



People in the News

The Kudos team

It was not a person but a team that was recently in the news, when Kudos won the ALPSP Award for Innovation in Publishing. Your *Insights* Editors were intrigued and went to meet Melinda Kenneway, Charlie Rapple and David Sommer, the founding members of the Kudos team.

To begin with, we asked Melinda, who is the Executive Director, to tell us exactly what Kudos is. 'Kudos is a toolkit for researchers and their publishers and institutions to maximize the visibility and impact of published research,' she explained. 'Kudos helps researchers to explain their work in plain language and to manage how they share that work across different communications channels and networks. We motivate researchers to spend the ten minutes this takes by showing the impact these efforts have on metrics including downloads, citations and altmetrics. One publisher's 2014 study showed that when authors used Kudos, usage of their full text more than tripled.'

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Melinda went on to explain that Kudos is free for researchers, and they can use it for any publication that has a CrossRef DOI. 'Publishers and institutions can subscribe to our intelligence services which provide a central view onto how that publisher's authors, or that institution's researchers/academics, are communicating about their work (what kinds of information do they share, and where?) and to what effect (which communications seem to have most effect on which metrics).'

She told us, 'Our aim is to bring together otherwise distributed metrics/systems/data to help everyone involved in scholarly communication to become more efficient and effective in building up visibility and impact of research. Centralizing communications makes it easy for institutions and publishers to amplify them, and generates intelligence from which everyone can learn how and where best to focus outreach efforts. We are already in the process of expanding these services to societies, funders and others who may benefit from learning which researchers are actively communicating around their work and which research is attracting attention.'

Teamwork can have its strengths but can also present challenges. We asked the three of them about how they work together and the role that each of them plays. Charlie has spent her whole career in the scholarly communications sector, initially on the technology side and latterly in marketing roles. 'Having fallen into it by accident', she explained, 'I've become surprisingly passionate about marketing – everything from researching customers' needs and ensuring this is what shapes product development, to clearly articulating the benefits

6 of the resulting products, and ensuring that the brand strategy joins up that customer perspective with the strengths and culture of the internal team. My role at Kudos now is sales and marketing director – this is a great fit, because as well as defining and executing marketing strategy, I'm greatly enjoying travelling and meeting new people. I love learning about how different institutions function when it comes to research support and scholarly communication, and bringing my past in technology to bear by thinking about integration of Kudos with institutional and library systems. A small company is a wonderful place to exercise a lot of skills and experience!

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David is the Kudos Product Director. 'I love products!', he told us. 'I've been working in the publishing community for over 20 years and from the very start I have focused on products. Whether it was creating CD-ROM encyclopaedias in the early days, developing major publishing platforms like Blackwell Synergy, building usage statistics services such as MPS Publisher Stats and ScholarlyStats and now Kudos, there is a magic for me in developing products. I think it is the idea that "thoughts become things" – especially so in the intangible world of online products. You can have an idea, sketch it out, create some mock-ups, inspire people that it is a good idea, build it and then it is a real thing out there that didn't exist and now it does! What really gives me a buzz is seeing real people and organizations use our products – knowing that something you and the team have lovingly put many hours into creating is now being used by thousands of users across the globe. Within Kudos, the three co-founders have very complementary skills and we are all very hands on, which I think sets the tone for the company. We avoid bureaucracy, keep our users at the centre of everything we do and work hard to hire talented, passionate and dedicated people. Above all – we are having fun!'

Melinda explained her motivation for joining the publishing industry. 'After graduating my main priority was to stay in Oxford, so it didn't take long for me to end up in academic publishing. I worked for OUP for 13 years, eventually becoming Marketing Director for the Journals Division. But I wanted the challenge of running my own business, so set up a consulting company called TBI Communications, offering marketing services to academic publishers and libraries, which I grew into a team over several years and which continues today as a thriving small business. As Executive Director at Kudos my role is very much one of managing the day-to-day operation of the business – its finances, logistics, policies and practices. I have a particular passion for looking towards the future – identifying trends and partnerships to help us grow, which balances well with the roles of my co-founders who help keep our feet on the floor so that we also meet the immediate demands of our customers! This constant creative tension between the present and the future keeps things lively at Kudos – especially as a small company with limited resources – but being able to combine them successfully is key to remaining agile and being able to respond swiftly to opportunities. It's the most exciting kind of work imaginable, and I'm grateful to be learning new skills and making new connections all the time.'

