About the MIT Press

History

The MIT Press is the only university press in the United States whose list is based in science and technology. This does not mean that science and engineering are all we publish, but it does mean that we are committed to the edges and frontiers of the world -- to exploring new fields and new modes of inquiry. (For a time we described our publishing program as chasing "The Moving Frontier," but we've moved beyond even that.) We publish about 200 new books a year and over 40 journals. We are a major publishing presence in fields as diverse as architecture, social theory, economics, cognitive science, and computational science, and we have a long-term commitment to both design excellence and the efficient and creative use of new technologies. Our goal is to create books and journals that are challenging, creative, attractive, and yet affordable to individual readers.

Our history starts in 1926 when the physicist Max Born visited the Massachusetts Institute of Technology to deliver a set of lectures on Problems of Atomic Dynamics. The Institute published the lectures under its own imprint, and that book is numbered 1 in the archives of The MIT Press. In 1932, James R. Killian, Jr.--editor of the Institute's alumni magazine and future scientific adviser to President Kennedy and tenth president of MIT--engineered the creation of an Institute-sponsored imprint called Technology Press, which published eight titles over the next five years. In 1937, John Wiley & Sons took on editorial and marketing functions for the young imprint, which during the next 25 years published 125 titles. In 1962, MIT amicably severed the Wiley connection and upgraded its imprint to an independent publishing house, naming it The MIT Press. One of the Independent Press's first new employees was graphic innovator Muriel Cooper, who designed our distinctive...
1937, John Wiley & Sons took on editorial and marketing functions for the young imprint, which during the next 25 years published 125 titles. In 1962, MIT amicably severed the Wiley connection and upgraded its imprint to an independent publishing house, naming it The MIT Press. One of the independent Press's first new employees was graphic innovator Muriel Cooper, who designed our distinctive logo and set the course for the design innovations that have been a hallmark of the Press's work to the present day. A Journals division was added in 1968, and a European marketing office was opened in 1969. (Today we sell a higher proportion of our products outside the United States than any other U.S. university press.)

The creative burst and explosive growth of the 1960s slackened with the library cutbacks of the early 1970s, and by the end of that decade the Press knew that it had to rethink what it was doing. We developed a strategy of focusing the list on a few key areas and publishing in depth in those areas. The initial core consisted of architecture, computer science and artificial intelligence, economics, and the emerging interdiscipline of cognitive science. The plan worked wonderfully, and by the mid-1980s the Press was again thriving. As the list developed, occasional offshoots sprouted (neuroscience, for example, was spun off from cognitive science in 1987), while a few smaller areas in which we continued to publish -- technology studies, aesthetic theory, design, and social theory -- have remained viable and interesting components of what has become a unique mix. Our latest addition was an environmental science list, started in the early 1990s.

Today the Press continues to thrive. In fact, our archive received book 8000 in August 2006.

The Press's enthusiasm for innovation is reflected in our continuing exploration of the electronic frontier. Since the late 1960s, we have experimented with generation after generation of electronic publishing tools. From those messy paper-tape systems through IBM Composers to our present-day use of direct-to-press production technologies, our intensive use of the Internet, and our commitment to new electronic products -- whether digital journals or entirely new forms of communication -- we have continued to look for the most efficient and effective means to serve our readership. These readers have come to expect excellence from our products, and they can count on us to maintain a commitment to producing rigorous and innovative information products in whatever forms the future of publishing may bring.