ATG Interviews David Schappell, Director, Corporate Accounts, Amazon.com

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sis on the “book places” that have evolved over the centuries to contain these essential artifacts, and to tell the stories of the people who have been their architects and custodians. I also have a lengthy section on “book people,” authors, book sellers, bookmakers, readers, and, yes, some more collectors in a chapter I call “Madin ness Redux” among them.

ATG: You have done a lot of interviews for both A Gentle Madness and Patience & Fortitude. How do you decide who to interview? How do you set up the interview? How do you frame your questions?

NB: I have built up a tremendous network of sources, and I combine what I learn from these people with my instincts for knowing a good story when I see one. I keep my eyes and ears open. I am old-school in the sense that while I do many telephone interviews, and while I have no compulsions about using the Internet to scout out information, I still believe that I have to conduct face to face interviews with all of my primary subjects, and that I have to see the places I write about and absorb the ambiance. I prepare carefully for all of my interviews, and I do like to know in advance how I am going to begin the conversation. But once we start talking, I like to let the interview follow its own course. You have to determine before you start, of course, exactly what it is that you want from a person, which means that you really have to know everything that you can about the individual and the individual’s work before you sit down to talk. More often than not, it means you probably know already the answers you are going to get. The real fun is when they surprise you with the unexpected, which happens more often than not.

ATG: Was your most interesting interview? I found your discussion of your time with Stephen Blumberg fascinating.

NB: I really have a very paternal attitude about all of “my” subjects. Once I write about these people, I consider them “mine.” Like both of my daughters, I love them all equally.

ATG: Do you like librarians? Do you have any anecdotes to tell on/about libraries and/or librarians?

NB: I love librarians. I unhesitatingly place them in company with firefighters, nurses and Coast Guard men and women, people whose reason for being it is to help others unhesitatingly. I refer you to the second paragraph of my acknowledgments in Patience & Fortitude.

ATG: How many libraries have you visited? What is your absolute favorite library? Why?

NB: I don’t honestly know how many, dozens to be sure, all over the United States and Europe. One of the reasons I decided to do Patience & Fortitude was because of the opportunity it gave me and my wife to travel to fourteen countries and to visit some of the world’s greatest repositories. If I had to pick an absolute favorite, it would have to be the Biblioteca Laurenziana in Florence, the exquisite temple to books designed for the Medici family by Michelangelo in the 16th century.

ATG: A third book-on-books by you, called Life Beyond Life: The Permanence of Books in an Impermanent World, will be published by HarperCollins in 2003. What do you think that the virtual and e-revolutions are going to do to libraries? Will they survive as we know them? Will print collections survive? How will “the archive for posterity” be preserved in the electronic environment? And will you discuss this in your book, Life Beyond Life?

NB: Every one of the questions you raise here will be addressed in Life Beyond Life, and I think I would rather discuss those issues when I am finished with my research and when my writing is complete. But I will say that reports of the death of the book are absurdly premature—to that end I refer you to the chapter in Patience & Fortitude I call “In the Stacks,” in which I make pretty clear with careful documentation that the best colleges and universities today are still measured to a great extent by the strength of their libraries. There are some really excellent interviews in there, Peter Lyman of the Bancroft Library at Berkeley being one, and some interesting case studies that should be of particular interest to acquisition libraries throughout North America. Let me note, too, that if the book is dead, and if libraries are superannuated institutions, then why is it that so many countries like France, England, Germany, and Japan spent millions on new national libraries at the very time that the electronic revolution was evident, and why are these institutions perceived as indelible expressions of national purpose and culture? I do address some of these questions in the concluding chapters of Patience & Fortitude.

ATG: Some personal questions. What do you read in your spare time? Tell us about your hobbies and your family and family life. You have two college-age daughters, correct? Will they become librarians?

NB: I read all the time, and my tastes are eclectic, with a general preference for good nonfiction. My current passion, believe it or not, is books about libraries, but also archaeology. (In another life, I think I’d like to be a classicist or an archaeologist.) But for idle pleasure, I have to confess a shameless affection for intelligent entertainments like tales of P.D. James, John le Carre, Bob Parker, Elmore Leonard, the late Ross Thomas, James Lee Burke. I don’t think my daughters will become librarians, but that is entirely up to them, of course, and it does please me beyond words that both are appreciative readers and great lovers of books.

ATG Interviews
David Schappell
Director, Corporate Accounts, Amazon.com

by Katina Strauch (Editor, Against the Grain)

ATG: We understand that Amazon.com has just launched its long-awaited Corporate Accounts program, which allows libraries, corporations, and institutions the option of using a credit card or paying by purchase order against an established line of credit. We understand that you led the team involved in getting the word out to the library community, so we wanted to sit down with you to help answer questions librarians are sure to have. So—why is this news so important to librarians, and why should they even care?

