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# Common Cause

## Librarians and Publishers — The Twain Met

by Roger M. Williams

(Director of Public Affairs,  
Association of American Publishers)



"Most librarians' meetings with publishers involve a single publisher. Here we had commercial and not-for-profit publishers as well as university presses and professional societies that publish — and more than one of each. Their presence shows that publishing is not monolithic. It tells librarians, 'Don't talk to one; talk to lots of them.'"

Carol Risher, vice president for copyright of the Association of American Publishers, was reflecting on the just-completed meeting of the **Library of Congress Network Advisory Committee**. Entitled "Network Content — A Dialogue with Publishers," the meeting of the long-established NAC turned out to be just that. In one and one-half firmly packed days at the **National Institutes of Health**, publishers appeared on three of the five panels, explaining in detail what they do and why, including in such sensitive areas as pricing and fair use.

The publishers' overall aim, said Timothy King of John Wiley & Sons, was to clear away the underbrush of misunderstanding: "Some of our concerns unite us with libraries — in those, we should make common cause. Some subjects divide us — in those, we should seek common ground."

The assembled librarians seemed to agree. At least they put forth very few even faintly hostile comments. They seemed willing to suspend disbelief, even suspicion, and listen with an open mind; their post-panel questions sought not to argue but to elicit more information.

Maybe that was because the publishers present dealt, much more than they normally do, with economic matters: how they arrive at their prices; different cost components of publishing; what they need in terms of sales volume to break even; group pricing ("let's make a deal") versus one price for all; and so forth.

In the first panel, "The Information Providers," Wiley's King declared that the future network for electronic publishing, to be "orderly," will need to be

complete, with authenticity of the information assured; "open to all and even-handed, with no mandated licensing and no entity deciding what to accept or reject;" equipped with "content identifiers;" and "accessible to all" information providers. Such a network, he added, is not available.

On the sensitive subject of copyright, King said that "continued, effective implementation [of copyright laws] is needed to assure the publication of the widest range of works and the necessary investment in their development." If copyright is widely ignored, in other words, publishers will have little incentive to produce — especially financially marginal works or those likely to be ripped off.

He added, however, that the matter of fair use "needs clarification." He sees a

***"The academic monograph . . . is publishing's 'most endangered species.'" — Edward Barry***

greater proportion of publisher sales coming from photocopying with permission rather than from "whole books," and that, too, argues for librarians' adherence to copyright laws: "If an institution or individual copies chunks of a work without paying for them, publishers won't receive the revenues they need," and their output will inevitably suffer.

King said that he expects more subscription arrangements, as distinct from transactional dealings, in photocopying and that subscriptions and "limited licensing" represent the future in the field. (Answering a subsequent question, however, he observed that publishers and their institutional customers "need a middle ground between only subscriptions and only transactions. The system needs to have the capacity for both.")

Edward Barry of Oxford University Press is a not-for-profit publisher.

But he echoed King's declaration that all publishers must make a profit — or "surplus," as he delicately called it — in order to be able to produce a wide range of monographs and other low- or no-profit materials. The academic monograph, he said, is publishing's "most endangered species."

"I don't fear the electronic environment," Barry said. "I do worry that a lack of understanding of it will hurt the cause of scholarship."

Commenting on the tenuous future of journals in the electronic age, Barry said, "We are not yet seeing a decline in subscriptions for the most well-established journals. But I have little doubt that we'll see that in the future as electronic versions become increasingly available." A decline is already evident, he added, "in subscriptions for low-priced social science and humanities journals. I'm worried about journals in those fields. What's going to happen to them in the electronic environment?"

Getting down to a publisher's financial reality, Barry noted that "A research monograph costs us, on average, \$20,000 to publish, including about \$10,000 for the 'editorial' processes. Yet it brings in less than \$20,000. And monograph sales are continuing to plummet.

"Without adequate copyright protection and an equitable way of charging for monographs, it's difficult to see how the presses that publish them will be able to continue to fund peer review, content and copy editing, promotion, and the other processes that go into producing them."

Barry also stressed a major theme of publishers: that they do not simply print the materials they're given but also "add value" to them. "There's no question that we do that," he said. "In many cases, the publisher conceives and funds the project, then hires the scholars to write or edit or review it, and performs the



functions necessary to deliver it to readers in an accessible, attractive format."

