

Antoni Comas, president of the Publishers Guild of Catalonia

‘Young people are needed who are willing to learn and create added value at whichever company they work for’

Antoni Comas has been the general director of Editorial Tibidabo since 1990 and is the current president of the Publishers Guild of Catalonia. He read Business Studies at the University of Barcelona and did postgraduate studies at prestigious Harvard, Boston and Columbia universities. From 1986 to 1990 he was the general secretary of Catalunya Ràdio.

Which profiles are currently most in demand in your sector?

At present, there is a shortage of people who are willing to learn and in turn create added value in the company they work for. In particular, we are looking for people who understand what they have at hand, by that I mean, who understand the whole editorial process and have the capacity to manage it.

More specifically, in the publishing industry, we are looking for people who have digital publishing skills as we lack competent people for the inevitable switch from traditional to digital formats.

What key skills are necessary for each of these profiles?

The great advantage for young people is that they are better prepared to face the big change that is transforming the publishing industry through new technologies. Young people are best suited to adapting as they are more malleable and can grasp and improve upon this transformation.

The qualities of young people, and the most sought after by many companies, are imagination, enthusiasm and drive, but they lack the desire to learn.

Which are the main reasons for the current demand in each one of these professions?

On the one hand, companies need to run the publishing industry as they have been doing until now and, on the other, they need to be prepared to face the change that is taking place. However, academic courses relevant to the publishing industry do not provide management tools; students find that they lack an understanding of financial management and they have to learn this on the job.

As Spanish universities are not able to provide this type of education, training has to be provided by the companies and personnel must be willing to go through a learning process when they are in the job market.

There are no accurate studies that outline what a publishing house is. Above all, a book is an intellectual property, not a commodity, but it is marketed. Therefore, you must adopt a universal vision of the whole process: the whole production line (what comes before and what comes after).

Which professional profiles needed in the industry currently have a significant shortage of candidates?

In order to digitalise contents and enter into the world of electronic books you have to go outside Spain, (in particular to France), where there is more experience. Within Spain there are only two or three companies that can digitalise contents so you have to import most of the work.

The eBook has opened a wide field of study that will change the roles and relationships between the graphic and the digital publishing industries. Nonetheless, Spain lacks the people to learn about this topic

who can also face and adapt to changes competitively.

How do you think that these shortages should be resolved? (improving the level and/or the educational content in these circles, bringing in expertise from elsewhere...)

Changes to the publishing industry, as with any transition, will occur slowly and involve a structural change that will completely transform the business model (many variables such as intellectual property rights still need to be defined). Publishing industry activities will remain largely unchanged in terms of the production process (sorting, classification, systemisation, etc.), but management and, above all, distribution channels will change. However, the questions of how to deal with intellectual property, how to control piracy and how to pay the authors, remain open. It is for this reason that you need to have an overview of the business and the ability to put forward viable proposals.

Confronting this change needs to be a joint task between the education system, which needs to be up to date in order to provide students with the theoretical grounding that they'll need later on, the companies, which need to be willing to train young people with on-the-job training, and, above all, people, who must be willing to learn.

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