DS: We are responding to what librarians have asked us for. Rather than a top-down approach, which requires contracts and agreements and signatures from deans and directors and business offices that can take days or weeks, acquisitions librarians can set up a Corporate Account (www.amazon.com/corporate) themselves in just a few minutes. If they have been buying things from Amazon.com using a credit card and want to keep that method of payment in place, that’s fine. Or they can apply for a line of credit right on the site, which is usually granted in a matter of seconds, and start shopping. For over a month now, I’ve been talking to several hundred librarians all across the country, from both small law libraries to multi-branch library systems. I think I can say honestly that they are uniformly delighted with this new service, as the entire program was designed with the library market in mind. Most of the “early adopters”—the librarians who signed up immediately—are telling us we did it right.

ATG: We noticed that Cindy Cunningham (who spoke at the Charleston Conference last year) was recently on the cover of Library Journal. You seem to be reaching out to the library market. Why? Is there a slowdown in other parts of your business?

DS: I’m sure you know that Amazon.com is always extremely interested in improving the customer experience for any kind of customer. Librarians have always been among our best customers and they told us they would love to be able to use purchase orders when buying books. We simply responded.

ATG: We know that some of your competitors—like Barnes&noble.com—are already doing this. Why did it take you so long?

DS: We know there are others in the space, and actually we think that’s fine, as we never expect to be a library’s sole vendor, maybe not even primary vendor. And some of the “competitors” you refer to are among our own vendors. Baker & Taylor and J. A. Majors, for instance, are two of our best book partners. We have many sources for books, music, video, and other items and sometimes librarians find things at Amazon.com they simply won’t find anywhere else. Our Amazon Advantage program, for instance, enables thousands of smaller publishers who are often not sourced by the disconnected on page 61

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Contributors (or our online competitors) stand right alongside the big publishers. As we like
to say here, every book gets in the window at
Amazon.com.

And as far as why it took so long, we wanted
to do it right. It might look easy when you're
on the site, but a lot of work goes into creating
a new buying platform, and at Amazon.com,
we sweat every single detail to provide a great
customer experience.

ATG: You said this new program was
designed especially for librarians. What are
some of the other features librarians you've talked
to are excited about?

DS: Most people really like the fact that
different publishers can be assigned to a single
account with one Account Manager
monitoring the buying. Even people who had
improved credit cards found managing different
accounts difficult and tedious. One of the
people on our team was telling the head li-
brarian of a nationally known hospital system
recently. She had 16 different accounts, all with
her as the purchaser, with 16 different credit
cards. When she signed her up for a Corporate
Account, she said, "This is exactly what I've
been hoping for. You are my knight in shining
armor today!" It's pretty rewarding coming to
work when the response has been so over-
whelmingly positive.

ATG: Back to competitors. Tell me more
about the programs that you referred to above
through Baker & Taylor and J.A. Majors. Why
would a library go through Amazon.com rather
than going directly to those vendors? And tell
us about the Advantage program? Are libraries
participating? Why would they?

DS: First of all, let me clarify about the
Amazon Advantage (www.amazon.com/advan-
tage) program. This is purely for publish-
ers. But can you believe there are over 100,000
publishers in the US alone? Many of them only
publish a few books, and these are unlikely to
be bought by the distributors. We started the
Amazon Advantage program so those small
publishers could get their books into our inven-
tory here, and it's a huge success. These are the
books that libraries won't find anywhere else.

And as far as why people would go through
us rather than B&T and J.A. Majors, that's purely
their choice. Once again, for the books I was
just speaking about (in the Amazon Ad-
vantage program), only Amazon.com carries
these books. For other books, it sometimes
comes down to selection and convenience is-
sues—sometimes we just have better in-
stock position, or they need it delivered quickly.

We also hear from librarians that they use
Amazon.com for their biblio data, so they are
already on the site doing research. They can
come now put whatever they're looking for in their
shopping carts and check-out just like our other
35 million customers.

ATG: How about shipping and handling
and consolidation of shipments? What about
reporting on orders for libraries? Do you do
any of that type of thing? Also, some of the
various jobbers offer set discounts and even
free shipping in some cases. Do you do any of
these things?

DS: The way the Corporate Accounts pro-
gram works is that the Primary Account Man-
ger gets a monthly statement reflecting all the
transactions on that account, by any purchaser
who has been authorized to participate on the
account, for the previous month. If they have
assigned a purchase order, that appears right
alongside the transaction information.
Shipping and handling charges remain standard
as posted on the Amazon.com Website.

