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## **Turning an idea into a valuable teaching resource and research output!**

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This paper describes the journey of a teacher who became an author in Higher Education. The journey began with a simple idea about a fundamental resource book, designed to improve teaching in design and illustration classes with ever increasing numbers of novice fashion students, back in 1991. This resource was a taxonomy of fashion, designed to increase the awareness of garment shapes, context, proportion, terminology, construction, production and finish with a view to improving student knowledge, design and visual communication skills.

The paper reflects upon the subsequent publications that built on the previous resource, as outputs of rigour, significance and integrity in shaping the author's approaches to teaching and research in fashion and other disciplines. It describes the development of the original idea and the subsequent acceptance of this for publication and illustrates how this one idea allowed for further opportunities for publications in a partnership with a global publisher.

There are resource issues around gathering content for publications of rigour and originality and there have been challenges around communicating in the publications themselves due to technological and economical constraints.

There are also practical resource issues around creating and designing the publications as well as the need for the development of personal skills when keeping up with changes in technology and the fashion industry.

Each publication requires careful planning and needs to have unique 'reasons for being' that make it different to the competition. It describes the positive aspects of working with a colleague who brings similar skills and understanding, but a different handwriting and point of view to the publications. It looks at the impact of updating original editions and keeping the works contemporary. It also looks at personal and

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practical insights learned across almost 20 years of being an author with the same publisher.

*Keywords: author, teaching resource, design process, communication, publication*

## **Introduction**

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This paper strives to explain what it is like to be an author of fashion design publications and a Reader in Higher Education. It describes the value of the publications as a Reader and teacher and the philosophy that binds them together in the 'Research Profile'. Becoming an author was not part of the career plan, but it was about having a timely idea, many years ago, and then taking an opportunity when it was offered, this is described in 'Developing the Initial Idea'. 'Taking Opportunities' explains how this idea allowed for more opportunities to be realised.

One of the key drivers of this success was my ability to draw, research, design, organize, plan, work in a team and hit deadlines. These skills became key to the publication design process and a 'degree of flexibility' meant that the inevitable design constraints were seen as a positive challenge explored in 'The Publication Design Process and Constraints.'

Each publication needs to be carefully planned and have its unique reasons for being, this is explored in 'Unique Selling Points and Content Resources'. The final consideration is the actual creation of the publications and what it takes to realise these in practical terms and with insights described in 'Designing the Publications and Practical Resources'. The paper concludes with personal reflection on the authoring process and the fulfilling of the original aim to improve teaching in design classes.

## **Research Profile**

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There is pressure, as a Reader, to have a strong research profile within Higher Education so these fashion design publications have to fulfill the need for measurable 'outputs' which means that as well as informing the target market there has to be consideration of originality, significance and rigour in their execution.

The research lies in the field of fashion design practice, which is an esoteric, volatile and dynamic field. The prevailing teaching/learning process of fashion designers is studio/workshop, project-based, where tacit knowledge and skills are acquired by osmosis (Schön, 1991).

The growing number of undergraduate fashion students needing to attain contemporary knowledge, skills and techniques that will effectively allow them to proceed to the design innovation stage and focus on idea generation, development and prototyping, are difficult to manage, so the traditional

studio/workshop is no longer sufficient for this osmosis of skills and dialogue to take place.

So, this research is manifested in a series of design pedagogy publications that are intended to inform and progress through the novice stage of the skills acquisition process (Dreyfus & Dreyfus 1980) and build on knowledge and experience in the subject area of fashion design. These are; the Fashion Source Book (FSB), *Illustrating Fashion* (IF), *Fashion Design: Process, Innovation & Practice* (FD:PIP) and *Fashion Forecasting* (FF), all published by Wiley.

The contribution to knowledge here is in articulating the heuristics of fashion design in a constantly dynamic industry to create a 'sense making' (Gladwell 2005, Owens 2007) relationship through skill gathering, but in a visual, non-verbal way.

The scholarship is in converting tacit, esoteric and volatile knowledge into explicit materials suitable for pedagogic reference; and in the sense-making approaches employed to do this, i.e. visual documentation, layout and annotation.

