



Profile

Frances Pinter

Frances Pinter is a well-known figure in the information industry. Her fascinating career has not only included publishing, but also establishing an international library consortium and the innovation of new business models for the scholarly monograph.

Frances was born of Hungarian parents in Venezuela. The family then moved to Australia before finally emigrating to the United States when she was five. At the age of 20, Frances came to study at the London School of Economics and fell in love ... with London. She faced the challenge of finding a way to stay in her beloved city, but with no skills, not even being able to type well, she did not know how she would get a work permit. Her solution, at the age of 23, was to spend her life's savings of £1,000 to set up a publishing company – thus employing herself and obtaining the permit!

For 21 years Frances ran Pinter Publishers, known for its innovative social science titles. That changed in 1994 when she was headhunted by George Soros, the Hungarian-American business magnate and philanthropist. Frances had first met him in 1991 when he had asked her advice on setting up a university press in Budapest. This time he wanted to know if she could organize a project to translate key books in the humanities and social sciences for the 30 post-communist bloc countries! Frances took on the task, realizing that it was important for each country to have its own translation programme. The impact of such a project is difficult to imagine now, but until then academic books from Western countries had not been available at all in the communist bloc. A newly-established Czech publisher once told Frances that Czech intellectuals learned Polish because the Polish Embassy was the only place that had a library with Western books – a paltry few translations in Polish.

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Frances says, “It was only after George broke the pound, I went to work for him [full time]”. Soros realized that there was a great deal more that his foundation could do following the breakdown of the monopoly state publishing structure after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

127 Frances led many projects that focused on helping the development of an independent publishing sector in ex-communist bloc countries. These included training independent publishers and booksellers in all 30 transition countries in management, finance, marketing and copyright, the setting up of ISBN agencies and the establishment of book distribution networks.

One of the most fascinating projects was to provide textbooks in the new era of freedom. Previously, the state monopoly publishing system had resulted in just one textbook for each subject at each level. Frances helped facilitate the introduction of competition, which encouraged schoolteachers to write textbooks and to ensure better editorial and production processes.

It was during this time that Frances fell in love again, this time with librarians. George Soros called Frances to say that books were not getting to Russian libraries because the state distribution system had collapsed. In answer to this, the Pushkin Project was born. Publishers were invited to submit titles to a collective catalogue and librarians were invited to select for their libraries and in the first year make a 25% contribution to the costs. However, the rouble had just collapsed, the banks were shut and the railways all closed down – but the redoubtable Russian librarians gathered their money together, and got it to Moscow in relays, taking growing sacks of money on each stage of the journey.

The project Frances is proudest of in terms of infrastructure and lasting value is Electronic Information for Libraries (eIFL.net). In the late 1990s, she conceived the idea of a library consortium to enable affordable access to commercial e-journals for academic and research libraries in Central and Eastern Europe. The idea came to her during a rather dull UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) meeting when she first heard about a Springer-Verlag countrywide site licence offer to Russia, and she had a vision of what would happen if this was scaled up to include lots of publishers, in lots of countries. She persuaded George Soros to back it – and so it was launched. Today, eIFL.net successfully collaborates with libraries and library consortia in more than 50 developing and transition countries in Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America.

By the end of the millennium, with a much improved publishing industry in the ex-Soviet Bloc, it looked like 'mission accomplished'. Frances returned to the UK as a Visiting Fellow at the London School of Economics, where she undertook research on civil society.

Then Frances took a total career break and went to France, where she and her husband bought an old Cognac distillery and renovated the barns there into cottages. This sounds an idyllic time in the French countryside with sheep and a pet goat. But not for long ... by 2002, Frances was back in London as CEO of International House Trust, which specializes in language education – quite a change from publishing.

In 2006, Frances came across Creative Commons (CC) and realized that it could be adopted by developing country publishers to their benefit and so led the Publishing and Alternative Licensing Model of Africa (PALM Africa), a project based in Uganda and South Africa. She also recognized that Creative Commons had potential in monograph publishing in the humanities and social sciences. In 2009, she met her old friend Richard Charkin, who had only recently taken up the post of Executive Director of Bloomsbury Publishing. He was interested in diversifying Bloomsbury into academic publishing, and Frances suggested that he do this, but using a new model that she had been working on – online publishing with a Creative Commons licence. She was able to point to evidence which showed that freely available text online actually promoted the sales of print books, and suggested he give it a try. One week later, Richard Charkin called Frances to come in and talk. She gave a presentation based on the experience of the HSRC, a South African open access publisher, which had put its books online and had seen a 234% increase in print sales. Richard Charkin and Jonathan Glasspool thought it was a good idea and asked Frances to prepare a business plan. She did, and "hats off to Bloomsbury" for inviting Frances to establish the new imprint, Bloomsbury Academic. The division focused on original

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128 research-led publications in the humanities and social sciences, publishing free online on a Creative Commons Non-Commercial licence with print and e-books available for sale. During the course of the next three years, Frances not only saw her books published, but published profitably.

Currently, Frances is involved in two projects. The first is the digitization of the Churchill Archive involving some 800,000 documents and the development of a sophisticated platform, all to be launched in August 2012 for Bloomsbury. Actually holding the original of the memorable 'This was their finest hour' Winston Churchill speech of 1940 was a special moment.

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Having mastered Churchill's papers, Frances' second challenge is to enable all monograph publishers to make their work available on a CC licence by changing the way these books are paid for. The British Library is giving Frances desk space while she works on this new model, which suggests the separation of the fixed costs from the variable – the fixed costs being the selection, managing peer review, editorial, formatting and design costs and the variable being the print and distribution costs of publishing a monograph. By means of a consortium of purchasing libraries paying the fixed costs, publishers would agree to publish open access.

Frances has based her idea on the Groupon model whereby a consortium of libraries would, after each went through their normal selection process, aggregate their order. Depending on the size of the consortium, savings could amount to well over half or more than what is paid now for a single copy of a print monograph. There would be benefits for all parties. Libraries would not only be enabling open access, but would also receive membership benefits such as discounts for the other offerings from the publisher.

Publishers would reduce the high financial risk involved in monograph publishing by securing an income for the provision services: selection, peer review, editing, typography and design, etc. They would earn additional income from the sale of print and bespoke and enhanced e-books for e-readers. The authors would benefit from greater discoverability, more readers, and greater sales of print and e-book products. Finally, for the reader, says Frances, "the benefits would be incalculable".

Frances does not yet have a name for this new model for open access monographs, but will stand anyone who comes up with a winning title a bottle of champagne!

When asked if publishers were perhaps resistant to the very concept of being a service provider, Frances agreed that some are, but they "need to get over it". David Worlock once said that the publisher is like a ringmaster in a circus tent, orchestrating the performers: the authors and distributors, etc. However, Frances points out that the ringmaster's role can be a dangerous one, especially when the wind is blowing through and pulling at the tent. The ringmaster has no control and may indeed be being trampled by the stampeding elephants (in this analogy, Google, Amazon and Apple). So, publishers will have to change and think of a different performance.

Frances has great vision and is not afraid to propose business models that might make the more traditional of publishers feel rather nervous. "I do put myself on the line", said Frances, "but it gets easier as you establish a track record. At least people will listen". Frances believes passionately in scholarly research and in digital content providing the opportunity for global communication, openly available so that anyone who has access to the internet can use it. Frances is equally passionate about preserving the professionalism of publishing.

When Frances is not publishing, digitizing archives or inventing (and implementing) new business models, she can be found every Monday morning at 8 am walking on Primrose Hill, where she has a great view of her beloved London.



Frances sharing a hug with Rosie the koala on a recent trip to Australia