April 2002

Bet You Missed It -- Press Clippings -- In the News -- Carefully Selected by Your Crack Team of News Sleuths

Pamela M. Rose
University at Buffalo, pmrose@acsu.buffalo.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg

Part of the Library and Information Science Commons

Recommended Citation
DOI: https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.3194

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.
to all of our customers, publishers, partners and friends for your notes, calls, and continuing expressions of encouragement and support.

When the mighty fall, encouragement and support rarely are the only feelings expressed. Many bystanders enjoyed the show, and with Goliath already on the turf, Davids everywhere loaded up their slingshots. At a certain point, it was suddenly natural to talk dismissively about eBooks, to say they “weren’t ready,” to refer to the printed book as an unsurpassed technology platform, and to roll the eyes at the very mention of netLibrary. “What? You mean the people in marketing were wrong?” was one facetious listerv header for a posting on eBooks. “What a shock, marketing people over hyping something.”

But it hadn’t been only the marketing people on this one. Anybody with anything to do with eBooks, it had seemed, briefly, was fully credentialed to offer forecasts at any time and in any medium on the future of the book (none too rosy, in some of them, for the print variety), on reading, education, publishing, scholarship, libraries. The virtual podium got awfully crowded. NetLibrary was hardly out there alone.

Should netLibrary have done it differently? Could they have promoted their eBooks patiently and quietly, getting to know the market with shoe leather and old-fashioned sales calls, with business cards left on desks, mornings of phone calls, lunch with top prospects? “We think our eBooks might interest you,” the netLibrary representative suggests to the librarian, as a waitress departs with order in hand. Then the next call, then write up the day’s reports at night, then another day just like it tomorrow.

Their investors must wish that netLibrary had done it mostly that way. Which of the rest of us, though, would really have preferred for netLibrary to build up the business like some beloved mom-and-pop outfit? Universities, after all, are hardly innocents when it comes to hype. Who didn’t enjoy the show? Who wasn’t flattered to have such a good ticket for a major production in hype like netLibrary staged? Who didn’t feel they were witnessing something big, were even a part of it? Who doesn’t think netLibrary gave it a good go?

And who wasn’t half scared to death, for a little while, that the future had come and gone, and pitilessly had left the slow sitting by, caretakers of dusty and undisturbed

continued on page 81
shelves of printed books? All the hype had one sure effect: nobody wanted to be that. The hype threw a spotlight and cast an interrogation lamp too. What was your library doing? Lots of libraries took up with netLibrary and bought some eBooks. They learned in a hurry — this was not a distance education opportunity — and figured out how to use them, how to catalog them, how to promote them, how to integrate them into everything else the library was doing. There were some real successes.

Librarians learned a lot about eBooks. Some things they learned were, that there weren’t very many of them, that the use model was restrictive, that they were not a bargain, that there were preservation questions, and above all that their patrons’ degree of urgency about the need for eBooks was well below that of people in the industry. The hype had been a good teacher.

Should netLibrary have done it differently? Should Clay have been polite to Liston? That would have disappointed everyone, probably even Liston. But Muhammad Ali always knew something that netLibrary now knows too. If you enter the ring with hype, you’d better win.

NUCLEAR KNOWLEDGE
by Sandy Beehler (Lewis & Clark College)

Preserving knowledge about nuclear weapons may seem a dubious goal to some, but it could prove crucial to the U.S.’s defenses — an uncertain future that includes rogue nations with nuclear arsenals. In addition to the problem of providing millions of paper documents and thousands of electronic files, there is the problem of passing on the knowledge that is held only in the heads of an aging population of nuclear weapons scientists. To address these problems, the U.S. is mounting both digitizing projects and training programs to ensure this information will be available to future generations.

See — “This is Not a Test” in Wired 10.03 (March 2002).

LIFE AFTER THE PROPAGANDA MILL
by Bruce Strauch (The Citadel)

The Russian intelligentsia makes a come-back for big bucks and the status it brings. In a Moscow dominated by nouveau riches capitalists, the eggheads moped in destitute squalor. Then Grigory Chkhartishvili created a 19th-century gentleman sleuth and suddenly found he had foreign language deals, movies and a TV series. This was followed by Tat'yana Tolstaya’s experimental novel ‘Kys’ and Alexei Slapovskiy’s TV screenplays, until there are as many as ten (!) authors pulling down 100 to 500K a year.

Chkhartishvili was previously employed translating Japanese and piddling with a magnum opera “The Writer and Suicide.” Enjoying nothing so much as a good walk in a graveyard, he got the idea of his Slavic Sherlock Holmes living in what Russians now regard as a Chekovenian golden age. Now a nine book superstar, he has T-shirts and a cologne named for his hero for sale online. And a new Peugeot in the drive. But he still thinks in terms of Five-Year Plans.


ENGINEERED EVERGLADES ECOLOGY
by Sandy Beehler (Lewis & Clark College)

It’s an interesting question: can a vast and unique ecological system, brought to the brink of ruin by human progress, be saved from ruin without endangering that progress and the human beings it sustains? This article provides a fascinating overview of what ecologists are attempting to achieve in the Florida Everglades. The plan calls for a gradual restoration of the original hydrological systems that sustained this huge wetlands area-including freeing the Kissimmee River from its man-made banks, storage of potential flood waters in underground wells, and creation of a marshland to filter pollutants from water flowing into the park area.

See — “Re-engineering the Everglades” Wired 10.02 (February 2002).

LET THEM EAT TOAST
by Bruce Strauch (The Citadel)

Napster’s been KO’d, but music thieving teens are still at it in a major way. Roxio produces 70% of the CD “burner” software which is cutely named “Toast.” And Roxio lusted to branch out into phots, video and DVDs. But the music empire has struck back with CDs that can’t be copied.

