovation the firm has developed is to package congregational study guides on issues of current and ongoing interest. These began with a guide called “Experiencing Jesus” based on the book “Reading the Bible again for the first time,” published elsewhere by Marcus Borg, a major liberal Christian theologian. Wood Lake’s contribution was to develop an experiential learning process of study questions, activities and background information which they packaged in a boxed set. That box included Borg’s book, paper versions of the materials and a disk with visuals and some interviews with the author and a facilitator. Later versions of a similar product have been redesigned so that all of the support material is available on disk only. This format will provide PDF files formatted on a disk which will allow individuals to print the participant and leader’s guide pages. Images and artwork for the entire ten week series will be on the disk as well in a format that allows them to be displayed on screen.

A similar study guide to accompany a book looking at the Christian response to the ecological crisis is being developed. In this case the book is published by Wood Lake, so they will receive a larger share of the revenue. The hope is that this type of product can be developed in a format that is easily deliverable online by 2010.

Whether these innovations and others yet to be developed will enable Wood Lake to successfully transition from being an information distribution firm using Gutenberg’s technology to one that uses that of Gate’s is a question that will remain open for some time to come. It is challenging enough to find ways to use the technology to distribute information. Perhaps the larger challenge, however, is to find ways to capture revenue for doing so when the
world wide web is full of freely distributed information as well as countless individuals dedicated to 'liberating' information that would not exist unless distributors such as Wood Lake are compensated for its production.