As far as discounts go, we pride ourselves
on having good prices throughout our stores,
and most librarians tell us our everyday low
prices are in many cases better than the special
"deals" they get from their wholesalers. At
Amazon.com, we always strive to offer good
value—our superior availability, selection,
and service also being prime factors in the value
equation, not just price.

ATG: Will Amazon.com be able to comply
with the myriad of library systems and invoic-
ing demands of corporate and library ac-
counts? What other services will they be able
to provide?

DS: The Corporate Accounts program first
tried to solve the biggest hurdle faced by librar-
ians when using Amazon.com. That is, by
removing the need to pay by credit card by en-
abling the use of purchase order or purchase
orders. We were also able to include functionality
that allowed multiple purchasers on a single
account, account management tools, and
folded this all into a seamless checkout pro-
cess, so that the new experience would be iden-
tical to what librarians were already accustomed
to at Amazon.com. As always, we will continue
to listen to feedback from our librarian
community to improve on their behalf.

ATG: Since Amazon.com discounts on
scientific, technical and university press titles
are not competitive with other jobbers, what
market are you looking for? Rush orders?

DS: Amazon.com knows that we will not
always be competitive on a title-by-title basis.
We provide everyday low pricing across our
entire catalog, and know that customers use
Amazon.com as much for our selection, speed,
and convenience, as they do for our specific
title pricing. This myriad of benefits constitutes
our overall value to our customers.

ATG: You are doing some other interesting
things like an e-documents Web page. What
are e-documents? How much do they cost?
What kind of activity have you seen from li-
braries on these types of purchases? How
about from individuals? Who writes these
e-documents? Do they get paid a royalty or a
flat "work for hire" fee?

DS: An e-document, or electronic document
(www.amazon.com/edoces), is a digital docu-
ment that you can read on a computer screen
using widely available free Adobe software
(available free from the Amazon.com Website).
Amazon.com e-documents offer timely re-
search information on a range of topics, from
e-commerce and telecommunications technol-
gy, to investment and marketing strategies. Our
titles are provided by some of the most respected
research firms in the business, including
Harvard Business Review, Morningstar Re-
ports, Accenture and Bain & Company. We
offer Amazon.com e-documents in a wide
range of prices, many starting at less than $3.

There are a number of advantages to reading e-
documents. First, you can read them immedi-
ately, without having to wait for the title to be
shipped to you. E-documents are printable so
that you can read them away from your PC or
laptop. Also, because these documents provide
timely research information, from publishers
difficult to find in print, many people enjoy being
able to access them on their PC. As our selec-
tion of e-documents continues to grow, you will
be able to find and download an even wider
selection of unique content on an increasingly
diverse range of topics. For competitive rea-
sons, we don't disclose business terms of indi-
viduals or publishers that we work with.

ATG: There was an article in the New York
Times about ebooks and the failure of them to
take off. Tell us about what Amazon is doing with
eBooks? Do you know how many eBooks are
bought yearly? Are you working with netLibrary?
What can we look forward to from Amazon.com
regarding eBooks?

DS: I don't have the answers to all of your
questions, but I'll do my best. While we are
currently not working with netLibrary, we do
offer a large selection of eBooks from publish-
ners like Random House, HarperCollins,
Simon & Schuster, and many others. You can
read any of the thousands of e-books on
Amazon.com using either Microsoft Reader or
Adobe Acrobat eBook Reader. As with our
e-documents, you can read e-books immediately,
without having to wait for the title to be shipped
to you. You can take them with you anywhere
you take your laptop. Also, we currently offer
hundreds of eBooks in the Microsoft Reader
format that can be read using any Pocket PC.
And with the release this month of the Pocket
PC 2002 devices, customers will be able to read
every eBook in our Microsoft Reader Store.

ATG: Tell us about you, your background,
and family. How long have you been at
Amazon.com? What's it like working there?
How many employees are there at
Amazon.com and how many Amazon.com in
other countries are there?

DS: How personal do you want me to get? Actually, I'm 33, my wife is a landscape
architect, and we have a boston terrier named Darcy (our daughter). I've been at Amazon.com since
May of 1998, and have been fortunate to work in positions across the company, from
assisting with the launch of the Music and Video stores, to launching the Used Book effort we call
Amazon.com Marketplace (it allows anyone to sell used copies of their books on the same
pages where Amazon.com sells new copies), and most recently focusing on the new
Amazon.com Corporate Accounts Program. I've also spent three fantastic holiday seasons
working in our distribution centers helping to ship product to customers during our peak sell-
ing season!

