ATG Interviews Michele Casalini

CEO and Owner, Casalini Libri

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ATG: You first launched the first version of your full-text platform in 2003 at the Frankfurt book fair with 20 publishers. Then you launched a newer version of the platform in 2007. And now you have released a brand new platform called Torrossa. Do we have the timeline correct?

MC: Yes, we launched our first collection, the award-winning Editoria Italiana Online, in 2003 with a relatively small selection of eBooks and e-journals by prominent scholarly publishers from Italy. Since my father founded the company in 1958 our mission has been to assist academic libraries in building their global collections, providing them with relevant bibliographical information, books and journals from the countries we represent.

As a library supplier, we closely followed the changes, that after the debut of **HighWire Press** in 1995, brought about the migration of STM journals to digital, and we were convinced early on that users would demand the transition to digital even in the Social Sciences and Humanities where the concept of relevance over time overshadows timeliness.

Our conviction and the great support of the library community lead us to the establishment of our Digital Division in 2000 and investments not only in systems but also in resources dedicated to working with publishers.

In 2007 we updated our platform and in 2010 we launched the Edición Española Online collection which, as EIO was and is for Italy, constitutes a snapshot of current research in the Humanities and Social Sciences from a variety of publishers from Spain. Alongside these two comprehensive collections, a number of other publishers selected our platform to offer their own special eBook collections, such as **Leo S. Olschki** and **Zanichelli**, or access to their e-journals, in either print+online or online-only package options, such **Fabrizio Serra Editore** and **Franco Angeli**.

In the past year, we launched the Torrossa platform (*www.torrossa.it*), on which the content we host continues to grow and multiply; **il Mulino** is just one of the publishers that has recently joined Torrossa.

ATG: Tell us about the latest Torrossa platform. How has it evolved from the 2003 version? In what specific ways does it reflect the changes in the marketplace?

MC: When we decided it was time for a new platform, we aggressively sought input from the librarians who use the platform everyday and work with researchers in the field and students, as well as consulting with publishers and authors. The feedback we gathered at a recent Charleston Juried Product Development Forum was also instrumental in our planning.

The Torrossa platform has all of the features today's users have come to expect: a neat and intuitive interface, a quick search textbox, highly advanced search options, personal workspace, citation tools, and more.

As for the content itself, Torrossa unifies all of our eBook and e-journal content in a single interface, offering institutions with a critical mass of academic publishing from Italy and Spain that is constantly growing.

The platform is specially designed to give us greater flexibility for continuous enhancements and further innovation as the market moves forward and new economic models for content acquisition and licensing are established.

ATG: You are also helping publishers to put up their own content, correct? This fills a gap in the availability of bibliographic information. Please tell us how this service works.

MC: Yes, the academic presses in the countries we cover are nearly all small and medium-sized publishers who do not otherwise have the technological and economic resources to make the transition from print to digital on their own. Our strategy was to create a digital showcase for scholarly research from Romance language countries. But not only are we offering our publishers their own space on a digital landscape that is heavily dominated by STM publications and, especially, by English language content, we are making the transition for them: digitizing their content in PDF format, breaking eBook files down to the chapter level, creating the metadata, cataloging and indexing. I always like to admit that if you find any inaccuracy in our databases, the error is solely our own.

ATG: You mention you have Italian and Spanish materials on the Torrossa platform and you refer to covering Romance language countries. How many titles are you covering in each language?

MC: Right now Torrossa includes a total of 13,000 eBooks and 550 e-journals for a total of over 220,000 articles and chapters. Conference proceedings comprise a fair portion of the eBooks and they are, of course, published in a variety of languages, independent from the country of publication. In descending order the languages represented are: Italian, Spanish, English, French and German.

Our efforts were concentrated in Italy at the start and then just three years ago we moved our efforts to Spain with amazing results. The number of Spanish publishers contributing to Torrossa doubled in just one year and we expect to reach over 50 in the coming months. In 2013 we'll be adding content by the Spanish publishers **Iberoamericana Vervuert** and **Casa de Velázquez** along with a host of university presses. In the meantime, we have a few publishers from Portugal and France signed on and we'll certainly be looking to consolidate those markets in the coming years.

ATG: You stated that some authors want to go to bigger international publishers? How does this effect Torrossa? How many publishers are you working with?