'It's the most exciting kind of work imaginable'

We wondered how long this dynamic trio have known each other. Charlie seems to think it was about ten years ago and it seems that UKSG was instrumental! 'I think I first met Charlie at a UKSG Quiz Night at the annual conference in Warwick', recalled David, 'trying to answer some fiendishly difficult quiz question about a 1934 saxophone soloist or the 17th highest mountain in the world! I met Melinda at a similar time, just after she had left OUP. Since then, we have all worked in consultancies, helping publishers, societies, libraries and vendors with various challenges. I think it is the variety of organizations we have been involved with over the years that has allowed us to build a detailed picture of the landscape and identify opportunities to solve problems. Our wide personal networks have also given us the credibility to meet with senior people and talk through our plans – that is what got Kudos off the ground in the first place and has allowed us to build up the service to what it is today.'

Melinda remembered that several people recommended Charlie to her when she was recruiting a new position at TBI and asked the question, 'Who's the best marketer in the

7 industry?' Melinda and Charlie worked together at TBI for some five years or more before co-founding Kudos with David. 'I'd met David on many occasions previously and worked on one or two projects with him in our consulting roles', recalled Melinda. 'His focus, passion for doing work that makes a difference and knowledge of the industry were always hugely impressive. It's an amazing experience to work with two such committed and talented people.'



The founding members of the Kudos team: David, Charlie and Melinda. 'Above all, we are having fun!'

We were intrigued to know how they came up with the idea of Kudos and why they thought the time was right. 'We would often get together at conferences and talk through the hot topics and key challenges in scholarly communications', explained David. 'Back in 2012, at the ALPSP conference, we were talking again about how much of what is published goes unread, or uncited. This was not a new problem, of course, but with the shift to article-level metrics and related changes in researcher evaluation, we found ourselves newly inspired. Our experience of working with publishers meant we knew it wasn't realistic for publishers to be able to increase the level of marketing and PR that individual articles and book chapters receive; we knew that institutional press and comms teams also don't have sufficient capacity or subject expertise to promote everything their researchers publish. We knew that researchers themselves are best placed to tell the story behind their work – it's almost crowdsourcing, in the sense that a small amount of effort from each individual can amount to a huge amount of extra capacity in the system. And we could see that newly available metrics, and changing approaches to assessment, were creating an environment in which researchers would want to take more ownership of the reach and impact of their work.'

Finding a name that everyone can agree on can be a challenge for any team. We asked Melinda if settling on the name Kudos had been the subject of heated debate. Melinda explained, 'It's a classic case of a working title that became the obvious choice. I don't think we considered any alternatives! It encapsulates so neatly what, ultimately, we are

8 helping researchers to do, which is to gain credit for their work –not in the sense of formally having it attributed to them, but in the more nebulous sense of generating the discussion that leads to wider recognition. Kudos is focused on publications now, but in the long term we will provide a suite of tools for managing wider reputational factors, so it was important that the name we chose was broad enough to encompass that vision.'

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All 'start-up' companies face challenges and particularly so in the current economic environment. We asked David about the biggest hurdles they have faced. 'In many ways, we're not a typical start-up – we were lucky to be able to call on our experience and connections to quickly gain support for what we were doing, both in the sense of quickly generating revenue, and in the sense of having credibility that facilitated early partnerships. The most obvious challenge, not unique to start-ups of course, is that you never have enough resource to do everything you want to do as quickly as you want to do it! Strategy is about choosing what to do and more importantly, what not to do right now. It would be so easy to get distracted. We employ ruthless prioritization when considering which features to work on, but this is set across a background of our long-term product roadmap.'

