

In 2008, Bloomsbury Academic, a new imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing in the United Kingdom, appointed her its founding publisher in London. As part of the launch, Frances convinced Bloomsbury to differentiate themselves by putting out monographs for free online under a Creative Commons license (BY-NC or BY-NC-ND, i.e., Attribution-NonCommercial or Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs). This was seen as risky, as the biggest cost for publishers is getting a book to the stage where it can be printed. If everyone read the online book for free, there would be no print-book sales at all, and the costs associated with getting the book to print would be lost. Surprisingly, Bloomsbury found that sales of the print versions of these books were 10 to 20 percent higher than normal. Frances found it intriguing that the Creative Commons–licensed free online book acts as a marketing vehicle for the print format.

Frances began to look at customer interest in the three forms of the book: 1) the Creative Commons–licensed free online book in PDF form, 2) the printed book, and 3) a digital version of the book on an aggregator platform with enhanced features. She thought of this as the “ice cream model”: the free PDF was vanilla ice cream, the printed book was an ice cream cone, and the enhanced e-book was an ice cream sundae.

After a while, Frances had an epiphany—what if there was a way to get libraries to underwrite the costs of making these books up until they’re ready to be printed, in other words, cover the fixed costs of getting to the first digital copy? Then you could either bring down the cost of the printed book, or do a whole bunch of interesting things with the printed book and e-book—the ice cream cone or sundae part of the model.

This idea is similar to the article-processing charge some open-access journals charge researchers to cover publishing costs. Frances began to imagine a coalition of libraries paying for the prepress costs—a “book-processing charge”—and providing everyone in the world

with an open-access version of the books released under a Creative Commons license.

This idea really took hold in her mind. She didn’t really have a name for it but began talking about it and making presentations to see if there was interest. The more she talked about it, the more people agreed it had appeal. She offered a bottle of champagne to anyone who could come up with a good name for the idea. Her husband came up with *Knowledge Unlatched*, and after two years of generating interest, she decided to move forward and launch a community interest company (a UK term for not-for-profit social enterprises) in 2012.

---

She describes the business model in a paper called *Knowledge Unlatched: Toward an Open and Networked Future for Academic Publishing*:

- 1 Publishers offer titles for sale reflecting origination costs only via Knowledge Unlatched.
- 2 Individual libraries select titles either as individual titles or as collections (as they do from library suppliers now).
- 3 Their selections are sent to Knowledge Unlatched specifying the titles to be purchased at the stated price(s).
- 4 The price, called a Title Fee (set by publishers and negotiated by Knowledge Unlatched), is paid to publishers to cover the fixed costs of publishing each of the titles that were selected by a minimum number of libraries to cover the Title Fee.
- 5 Publishers make the selected titles available Open Access (on a Creative Commons or similar open license) and are then paid the Title Fee which is the total collected from the libraries.