## **Developing the Initial Idea**

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This all started around 1991, with an idea, to try and encourage novice fashion students to use the correct fashion terminology in their design projects.

I worked on the Fashion Marketing degree at Newcastle Polytechnic, teaching fashion design, illustration and conceptual thinking by combining skills in design and illustration 'holistically' through a fashion forecasting project (fashion forecasting being my background and requiring illustration and design skills).

Research revealed that there was a lack of well-drawn fashion dictionaries and a complete lack of focused practical fashion books in 1991 – mostly promotional fashion illustration books or pattern cutting books were available.

Novice fashion students needed to learn so many skills to be proficient designers, how do you do this effectively when there is pressure to be more efficient with teaching contact time?

Further investigation revealed the need for a fundamental reference combining this with knowledge of construction and production and so aid awareness of potential when designing. Imparting this knowledge with traditional one-to-one teaching was becoming difficult primarily because there was a rapid increase in student numbers.

Fashion design traditionally takes a 'problem-based learning approach', but if a novice designer is not well informed and the lecturer cannot instruct till there is some designing in evidence, then the student needs to 'jump in

without knowing' (Schon 1987:93). The FSB was intended to provide support at this point.

The FSB, needed to be a 'visual' fashion dictionary. This is supported by Sennett's view of the limits of language, by substituting the 'image for the word'. He emphasises this by suggesting the 'showing rather than telling' approach of Henri Cartier-Bresson's 'decisive moments' series of photographs (Sennett 2008:95).

The FSB was created and used when teaching fashion design fundamentals. The idea was to include clothing items that were of historical, classical or ethnic interest in each garment category. It included a comprehensive range of templates of figures for men, women, children and babies and a chapter on how to adapt these figures for fashion use. It included flat drawings of childrenswear, mens and womenswear clothing such as; outerwear, jackets, waistcoats, trousers, suits, skirts, swimwear, dresses, shirts, tops, loungewear, nightwear, knitwear, underwear.

It also included flat drawings of accessories; bags, gloves, hats, belts, neckwear, boots, shoes, sports shoes, hosiery.

Production techniques were illustrated, such as; seams and finishes, fullness, pockets and fastenings. Varied construction elements were included such as sleeves, cuffs, collars, necklines, waist and hemlines. All items had full explanations in the glossary.

Some figures, garments, accessories, production and construction elements had to be painstakingly researched, described and then illustrated as sometimes drawings and photographs were difficult to find for reference.

What made the book unique was the pulling together of all of these elements, elements that were necessary to teach in design class, but pre FSB this was undertaken in a much more ad-hoc way without the comprehensive resource.

## **Taking Opportunities**

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The publisher from Blackwell Publishing, visited the University around this time looking for modern pattern cutting books to publish, he saw the prototype of FSB and immediately negotiated a contract to publish it (he didn't pursue the pattern cutting book).

The contract was for two years to produce the book.

Blackwell were seen as 'one of the world's foremost academic and professional publishers' (Wiley 2011) and this fitted perfectly with the change of status from Newcastle Polytechnic to University of Northumbria in 1992 and the beginnings of developing research in Higher Education.

The continuing relationship with Blackwell in 2007, allowed for a broader distribution to Australia, China, USA, UK and Greece when John Wiley & Sons bought Blackwell Publishing, they stated that, 'for our customers, we

provide more access to more content to more people than ever before in the history of the two companies'(Wiley 2011).

Blackwell were interested in other publication ideas. There was a need to produce a resource on fashion illustration as this was a subject taught alongside design studies.

The Illustrating Fashion (IF) publication was created and used when teaching modules on illustration fundamentals, there were many books on promotional illustration but very few that analysed the different types of drawing taught in class and more importantly required by the fashion industry.

There was a need to provide a comprehensive resource offering as much information and explanation about this area. So, the book began with an historical contextual review of drawing for fashion dating back to the 1900's with a brief indication of the influences that affected the style. These drawings were all re-interpreted and illustrated, as permission to use existing imagery was going to be costly, also this allowed us to gain better knowledge and understanding of historical stylisation.

The book then explored figure construction, drawing from life, balance, including proportion and the drawing of clothes. Particular emphasis was placed on drawing heads, hands, feet and footwear as students struggled with these areas. Drawing exercises (from contemporary life drawing classes) were included to build on the independent learner's understanding.