We asked David about the early signs that Kudos was going to be a success. 'Signing up our first three publisher partners – the Royal Society of Chemistry, Taylor & Francis and AIP Publishing – for our pilot in 2013 was an exciting endorsement of our ideas', he explained. 'At the end of that pilot, our analysis showed that the Kudos toolkit had increased usage by 19% when authors had used it for their articles. We had also managed to hugely exceed our targets for the pilot – we had anticipated perhaps 1,000 researchers signing up over three months, and we achieved that in the first 24 hours! During the months after that, we were successful in gaining a £164,000 grant from the UK government, and signed up 25 publishers to participate in the next stage of Kudos. Each of those milestones reinforced our vision and our belief and propelled us to the next stage in our growth.'

Charlie went on to tell us how people are using Kudos and the difference it is making. 'Firstly, people explain their work in Kudos by answering simple questions about their work: "What is it about?" and "Why is it important?". These help people within the field to more quickly skim and scan more of the literature; they also help people outside the field, and non-native language speakers, to begin to understand the work. There's also an SEO (search engine optimization) advantage as often the language used to describe words in Kudos includes common words that don't actually appear in the original work but might be used by non-specialists looking for works on that topic. You can add a "perspective" that tells the personal story behind the work: why you're interested in the field, what your specific role was in this project, or perhaps how this particular piece of work contributed to your career. These are the kinds of "human interest" points that bring the work alive and make it much more interesting to mainstream audiences. You can also use Kudos to link your publication to any other related material that is online, which helps to draw all these resources together and provide a single rich entry point for people interested in your work. You can keep all these fields updated as your work continues, or as the wider field evolves. All of this builds the discoverability of the work both within and beyond the author's field. Secondly, you can use Kudos as a platform from which to manage how you share your work. We generate trackable links that you can post directly from Kudos into Twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook, or that you can copy and post into other academic networks, elsewhere on the web, or send via e-mail. These mean that however you typically let people know about your work, Kudos can make that process trackable so that you can begin to understand which of these networks or media is most effective for increasing your readership. This leads directly into the third step – measuring. We pull together a range of metrics – clicks, views, downloads, altmetrics and citations – and map these against your "explaining" and "sharing" actions so that for the first time you can see, all in one place, which actions correlate to which results. This is exciting for researchers because it's often the first time they've had such a holistic view of the interest in their work – many publishers are not yet able to provide article-level downloads, and many researchers don't

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know about altmetrics services. We've had lots of lovely feedback from people who were amazed to see the level of views of their work – and who were inspired to do more explaining and sharing as a consequence! This is good for institutions and publishers – and societies and funders – too. Not only do they benefit from increased readership of research, but because researchers are doing this explaining and sharing in a single central platform, it's easy for institutions and publishers to build on their efforts, re-using plain language explanations in wider marketing, "liking" and "resharing" to broader networks, and improving their guidance and support to researchers based on what they learn from Kudos. Ultimately, Kudos is helping researchers gain more recognition for their work, and helping that work reach a wider audience.'

'We've had lots of lovely feedback'



'So wonderful to feel that all our efforts to make that vision a reality had been recognized'.

It must have been quite a thrill to win the 2015 ALPSP Award for Innovation in Publishing; we asked Charlie how she felt when the award was announced. 'The world went into slow motion for a moment! It was so rewarding to feel that our vision was shared by the people we're doing it for – in the sense that the judges are all either publishers or librarians from research institutions. And so wonderful to feel that all our efforts to make that vision a reality had been recognized. Just a lovely moment to savour! It unlocked a lot of new interest in what we're doing, too, so the effect continues with a glut of new enquiries and new partnerships thanks to the awareness raised by the award, and its endorsement of our services.'

Our final question was for Melinda: what is next for Kudos, we wanted to know. 'There are so many more audiences that can benefit from what we are doing', she explained. 'We are already working on our services for funders and societies; we're also looking at how people in industry can derive valuable insights from our growing data set, and exploring how to provide similar services for non-scholarly publications. But Kudos, and reputation, is about much more than publications – and we're very excited about the different ways we can help our researchers showcase the broader story of their research.'

We very much enjoyed our visit to the Kudos team – and we won't forget the moral of their story: Never miss a UKSG Quiz Night – you have no idea where it might lead!

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Steve and Lorraine

Competing interests

The author has declared no competing interests.

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