Also, I am a rabid booklover. I am currently
enjoying reading Confederates in the Attic by
Tony Horwitz (I plan to explore some Civil
War monuments while attending the Charles-
ton Conference), and recently re-read A Con-
federacy of Dunces and the complete Harry
Potter Series.

Although I am biased, I can honestly say
that I love working at Amazon.com. We're all
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MathSciNet
www.ams.org/mathscinet

MathSciNet—your premier source for searching the world's mathematical literature—now provides over 1,7 million items and over 160,000 links to original articles in more than 220 journals. Available by subscription on the Web, MathSciNet offers searching of over 60 years of mathematical literature in the Mathematical Reviews Database.

MathSciNet enhancements in Fall 2001:

Linked Reference Lists

This major new enhancement to MathSciNet—linked reference lists—allows users to navigate smoothly from an item in MathSciNet to reviews of items referenced in the original article, and finally (in many cases) to the referenced items themselves. This new feature of MathSciNet reflects the way in which mathematicians often use articles for research, moving from one paper to the next by using the list of references.

MR Database Expansion

A new collection of items will be available in what might be termed, "Applied Stats." These new items are called Database Expansion items, and represent not only an expansion of the scope of coverage by the Mathematical Reviews Database, but also a new kind of treatment.

As the database grows and the efforts to link MathSciNet to all electronic literature continue, these new features of the Mathematical Reviews Database will become more and more valuable. These enhancements add convenience and offer brand new tools for mathematicians around the world.

Schappell Interview

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As of our June 30, 2001 press release, we employed 7,800 employees at Amazon.com and our four international sites—Amazon.co.uk, Amazon.de, Amazon.fr and Amazon.co.jp—including both full- and part-time employees. It is quite a bit larger than when I got here.

ATG: Speaking of the Used Book (Marketplace) program, what feedback has Amazon.com received from publishers now that they are listing used copies of books next to the new ones in the database?

DS: We have great relationships with our publishers and are committed to being their best channel. We all believe that anything that makes it easier for people to find, discover and try books is good for customers, authors and publishers.

ATG: What innovations can we expect in the coming year? Can you give us a preview?

DS: For competitive reasons, I can't be specific, but we are always listening to and innovating on behalf of our customers. However, I am very excited to tell you about a new feature that we launched today (October 10, 2001) called "Look Inside The Book" that allows customers to flip through the inside pages of thousands of books. Amazon.com's bookstore (www.amazon.com/books) now features a vast selection of interior pages from over 25,000 titles, with thousands more titles to come. It is fantastic for browsing recipes found in cookbooks, illustrations from children's books, full indices of textbooks, first chapters from mystery novels or the millions of other pages available. The company's publisher partners at launch include DK Publishers, HarperCollins Publishers, Holtzbrinck Publishers, Hungry Minds, John Wiley & Sons, McGraw-Hill, Pearson Education, Random House, Scholastic, Simon & Schuster, Stewart House Publishing and Time Warner Trade Publishing. Customers can also visit Amazon.com's new Reading Room (www.amazon.com/reading-room) to easily access all the titles from which they can view the inside pages.

I'll tell ATG readers a lot about "Look Inside The Book" and more at the Charleston Conference, where I'm excited to be attending, exhibiting, and speaking this year—please find me and introduce yourself.

And, of course, people can e-mail me at <davids@amazon.com> if they want to give me feedback about the program, or if they need more information. We're very committed to the library market, and welcome librarians' feedback about the service.

ATG: Now, for everyone's favorite question—Is Amazon.com profitable yet?

DS: We have said that we expect to achieve pro-forma operating profitability in Q4 2001. We do not provide any intraquarter guidance. Some highlights from the second quarter earnings release were:

- Net sales for the 3 months ended June 30, 2001 were $668 million, up 16% from the same period in 2000.
- Net sales for the period from international sites rose 75% to $128 million, from $73 million.
- Pro forma loss from operations improved by 69 percent to $28 million, or 4 percent of net sales, compared to $89 million, or 15 percent of net sales in the second quarter of 2000.
- This quarter, the US (US Retail and Services segments combined) was profitable on a pro forma operating basis for the first time—this is our sixth sequential quarter of improved absolute pro forma operating results. US pro forma operating results improved to a $2 million profit, from a loss of $55 million.
- Over 21 million customers purchased in the last year, more than 1 million of whom have purchased a used product from one of our more than 60,000 Amazon Marketplace sellers. In fact, this quarter, roughly 10 percent of our US orders were for a used product.
- Worldwide, 2.6 million new customers ordered during the period, including 900,000 new international customers
- Cash and marketable securities were $609 million at June 30, 2001.