Media Techniques were included, that is, hand drawing and digital techniques – utilising digital tools in a common workflow situation using Adobe Illustrator and Photoshop. Part of the success of an illustration is in the presentation, so layout & typography, normally belonging in the graphic design discipline, were researched. This chapter proved itself to be of value when teaching other disciplines, such as animation and interactive media, as knowledge of the Adobe suite of software is essential in today's digital world (hand drawing techniques are valuable also). The level of the digital tutorials proved to be pitched correctly for these students also as they have been used for a number of years with great success.

A chapter on Fabric Representation, exploring printed textiles, depth and shine, highlights and pleats, textured fabrics, drape and transparency, knitwear, volume and gather, wool and faux fur, folds and fringing, denim, specialist fabrics, lace and embroidery was also included along with composition, cropping, viewpoints, graphic application, promotional drawing and illustrating detail.

Drawing for Manufacture explored the working/technical drawing which was a fundamental method of communicating design ideas for all types of fashion personnel involved in the industry. Accessory drawings were also included as this was becoming a developing market area. Examples of each

type of drawing were provided to show as much variation in style and approach as possible.

## **The Publication Design Process and Constraints**

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Publications take a lot of planning and of course producing the content, especially when they are an original set of drawings as in the source book. A new contract was being negotiated to produce the book on fashion illustration, half way through the production of the FSB. This looked like a lot of work for one person to undertake, so my colleague, Janine Munslow, offered to help with IF. This proved to be an ongoing working relationship.

The idea was made explicit in a 'publication proposal' that was essential to the process and the publishers used this to gauge interest, in terms of sales, in the idea, and whether the proposed content was right for the target market. The proposal was refereed by 'experts in the fashion field' and the publisher fed back findings to us.

There weren't a lot of competitors in the early years, from 1993, and they didn't seem to have the complete overview of industry requirements that we did, dealing primarily with the more promotional aspects of fashion illustration. Janine and I happened to work closely together as Industrial Placement tutors also, so feedback from industry here was important in terms of teaching students the right skills at the right time for their 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> year placements. We were in a position to influence what was included in the curriculum because we taught on the novice/fundamental early years of the fashion courses. Later, around 1997, at the implementation of 'modularisation' in Higher Education, the books helped us to clearly articulate new modules in the curriculum as we had already separated design processes and illustration processes through the books. Design is a holistic skill though (Schön 1987:158) and novice designers need to understand the whole in order to synthesise the parts, consequently the two books (resource and illustration) worked together but there was another opportunity presenting itself that would take advantage of the 'whole' design experience and would utilise the industrial intelligence that we gathered as well as explain the design process; this was Fashion Design: Process, Innovation and Practice (FD:PIP).

FD:PIP explored the design process and after creation worked in tandem with the FSB in fashion design classes.

The book began by; analyzing the brief, discussing the place of innovation - including exercises to promote innovation, research inspiration, research direction including fashion forecasting, the fashion cycle, fashion and art, the place of sub cultures and street style (the analysis of fashion design research into inspiration and direction helped to clarify the process).

After the design research element the book explored the development process by looking at the use of colour, silhouette, proportion, understanding fabric

and new fabric innovations, construction, that is; basic skirts, bodices, panels, pleats, dresses, sleeves, trousers, collars, prototypes and embellishment.

In keeping with the previous two books, a comprehensive approach was desired to have a self-contained teaching resource that aided design understanding, so chapters on designing for specialist markets, designing ranges and collections, design using the computer and promotional graphics and styling were also included. These latter subjects were taught on the Fashion Marketing degree, which philosophically is about taking a product from concept to market. The Fashion Design degree works towards a final catwalk collection and it was important that the publications were relevant to these students also. The two different approaches to fashion allowed for a number of vocations, requiring slightly different skillsets, so the Fashion Careers chapter aimed at articulating these possibilities. As placement tutors, liaising regularly with industrial partners, we knew what was required by industry and utilized this information by reflecting on the job of press assistant, public relations officer, assistant buyer, assistant designer, visual merchandiser, costume designer, assistant on a magazine, fashion forecaster, product developer, textile agent, recruitment consultant and supplier. The book concluded with case studies elaborating upon the design principles explored.

