



## **2021 Year-in-Review: The New Normal**

### **Interviews with**

- **Jess Joseph**
- **Victor Pickard**
- **Joy Owango**
- **Thad McIlroy**

### **For podcast release**

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**KENNEALLY:** Welcome to Copyright Clearance Center's podcast series. I'm Christopher Kenneally.

In the final weeks of 2021, Velocity of Content is looking back at the past twelve months of programs.

While economic growth and scientific advancements in our digital age rely on technology, it's clearer than ever that everyone's full participation in innovation is crucial.

When students and employees see themselves reflected in innovation, their interest and commitment is sustained.

Jeff Joseph, president of Washington, DC, based SIIA, the principal US trade association for the software and digital content industries, told me why diversity, equity, and inclusion in hiring practices and business culture will accelerate advancement of all kinds.

**JOSEPH:** We know that the more input we have into the development of ideas, the more input we can have into innovation, the better the outcomes. So improving our outcomes on DEI is not just the morally and socially responsible thing to do. It's a good business decision.

I often joke, imagine if Alexa couldn't understand a Bostonian or a Baltimore accent. You'd miss out on that entire market. So wouldn't you want product development to be as inclusive as possible to represent a wide array of views? Not just views in difference of ethnicity or gender, but also political views and social views, to create a better outcome that can provide you with the broadest market possible.

**KENNEALLY:** And for SIIA members, this is important, too, because it connects you to customers and to communities.



JOSEPH: Absolutely. Absolutely. Again, not only do you want to develop these products that are innovative and have all these various inputs, but that then not only connects you to potential customers and broadens your customer base, but it also reflects the communities in which we work and engage. We talk a lot about DEI, but another major trend we see a lot of companies engaging in and investors engaging in – the importance of social responsibility and environmental responsibility. We know that customers, that business partners, that investors are increasingly looking for quality work and a true investment in these areas.

Some of that comes from the transparency that's now provided through social media. Customers and partners can look and see if companies are really standing behind what they're saying. We're seeing investors push for specific metrics to show performance in these areas. So again, it's not just a matter of doing the right thing because it's the right thing to do. It's really a critical matter of improving your business, of enhancing your business, and creating new market and business opportunities.

KENNEALLY: When it comes to infrastructure, Republicans in the US Congress prefer to limit their sights to traditional projects like roads and bridges, while for the Biden White House, infrastructure includes internet access, childcare, schools, and even drinking water.

Prof. Victor Pickard at the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School for Communication makes a case to add infrastructure support for public news media. Pickard calls for creation of a public media safety net that would deliver trustworthy information along with access to democracy.

KENNEALLY: We're talking about infrastructure here, but of a different kind than most people think. We've heard a lot about crumbling roads and tumbledown bridges, as well as dilapidated schools and poor connectivity in rural areas. So my question to you, Professor Pickard, is, "Is America's national information infrastructure similarly deteriorated, and how did we wind up in such bad shape?"

PICKARD: Yes, that's a great question. The first part of the question is very easy to answer, which is yes, it's in very bad shape. However, how we got here is a much longer discussion, and oftentimes it's not even as much about particular policy decisions as it is about policy indecisions or inaction. For example, we have glaring market failure where local journalism is not being supported, and the information and news that we need as a democratic society is not being provided for. Really, that should be seen as a national crisis. Yet there's been very little policy response thus far.

How did we get here? I think a big part of the problem, especially here in the US, is that we've been governed by this particular ideology, what might be referred to as market fundamentalism, where there's at least an implicit assumption that our social problems will be taken care of by the



market. And because we've relied on this commercially driven news media system for so long, when you start to have what might be referred to as market failure – I like to call it systemic market failure, because I think it's really baked into the DNA of our commercial media system – when you start seeing that the market's no longer supporting the journalism we need – in fact, driving it into the ground – then it really calls into question some of these basic ideological assumptions.

KENNEALLY: So what's important here, Victor Pickard, isn't only access to information, but it's about inclusion in the information ecosystem. That would be important, as you say, at the local level, but particularly for communities that have been excluded or not fully part of that system before.

PICKARD: That's exactly right, and you're putting your finger on a key detail that often drops out of the conversation. Sometimes, I'm guilty of also not underscoring this enough, which is when we're talking about news deserts, we're talking about market failure, we need to be absolutely clear that for many communities, especially communities of color, they have never been well served by this commercial media system. We're really talking about historical harms done to many of these communities.

And I think the best way to try to address those harms is to ensure that local communities themselves own and control their own newsrooms, so that local newsrooms look like the communities that they are meant to serve. That means that those communities need to be intimately involved in making the media – to be not just in constant conversation with local journalists, but indeed this whole distinction between journalists and members of local communities should be broken down. They should be one and the same. Again, this is a fairly utopian vision, yet at the same time, we can point to concrete examples – real-world examples of where this has happened, even how we've done this through policy in the past. So I think it is achievable. We just need to broaden our imagination about what's possible.