MC: We now have over 150 publishers contributing their content to the Torrossa platform and that number is increasing at a steady rate.

It is true that authors are attracted by the audience that the big international publishers promise and that this is a challenge for the small academic publishers we work with. But that is precisely where Torrossa comes into play: we aim to give our publishers the visibility their academic content deserves in order to make the transition to digital an even greater opportunity for them.

A further advantage Torrossa offers is context. The tradition of research in Italy, Spain, France, is heavily concentrated in the Humanities and Social Sciences and, still today, the output is not dominated by a handful of big publishers; rather there are hundreds of small scholarly publishers producing high quality research all across Western Europe. With the Torrossa platform, publishers and researchers have a framework that is specially dedicated to the scope of their publications and studies.

Our mission with Torrossa is to produce a platform that meets the expectations of publishers and the needs of libraries.

ATG: We also notice that you have a sister site, store.torrossa.it, which is dedicated to individual users so you are selling to directly to the reader. Is this a successful operation? Is it taking away from your library sales? Or are they proving to be mutually exclusive?

MC: Yes, the Torrossa platform was developed specifically for the academic library market which has its own set of user characteristics, licensing and purchasing models and institutional obligations.

Nevertheless, we wanted to make this wealth of exclusive, original-language content also available to private individuals that are outside the university context. So, we created the sister site Torrossa Store where anyone can purchase articles and chapters. Our institutional subscribers are located all over the world but customers of Torrossa Store tend to be located in Italy and Spain.

ATG: Is Torrossa econtent available for download on to mobile devices?

MC: There is a Torrossa App for private individuals to purchase eBooks to their mobile devices, and we are now working on the licensing adjustments that will allow our institutional customers to offer download to mobile devices to their users.

ATG: We understand that Casalini is cataloging all Italian books that are published. We believe you said there were 60,000 published last year and that approximately 30,000 are handled on your academic approval plan which doesn't count duplicates, children's books and textbooks. How does all this cataloging fit into the services you provide libraries and publishers?

MC: After the Digital Division, our Cataloging Division is the next largest production team of **Casalini Libri**. We are actually cataloging around 43,000 new titles a year, and these are titles published in Italy, Spain, Portugal and France which our bibliographers deem pertinent to the collections of our academic library customers, excluding reprints and translations. This work is now the basis for our print book approval plan services and, as publishers in these countries begin to release online versions of their works simultaneously or with a scheduled delay with respect to print, we will be able to offer e-preferred approval plans and we will see a fusion of our full-text platform Torrossa with our online selection and ordering interface, I Libri International.

ATG: Are there any other new initiatives that we can expect from Casalini? Any new services that you have planned that you'd like to mention here in the pages of Against the Grain?

MC: Well, with specific regard to cataloging, we are now preparing for implementation of RDA; our PCC level cataloging is an integral part of the shelf-ready processing we handle for our research library customers.

As for Torrossa, we expect to see further growth in content from West European countries, allowing us to offer ever more flexible collections.

We also look forward to experimenting with our customers — who are both libraries and publishers — different variations on the patron-driven purchasing workflow and exploring new, sustainable economic models.

The economic models proposed in STM fields are not easily applied in SSH publishing, especially in foreign languages, because of their very unique kind of user and usage. In the print world these unique qualities have their impact on print runs, for example, and book prices which are very different from their STM counterparts. I believe we must all work together to find the new "magic formula" that will balance the economics of publication and dissemination of scholarly research in the Social Sciences and Humanities. The cultural vitality of such niche areas of the academic information chain may very well depend on it.

ATG: When you are not working hard for publishers and libraries how do you like to spend your time? Are there any personal interests or hobbies that you'd like to share with our readers?

MC: I've always been very interested in environmental issues and actually we have installed a photovoltaic system on the roof of our logistics offices which powers our entire farm of servers; in this way the Torrossa platform serves as a bridge also to an environmentally friendly future.

My sister **Barbara** and our wonderful colleagues joke that Torrossa is my "baby" but, seriously, I have a wonderful 11 year old son, **Piero Niccolò** and we love to go hiking together in the mountains.

ATG: Michele, thank you for being so gracious in taking the time to answer our questions.

MC: Thank you, **Katina** and **Tom**. It has been a pleasure. 🌳