This book pulled together a lot of tacit design and education experience and captured material that, on reflection, was often overlooked but proved incredibly important.

The design process here was also applicable in other disciplines perhaps with a change of terminology, for example, in Fashion Marketing the focus is the 'target market', in Interactive Media (IMD) it is the 'User'. I now teach on programmes like Motion Graphics and Animation Design (MGAD) and IMD, and have found, as Schön (1991) suggests 'simply shifting between domains of activity stimulates fresh thinking about problems'.

For example, IMD students explore 'scenarios' (invented consumer profiles) in product development, this resides in a design process document called 'Information Architecture'. MGAD students use graphic design as a basis for their character design, where the character is a 'brand' and apply 'Style Guide' principles (rules of the brand) to this type of work (also the brand is explained in the Fashion Forecasting publication). Both of these approaches have been used in the second edition of FD:PIP.

The publication design process, in terms of structuring the books, consisted initially of a holistic mind map of what Janine and I thought we needed to do; then we would talk through each area about the why and how, audience and message, process and materials, ways of thinking and synthesis (Noble & Bestley 2005), elaborating on which areas we needed to research in more detail, the type of content that required development and whether we would illustrate these principles ourselves or use 'case studies' to make a



point. We split the chapters up between us as to which areas we felt we could best handle individually.

On reflection, we learned also that we used visual representations and graphic organisers to communicate abstract concepts and content as Petty (2006:113) suggests: 'indeed the more abstract the topic, the more important it is to represent it visually'. We used some principles of design such as 'mnemonic devices' and 'picture superiority effects' by choosing memorable visual examples, 'progressive disclosure' in digital tutorials, 'storytelling' in audience scenario development, the 'Von Restorff effect' where noticeably different things are likely to be recalled such as, the innovation examples in FD:PIP and the 'ways of seeing' in Fashion Forecasting (Lidwell, Holden & Butler 2003).

Three 'second editions' have been completed now, allowing us to implement any reflection and new material.

There were opportunities to seek feedback, which affected our design decisions, such as looking at Amazon for 'pointers' from purchaser's reviews, we would also consult with the fashion student body and check out any citations of our work on Google Scholar to see what information was being used.

We went from working in 'black and white' on the first three publications (colour was not in common use as content tended to be text heavy and technical with diagrams and the odd photograph,) to years later, being able to explore the 'impact' of and 'designing' with colour. We learned a great deal from doing the IF first edition - that line quality needed to vary, that texture and pattern were critical and that composition was an important consideration.

As the relationship with the publisher developed and the books sustained strong sales, Janine and I continued to work together as we discovered that 'two hands' and two different but complimentary approaches really helped to make the publications unique in the field. We described FD:PIP as the third in a 'trilogy' of essential books for the novice fashion designer.

The fourth book was more specialist in the world of fashion and would appeal to a slightly different market, not the novice but the more competent designer and professional; this was Fashion Forecasting (FF).

With more specialist books the publisher needed to be sure there was a market and so they tested the idea on a number of fashion experts. Usually 2000 sales in the life of a single book edition is considered successful!

FF grew from the research direction part of FD:PIP, from a level 4 module that synthesized illustration and design and from personal industrial experience.

The fashion forecasting industry sells design intelligence material to the fashion design and manufacture industry, usually two years ahead of a season.

FF began by explaining about fashion design intelligence, which looks at general trends such as social, political, economic and cultural influences and included the power of the fashion brand. Key companies in the forecasting industry were interviewed and profiled, such as, Carlin and Here & There, with their limited edition hard copy publications and Worth Global Style Network, who publish online; more accessible fashion forecasting magazines, such as, the View series, were also profiled.

The fashion forecasting process was briefly outlined in FD:PIP, but here was elaborated upon, with a view to students creating their own intelligence material and included the development of new textiles, mood boards, colour and 'seeing' an important contribution that was about getting more out of visual inspiration (from the work of a PhD student, Emma Jefferies, who was exploring visual literacy in visual communication) and case studies to explain the esoteric principles of forecasting and how to communicate ideas.