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Amazon.com information:
www.amazon.com/corporate
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Seattle, WA 98104; 206-266-2633
<davids@amazon.com>

<http://www.against-the-grain.com>
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Joyce J. Fitzpatrick, PhD, RN, FAAN
Carol Romano, PhD, RN, FAAN
and Ruth Chasek
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ATG: What is Amazon.com’s relationship with AOL? Is Amazon.com getting bought out?
DS: In July 2001, we announced a new multi-year strategic alliance with AOL, through which the industry’s two e-commerce leaders will team up to develop and offer an enhanced online shopping experience for users of America Online’s interactive brands. The new agreement joins Amazon.com’s industry-leading platform and online retail expertise with America Online’s technology and popular shopping environment to provide an even better online experience for America Online’s 30 million members, millions of visitors to its Web-based brands and hundreds of retailers. This new agreement expands on the successful marketing relationship begun between the two companies in 1997.

The companies also announced that America Online has made a $100 million equity investment in Amazon.com common stock.

In addition, America Online and Amazon.com will continue to work together on future e-commerce initiatives to benefit consumers, such as marketing initiatives, customer authentication and wallet services, and extending the alliance internationally.

ATG: What does Amazon.com consider the list price of a book to be? Since Amazon.com controls the database, how do we know what the publisher’s list price is? Are service charges ever built into the price?

From the Reference Desk
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is serious science at a serious price. Academic libraries supporting courses in physics or engineering are the main audience for this title.

Originally promised for release last year, the first three volumes of ABC-CLIO’s Encyclopedia of Archaeology (2001, 1576071987, $295) are now available. The first two volumes of the Encyclopedia, subtitled the Great Archaeologists, were edited by Tim Murray and met with approving reviews. The new volumes, subtitled History and Discoveries, are also edited by Murray and offer the same quality content and attention to scholarship that characterized his initial effort. Articles on specific countries and regions, individual sites and discoveries, time periods, methods and techniques and famous institutions and museums are the main attraction. Interested readers will find articles on topics as varied as Great Zimbabwe, the Ashmolean Museum, Medieval archaeology in Europe, Cambodia (and the ruins at Angkor Wat), Chaco Canyon, and computer applications in archaeology. While primarily an academic library title, large public libraries may also be interested, especially if they have the first two volumes.

ABC-CLIO’s Encyclopedia of the War of the Roses (2001, 1851093583, $58) focuses on the series of civil wars that marked fifteenth century England. This single volume reference is a well-organized volume with a number of useful features. It is intended for the lay reader or student with an interest in the topic and provides needed background information in brief and clearly written articles. Use of the volume is enhanced by a guide to related topics and a alphabetical list of entries, as well as a number of appendices that include genealogies, maps, a table of dynastic families, lists of contemporary European rulers, Popes and English church leaders. The Encyclopedia of the War of the Roses is one of those titles that would be at home in either Reference or Circulation.

Published by McFarland and written by Mary Ellen Snodgrass, the Encyclopedia of World Scripture (2001, 0786410051, $75) is a compact and handy volume that covers 27 major works of sacred writing. As you would expect, the scriptural writing of the major religions like Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism are included. But there are also essays covering the scriptural source of Stoicism, the Kojiki, the Chinese Ching as well as the sacred scripture of Zoroastranism, the Aveva and Native American writings like Black Elk Speaks and the White Roots of Peace. Besides giving clear explanations of individual writings, the Encyclopedia offers readers a quick and easy way to compare the holy writings of numerous religious traditions. From this perspective, the Encyclopedia of World Scripture offers a fascinating look at how different cultures and people have tried coming to terms with life’s mysteries. Both academic and public libraries should be interested.

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is especially significant since ILL has assumed an even more important role with the increasing emphasis on distance education. We have initiated several new services for the fall term that provide support for distance students and their unique curriculum needs.

The Horizon
As with many state institutions, Delta State is currently facing a shrinking budget because of difficult economic times. This has forced us in Library Services to closely evaluate the services we provide and those that we plan to offer in the future. Even though our materials budget is not at the level we wish it could be, there are some positive changes coming in the near future. In September, we are going to utilize Serials Solution's reporting service. This will generate a single alphabetical list of our electronic full-text journal holdings that can be mounted on the Library Services Web site. We are also in the process of acquiring a new library automation system that we plan to implement next summer. Both of these additions will allow us to provide our patrons with significantly improved access to our available resources. While there are always challenges that must be faced, with our beautiful new facility and a new automation system on the way, we realize that we are more fortunate than most. This infrastructure, maintained by a dedicated staff, will provide a powerful combination and exciting possibilities for W.B. Roberts Library and Delta State University.