Roxio is striving to convince the industry that burning is a positive thing for them. They’re only showing a profit on 10% of new music releases anyhow. So why keep backlogs of music inventory that will never sell?

EMI has been won over. For a fee, users can burn music from Roxio’s Website. The biz plan? Make legit burning easier than stealing.


<http://www.against-the-grain.com> 81
FORCING FCC FREQUENCIES
by Sandy Beehler (Lewis & Clark College)

Since 1934 the FCC has had the final say on who has access to broadcast frequencies. Dewayne Hendricks contends that the FCC is standing in the way of inexpensive, high-performance broadband access for all Americans. He is challenging the FCC licensing monopoly by developing a wireless network on a Chippewa Indian reservation—technically sovereign territory not subject to U.S. regulations—in an effort to force the FCC to open up the whole spectrum to everyone. He contends that current technology provides the ability to share spectrum space more efficiently and without interference between users. Many agree that the time for reform has come.

See — “Broadband Cowboy” Wired 10.01 (January 2002).

THE JOHNNY APPLESEED MODEL IN EDUCATION
by Bruce Strauch (The Citadel)

Acting semi-locally, Charleston's own Mary French wants every South Carolina third grader to have a dictionary. And for the third year running, she's pulled it off.

With South Carolina's 45% near illiteracy in fourth graders, it's hard to see the impact. But for a devoted small-town philanthropist like Mary French, the proof is in the delightful enthusiasm of the kids. She has no doubts about her mission wrangling with dictionary publishers over price and soliciting donations in such drible sizes that most people willingly kick in. On Charleston's elegant Tradd Street, Harriet McDougall and her blockbuster novelist husband Jim Rigney (pseud. Robert Jordan - Wheel of Time series) were so shocked by a request for only $500 that they gave her $5,000.

"We're putting words in the hands of children," she says.


International Dateline — Age of Knowledge
Calls for More Qualified Librarians in Chinese Academic Libraries

by Hu Ming Rong (Associate Dean of The Library of Chongqing Normal University, Chongqing, China) <humingrong@yahoo.com.cn>

Translated by Haiwang Yuan (Web Site & Virtual Library Coordinator, Western Kentucky University Libraries & Museum, 1 Big Red Way, Bowling Green, KY 42101; Phone: 270-745-5084; Fax: 270-745-6422) <haiwang.yuan@wknc.edu> www.wku.edu/Library www.wku.edu/Library/tip

The Need for Upgrading Chinese Librarians

The new millennium has ushered in the Age of Knowledge. Unlike its lingering predecessor, the Information Age, it requires that one not only knows how to access information, but also knows how to process and analyze information so that it becomes knowledge. In a knowledge-based society, one strives to be competitively marketable, trying to acquire the knowledge and capabilities that others do not have. For this reason, users are no longer satisfied with mere access to information. They want information services delivered to them when and where they want them in order to increase their knowledge base more efficiently and cost-effectively. All libraries, academic libraries in particular, bear the brunt of the oncoming tide of digitization under the network environment. The extremely urgent task is to keep up their efforts in automating, wiring and digitizing libraries, thereby bringing about fundamental change to them so that a great number of them will be modernized. Indeed, it is incumbent upon all Chinese librarians today to face the challenge and seize the opportunities it may offer in the process of modernizing their libraries.

It is true that funds and equipment are crucial to library modernization, but the human factor is equally, if not more, critical. It is a consensus among scholars of librarianship that the modernization of librarians is at the core of library modernization. A British librarian observes that even a world-class library will find it hard to provide its users with extensive and effective services without full use of its collections, efficient operation, and well-trained staff. The famous Chinese nuclear scientist Qian Xuesen also states, “Librarians in a modernized library ought to be information experts or engineers, builders of information systems, and consultants guiding users through the maze of information.” A vivid analogy depicts a librarian in the 21st century as a “navigator in the sea of information resources.” The point is that modernized libraries require qualified librarians.

How are the Chinese librarians doing today? According to statistics, academic libraries in China each have an average of 40 librarians and staff. If temporary and part-time personnel are included, the number will average 60. Only a few large libraries each have as many as 200 to 300 people. Chinese academic librarians and staff come from four different backgrounds: (1) college graduates from schools of library and information science, (2) college graduates of disciplines other than library and information science, (3) people with diplomas of continuing education in various disciplines, and (4) people without post-secondary education. An overwhelming majority of the Chinese academic library personnel belongs to the third and the fourth categories. In the past few years, some efforts have been made by academic libraries all over the country to upgrade their library staff. Unfortunately, the impact of these efforts on improving library efficiency and services has been limited, which worries scholars of librarianship. They point out bluntly that there is no time to delay in bringing up high quality librarians in China!

What Qualities Should Chinese Librarians Have in the Age of Knowledge?

First, let us take a look at top library administrators, namely, deans, directors, and other members of the administrative team. As policymakers and leaders, they play a decisive role in the day-to-day operation, in particular, and the modernization, in general, of Chinese academic libraries. There are a few outstanding top library administrators who do have a clear vision of their libraries’ future, an open mind for changes; and high levels of library, computer, and foreign language skills. They know what they are doing and are doing it well. Unfortunately, they amount to a very small percentage of the tens of thousands of academic library administrators in China. A large number of them are not equal to their responsibilities, owing to the following reasons:

Without sufficient knowledge of librarianship they often find their abilities fall short of their best intentions. The overwhelming majority of librarians in China do not have a deep understanding of library science. Many of them have the idea that the library is just a place for books. This belief is due to a lack of education and to the time spent on library science in their professional training. Library science is a professional discipline that combines library theory and library practice. Only through a thorough study of library science can librarians have a clear understanding of the library and its management. They can then find their place among the librarians.

Continued on page 83