As forecasting is communicated via the Internet or in book form, a further chapter on communication was included, which expanded upon the work in IF on type and layout application. The colour work here has proved invaluable in animation design classes as well as in fashion teaching.

## **Unique Selling Points and Content Resources**

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Each publication had a number of unique selling points.

The second editions (FSB 2006, IF 2007 and FD:PIP 2011) needed to not only be updated but also allowed the introduction of FULL colour which meant that the impact on the audience would be greater and finally we could really explain about designing with colour.

We updated all content in each second edition, especially case studies and other illustrative examples to keep them contemporary.

FSB offered copyright free illustrations for use by students.

The case studies in each publication re-inforce the idea that an individual approach is expected, they also help to show someone else's design process and decision making when working with a complex problem. They are really about 'sense-making' (Gladwell 2005, Owens 2007:31) in complex problem solving.

Where necessary we introduced relevant current digital tools and how to use them by designing easy to use tutorials (IF and FF).

The addition of the 'innovation' chapter in FD:PIP came from a product design oriented project, written specifically, by a colleague, Dr. Kevin Hilton from his research. This was updated, in the second edition, by adding a conceptual exercise derived from a MGAD project. The chapter on 'seeing' in FF by Dr.Emma Jefferies, was unique in attempting to utilise the visual more thoroughly. The contribution from experts from other disciplines makes the books unusual in the field, as they offer different ways of problem solving.

As fashion students try and make sense of their world, I would suggest that these publications support a move towards independent learning and a student centred approach (Owens 2007:33).

A designer makes things. . .He works in particular situations, uses particular materials and employs a distinctive medium and language. Typically his making process is complex. There are more variables – kinds of possible moves, norms and interrelationships of these – than can be presented in a finite model. (Schön 2007:78)

## **Designing the Publications and Practical Resources**

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We started out in 1993, using traditional skills such as cutting and pasting drawings and word processing text.

As the books and technology have progressed, we have been given the responsibility for producing the layout of the manuscript as we became skilled enough to do our own typesetting. It was important to consider the content retrieval element of each book so the information design had to be clear. Designing the contents page became an increasingly more visual and informative exercise. The publisher lets us design the covers now also, we originally provided ideas only, this is exciting as it re-inforces the idea of it being our design, our practice! The books ‘hang together’ and have our stamp on them, as they are completely conceived by us.

Our skills at graphics and layout design improved and each publication became more contemporary in feel.

We did apply for small research grants from our Design School to support the production of the publications. We needed equipment such as laptops, a scanner, an external hard drive to back up and store files and access to printing facilities. A personal camera was useful to capture interesting and inspiring imagery. We needed the Adobe CS software Suite as we regularly used Illustrator and Photoshop in image production and InDesign to create the pages. We now export chapters as PDF’s. These are used to proof read and produce the final printed publication. We started out, in the early years, saving word files on floppy discs, then we used zip drives, CD’s and DVD’s, posting a printed version to the publisher, we now upload the PDF files to the publisher’s server.

The problem with technology changing so rapidly is that often our 1<sup>st</sup> edition files will have become out-of-date and in-accessable due to changes and upgrades in computer equipment over the duration of the life of a book (we re-do most content in any case though). We always produce a printed version throughout the process, for checking purposes, updating pages as we create them, as it is important to understand how the pages are going to work, they are re-worked if the layout doesn’t communicate well enough.

In terms of the FF publication, the fashion forecasting industry is based in key fashion capitals like London, New York and Paris. How do you profile and interview companies situated across the world with no budget?

We had to plan well ahead to gather the necessary information, up to two years before the delivery of the publication. Opportunities like field study visits, to New York, with student groups to arrange meetings, interview personnel and take photographs with companies and to get permission to publish, were invaluable. I put in bids at the university for side projects like 'Applauding Teaching & Learning' initiatives with ideas like 'assessment feedback by MP3', the £1000 award allowed for travel to Paris to interview key companies and also visit Premiere Vision, the trade show, where the main players exhibited to the fashion industry. I was always planning and thinking ahead as to how I could do visits. We visited companies in London with money left over from the award. We were surprised to find that everyone wanted to be part of the publication, this meant that we got some excellent material to publish. We were privileged to be given passwords to access online content and were sent limited edition publications to scan.