In the second panel, the **American Psychological Association's Dennis Auld** cautioned publishers that "electronic products have to be easy to use — librarians don't want to incur the costs of training their people to use them."

**David Rodgers** said that his organization, the **American Mathematical Society**, has gained experience with sev-

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***"Information is not the important element in the electronic world — access is . . ." — Pat Moholt***

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eral electronic publishing systems. For one of the society's publications, *Mathematical Reviews*, it analyzed the costs involved in creating the print, CD-ROM, and tape versions and found that 80 percent went to creating the database source of information. The society then determined an "access fee" per institution to help recoup the costs and obliged institutions to pay a separate, additional subscription for whichever version it chose to have delivered. By linking prices to separate areas, Rodgers said, the *Mathematical Reviews* model helped librarians understand the pricing process.

In "Setting the Scene for Libraries," librarian **Pat Moholt** of **Columbia University** observed wryly that publishers and librarians are both "suspended between fear and hope." She cautioned the former that, "Information is not the important element in the electronic world — access is, finding the information needed to solve a particular problem." She told publishers, too, that the electronic world is "much more complex for librarians than its print counterpart;" therefore, "every aspect of the old system has to be reconsidered;" yet, "with some exceptions, librarians are as reluctant to leap into the new one as publishers."

Not just reluctant, she noted, but "threatened," by the real prospect of "being bypassed by publishers using document delivery systems to put materials directly into users' hands."

On the matter of copyright, Moholt delivered two other forthright opinions: "unmitigated chaos" will result if the move by some universities to retain copyright succeeds; and, in the matter of pho-

tocopying, "the objective should not be to deter use [of copyrighted materials] but to enhance it, and I hope we can come up with a plan where the issue of fair use becomes unimportant." She also supported the contention that publishers add value to what they produce, saying, "There's a lot of processing between the support of research [leading to an article or book] and the creation of the end product."

**Marshall Keys** of **NELINET** succinctly identified a key difference between librarians and publishers: "Librarians tend to believe that information is, or should be, free." The Internet and the atmosphere it has created have fostered that perception, he said. "The idea of intellectual property as a saleable commodity, other than by the author of the work, seems to some an utterly foreign concept. Indeed, there's an increasingly

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***"... perhaps librarians could talk to publishers informally, . . ." — Julie Blixrud***

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common phrase, 'the library as publisher.'"

Seconding what publishers had said early on, Keys concluded, "These beliefs pose a serious problem for the future of scholarly publishing."

Librarians, according to Keys, are "woefully ignorant" of the costs of publishing. Their education "must begin early in the process — in library school, with library organizations." They need to know that publishers do much more than provide "access" to information: "They filter and screen it; so does a librarian, in a secondary sense. And that's really important during an age of information explosion."

What can publishers do to counteract misconceptions? "They can educate academics and librarians on the real contributions made by the publishing process" — in other words, on the importance of value added. "They need to educate us about the economics and ownership of their businesses, to demonstrate that they're not Robert Maxwell lighting an expensive cigar while some ghetto-reared child leaves the library empty-handed because he can't afford the reproduction fee for the materials he needs."

In a panel on "Content Issues," **Robert Badger** of **Springer-Verlag** listed

two essential elements of publishing journals electronically: "article integrity — not cutting articles apart and sending pieces over various networks;" and "peer review — for the benefit not only of the publishing community but also of the scientific audience to whom the article is directed."

**Janet Fisher** of **MIT Press**, which has published or is about to publish a variety of new electronic journals, pointed out the enhancements — including continually updated cross references — to the electronic versions of the journals the university publishes. MIT, Fisher said, has spent a lot of time wrestling with the uses that will be permitted under the terms of a subscription to one of its electronic journals.

Fisher cited one new MIT project, *The Chicago Journal of Computer Science*, and the decisions that she and her colleagues had made concerning dissemination of its contents. A subscription to the journal, they decided, would permit its contents to be printed and stored on shelves or disseminated electronically to library patrons; placed on a campus network and transferred electronically; and converted to other media. Clearly, MIT, in wrestling with the emerging issues of electronic versus print dissemination, had concluded that it should be quite permissive in order to maximize readership. Other libraries, and other publishers, might react differently.