KENNEALLY: In October, TCC Africa, based at the University of Nairobi, Kenya, and the pan-African open access portal AfricArXiv agreed to foster a long-term strategic and sustainable approach to building and managing an international scholarly community.

According to a World Health Organization analysis, African countries receive less than one percent of global research funding, yet research has also shown that Africa has by far the strongest-growing scientific production in the world. And the number of African authors is growing at an equally astounding rate.

Joy Owango is founding director of TCC Africa and serves on the AfricArXiv board of directors. African researchers, she says, are eager to share their work with the world.



OWANGO: What is the plan for AfricArXiv? Increasing the visibility of African research. We do not believe in reinventing the wheel. There are already existing repositories that exist, and what we've done is that we've partnered with them, and through those repositories, we've created a gateway in which African research can be visible – can be much more visible.

This is a platform by Africans, for Africans, on African research. It can't get better than that. And it's multidisciplinary in nature, so any research area that any African researcher takes part in can put their work in AfricArXiv. Any non-African who is doing research on or about Africa can put their work in the platform as well.

KENNEALLY: You say that there's a need for this. There's a demand for this. There's a will to act. And it strikes me that what's important about the initiative is that this is collective activity. This is across all of Africa that this is taking place.

OWANGO: Absolutely. We have received submissions from 33 out of the 54 African countries.

As I was saying when I began the interview – I said, oh, it's scary, but it's also exciting. We have received 33 and 15 from outside Africa. These are researchers from outside Africa doing research on Africa. That says a lot.

Also, we are seeing some of the research areas that Africa is well known for being highlighted in the platform, and that is what we are talking about.

We are in a situation whereby we need to influence the narrative. Those words ring true to me, because they come from Professor Ahmed Bawa. He is the current CEO of the South African Association of Universities (sic). He keeps on saying we cannot continue complaining. We need to influence change. That is what we want to do. We cannot sit down in panels. We need to influence change and show that this is what we are capable of doing and then also seek partnerships.

KENNEALLY: How to account for the upbeat note coming from most sectors of publishing in 2021? When the pandemic struck the year before, forecasts were dire. Yet publishing in many sectors and across formats has survived and thrived

Thad McIlroy is co-author of COVID-19 and Book Publishing: Impacts and Insights for 2021. The free downloadable report reviews publishing's pandemic performance from multiple angles.

McILROY: What COVID is telling us that there is a renewal going on in the industry – fortunately, a powerful one.



So it's a great opportunity here to revisit the landscape and say, what is it that we do with physical books, and how has that changed? What is it we do with digital products, with ebooks and audio, and how is that changing? My view is that the future – it's almost a cliché, but the future is once again mastering online marketing, because that's where the growth is going to come from.

KENNEALLY: And publishers should face all those kinds of challenges with some degree of confidence, because after all, 2020 proved they can do some of this and be successful. They were successful at the shift from working in office to working from home. They were reasonably successful with the supply chain challenges that they faced, at least early on in the pandemic. So they can build on those successes.

McILROY: Indeed. Isn't that an enviable position to be in? Because for many industries, they're in very bad shape right now. There have been a large number of bankruptcies, particularly in the retail sector, over the last year that have been tragic and cost a lot of employees their livelihoods. For publishers, they've got this chance again to come up with revitalized strategies.

KENNEALLY: Given the highlight – the spotlight, I should say – on research and science that the pandemic has brought, academic publishing, STM publishing, has really stepped to the front and been the really obvious leader in publishing, at least as far as the public is concerned.

McILROY: Yeah, I've enjoyed that perhaps the most of all the changes I've been looking at. It's great when something radical moves into the marketplace. COVID sent out an urgent call for research to be initiated, but the call included not only do you have to find the answers, we need to hear about those answers ASAP. And the academic publishing industry has never been known for quick to market with a new piece of science. It's one year, a year and a half process ordinarily. Now, we're seeing that cut down to weeks in many cases. So again, great shot in the arm to that side of the publishing industry that shows them, oh, we really can do it faster if we do X, Y, Z. There's, again, a reenergization, a rebirth within that marketplace.

KENNEALLY: A common observation on the COVID-19 pandemic is that the virus has illuminated the fractures and failures in society. In the teeth of tragedy, we can see what we have long ignored and now requires our immediate attention.

In 2021, the New Normal started to crack through the COVID cocoon. Its shape isn't yet entirely clear – but this New Normal will need to be adapted to changes in the environment that require all of us to be more inclusive, more tolerant, and more resourceful.



Our co-producer and recording engineer is Jeremy Brieske of Burst Marketing. You can subscribe to this program wherever you go for podcasts and please do follow us on Twitter and Facebook.

I'm Christopher Kenneally. Thanks for joining me throughout the year on Velocity of Content from CCC. Best wishes for 2022!