Reflecting on the publication process in this way, over the years, has revealed some interesting insights and practicalities about the process, such as:

It is not ethical to publish with a number of publisher's on similar subjects. In fact, you do become very loyal to your publisher and build the relationship over a number of years.

The more ideas for publication that you have, the more updating to 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> editions is required! This means that there always seems to be a book in the background!

When you work with a colleague any royalties are split between you, which is fair, because your time commitment is halved.

When royalties are 10% of any sales this does not mean that you make a lot of money, you do not publish for the money.

You have to estimate how long a publication will be, this used to be by the number of words used in the very early days, but now we commit ourselves to a great number of images per publication.

It is expensive to use other people's imagery and photographs so it becomes essential to observe and record interesting subject matter wherever you are in the world. These images could also be subjects for illustration in the publications. Building resource libraries of photographic images has become very important.

In terms of research outputs and the Research Excellence Framework (REF) in Britain, if publications are your key outputs it becomes very difficult to generate and publish four in the given time period, so other outputs have to

be considered. When this is your passion, as practice-based research, it is difficult to diversify meaningfully.

In the production of these publications a number of research methodologies have been employed, mostly this is practice-based research using action research and experimentation when creating visuals to explain principles. Also, qualitative methods were used by interviewing key players in FF and fashion careers in FDIP. Not only did content and relevant techniques require research but the actual design of the content/the information design required research and experimentation to find the best ways to communicate. The books also work in different disciplines in terms of fundamental principles of design.

Publications require long term planning, so you have to be well organized and always looking at opportunities for gathering content.

## **Conclusion**

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The original aim behind producing the publications was to improve teaching in fashion design and illustration classes (as well as to get published), the books became invaluable resources here. The principles illustrated were broken down into weekly classes and design and illustration, taught by us, was cross-referenced to help to 'sense make', to have a more holistic approach, with the students. Contemporary examples of design and illustration were shown that were wholly appropriate to any fashion design principle.

Design and visual communication skills were tangibly improved, both by students who had no prior knowledge of fashion design and illustration, before entering the university, but also by those who understood the fundamentals, this was especially visible when students undertook the design and illustration synthesis module that was concerned with fashion forecasting. What was harder to gauge was the effect on independent learners!

The modules taught in the fashion degrees were often starting points for what needed to be included in the publications and the publications became key texts in the module reading lists.

The fashion books sell consistently well in the fashion market and are core texts in a number of institutions, even though there is greater competition in the field of fashion publications now, twenty years on.

I believe we have achieved the original aim to improve the teaching of fashion design and illustration skills to novice fashion students and have found broader uses for the publications than was originally intended in other design disciplines.

I have not taught in fashion related disciplines for a number of years but have succeeded in applying the design and illustration process (FD:PIP and IF) to the disciplines that I now teach, such as, IMD (with some of the 'user'

approaches cross fertilising back into the fashion publications) and MGAD which is very much based on drawing and then moves into using digital tools.

I am very interested in the 'design process' and how it can be applied to other subjects (the design process in fashion, interactive media and animation starts out with many similarities from a design research point of view).

I can use the FF book to explain colour concepts to MGAD students. I can explore illustration examples and media techniques from IF with MGAD students. I can then use animation design processes, such as storyboarding and graphic novel approaches to further my fashion illustration skills. I can apply my knowledge of drawing, design, colour and media use to teach illustration, storyboarding, character design and use my developing digital skills in teaching matte painting in animation classes.

I can collaborate with IMD students to develop websites for fashion forecasting material. This crossing over of disciplines provides a consistently rich supply of potential ideas for publication development or research projects. The only problem with this approach is that perhaps the publisher does not always publish in these new areas and may not yet be interested as they do not have an established market!

There is always a desire to strive to make the most recent publication better than the last, this can be fun but does create personal pressure.

Being an author is exciting, especially when you see your books in stores or online, it is even better when you see students using them in their studies.

This journey started with a very simple idea in 1991, followed closely by an opportunity to become a published author in 1993. I have 'written' books ever since!

New technological developments have not diminished the desire to own books whether digital or printed. So far we have sold around 15,000 publications with Wiley.

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