**Ann Okerson** of the **Association of Research Libraries** has studied the contents of electronic networks, and she said she has found a profusion of valuable

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***"After all, newspapers are capable of providing information in ways libraries can't possibly match." — Frank Grisham***

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new products only available electronically. Despite the Nets' still-unsophisticated nature, the materials they transmit have expanded phenomenally and will continue to do so: "They clearly have value and attract subscribers." For authors, she said, the networks offer a medium that should be regarded not merely as an adjunct to traditional publication but also as a new and valuable outlet to the public.

**Paula Kaufman**, dean of the **University of Tennessee** library system,



while not contesting the assertion that publishers add value, declared in a presentation read to the group that "libraries also add value, by providing access, authentication, preservation, and support." At least some of those contributions, she said, will continue in the elec-

***"The cost pressures over the last five years have been in the people needed to support electronic systems . . ." — William Arms***

tronic environment, and a new or much more demanding one will emerge: "the training and assistance we provide to users."

**Frank P. Grisham**, chair of NAC, said during the question period, "I recently heard an executive of the *Atlanta Constitution* outline its plans for providing vast quantities of information electronically. If even half of what he says comes true, will libraries be left in the dust? After all, newspapers are capable of providing information in ways libraries can't possibly match."

In the "Distribution Issues" panel, **Vinton Cerf** of the **Corporation for National Research Initiatives** observed that the model of photocopying "dependent on paying for copies may not be the best way in the electronic environment . . . We'll see changes in the subscription process — no more buying of material unseen, for example." **Bernard Rous** of the **Association for Computing Machinery** noted that the Internet "may help [journal] publishing by reducing the pressure to publish [by conventional means] to more manageable levels."

**Ward Shaw** of **CARL Systems** said that a search for the right "price points" has in many cases pushed "copyright fees above our service fee." Some of these copyright fees, he added, have created "an insurmountable barrier to network use" of the material involved — "a defense mechanism" for the publisher involved. "We need new mechanisms for pricing at levels end users can afford to pay."

In the concluding panel on "User Issues," **Suzanne Grefsheim**, librarian at the **National Institutes of Health**, sounded an optimistic note about the future of libraries and librarians in the electronic age: "I believe [they] will remain the intermediary between users and scientific publishers in the era of electronic

publishing because they can provide solutions for many of the issues raised by this medium.

"For example, they can negotiate reasonable costs for institutional access; they can provide a single search interface for the disparate information resources available to users; they can facilitate access to the resources by teaching their clients to be self-sufficient users of those resources and by making users aware of which resources will meet their needs. And, by providing high-end workstations in the library, they will guarantee that staff at all levels, and students where they are a factor have equal access to electronic resources."

**William Arms** of **Carnegie Mellon University** talked about the high cost of personnel: "The cost pressures over the last five years have been in the people needed to support electronic systems, not in subscriptions or hardware. That's clearly the wrong way to go." **Gary Marchionini** of the **University of Maryland's College of Library and Information Services** returned to the topic of value added, urging publishers to realize that "value may be added by users or librarians" as well as by themselves. Both publishers and librarians, he said, should appreciate that "we're collaborating and cooperating to do some of the same tasks." He also urged a "focus on services, not products; publishers must provide a mixture" of the two.

**Judith Turner** of the *Chronicle of Higher Education* reported that an electronic version of the *Chronicle* has not been a big success — even offered free of charge — "because it's a different product." A survey of the electronic version's usage, issued through the University of Southern California, found that 1,000 people accessed it during the year, and 50 "read it on a weekly basis." Turner also explained how the *Chronicle* concluded that the electronic version was a totally different product from the print version and had to be developed with principles and marketing policies of the new media in mind.

The conference overall produced a strong sub-theme of hope that publishers and librarians can realize how much they need and depend on each other. In the summing up, **Julie Blixrud** of the **Council of Library Resources** emphasized the point: "The title of this conference was 'A Dialogue with Publishers,' and it worked. That would suggest that perhaps librarians could talk to publishers — over lunch or whatever," that is, informally, without having to be drawn together by an organization or a conference.

**Frank Grisham** seconded that idea, saying that the formal and informal conversations he'd had with publishers at the conference had been "extremely helpful. We need to find ways and occasions to do this often." ☛

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