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ATG Interviews Dan Halloran

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We spent the whole of the twentieth century building major collections and building major systems to organize those collections and make them available. And, I think, in the foreseeable future, we’ve got to concentrate on being more precise about methods for searching and understanding more precisely the characteristics of the people that we want to serve.

Right now, most librarians get very little training in that. The ones that do are the children’s librarians, who understand precisely the needs of a four-year-old (as distinct from the needs of a seven- or eight-year-old) and who apply that knowledge daily to match those kids with the kind of information that will be useful to them and also consistent with their needs and interests. People who serve adults and undergraduates don’t get that kind of training, so mostly it’s a hit-or-miss thing for us. So we can do a better job of matching their information needs and interests with what is available to them.

You asked me what I thought the future was going to be like... I think the future is going to be pretty much like what the past has been, with a continuing emphasis on technological systems, and more and more emphasis on the Internet.

VB: Can you comment on the impact of globalization?

RW: That’s hard to predict, because that’s going to be primarily subject to economies and politics. Access to information will continue to improve, more slowly in some societies than in others—especially in societies where you have religion as a controlling factor, where the object there is not to give people access to lots of information but to control what people think.

VB: Your career has been meteoric, and it’s still going strong! Would you like to offer any advice to librarians just beginning their careers?

RW: My advice to young librarians is to get to be knowledgeable, get involved, and write for publication. Pursue the topics that are of interest to you, research them, and write about them.

VB: Thank you! This has been very inspiring...

References


ATG Interviews Bob Schatz
(Director, Sales and Marketing, Franklin Book Company, Inc.)

by Jack G. Montgomery (Column Editor, ATG, Western Kentucky University) <jack.montgomery@wk.edu>

ATG: Bob, how did you come to work with Franklin Book Company?

BS: The short answer is that the planets all came into alignment to provide a great opportunity for me to help direct a great company. The longer answer is that I've been aware of Franklin for some time, through my acquaintance with Manny Deckter, the company's President, and a long-standing friendship with Linda Moran, FBC's Director of Customer Relations. For some time I've been tracking the success of this rather remarkable domestic bookseller, so the lines of communication were already open.

ATG: Can you tell us a little bit about the company's history, its founder and Franklin's overall business philosophy?

BS: The company began in 1969, primarily serving special libraries in the Philadelphia/New York area. This is a great place from which to begin, because of the demands placed on vendors by special libraries. Franklin is used to meeting some rather exceptional requirements in terms of turnaround time, so we were ideally suited to meet the needs of academic libraries when we expanded our customer base. Manny Deckter acquired the company twenty years ago. His multi-faceted philosophy of business is still very much the guiding force within the company, and was what attracted me when we discussed the possibility of my joining Franklin Book:

- Pay attention to every detail; they are all important to both our customers and to Franklin.
- Listen to what the customer wants, and look for ways to sell "yes" before you jump to "no."
- Never forget we're booksellers to librarians, not merchandisers; we don't "move units," we sell books. Learn the craft of bookselling. Know what goes on in publishing. Pay attention to the particular needs of libraries.

ATG: What, if any, specialized training, experience or education did you receive before getting into the book business?

BS: Now, that could turn into a very long story, but I'll spare you most of the details. I came out of Library School (U of Oregon, class of December 1976) with $14 in my bank account. My first job with my new MLS was shelling tacos in a fast-food place in Eugene for minimum wage. Later I went back into retail bookselling, supplemented by waiting tables and doing some freelance advertising writing. I eventually went to Academic Book Center to see if they had any leads on library jobs, and ended up spending the next twenty years within that organization, where I eventually became VP for Sales. The library degree and all those years of retail and wholesale bookselling became the foundation for my work now as Franklin's Director of Sales & Marketing.

ATG: Who do you see as primary customers of Franklin Books? Are you organized to respond to a certain patron group?

BS: While special libraries are still important to the company (we have the IBM book contract, for instance), academic libraries have become our largest customer group. We've established the same service options as the big companies, and internally we're organized primarily by those service areas: firm orders, standing orders, approval plans. There are other departments that cross service lines: automation/ Web-support, accounting, sales. In most cases, customer service is handled within the specific service areas, so customers can talk directly with those most likely to have access to information that will quickly, and correctly, solve problems that arise.

ATG: So far, what has been notable in your experience in dealing with libraries? Have there been any unexpected issues?

BS: We've always been aware of the complexity that surrounds library book-buying needs. The issue for us today, and the one that is creating tremendous opportunities for Franklin Book Company, is the extent to which libraries today feel that service quality from booksellers is eroding. That keeps us focused on developing new services (our approval plan, for instance, was created three years ago), and on constantly looking for ways to improve existing services. Even though we have a minuscule market share compared to companies like Blackwell's and Yankee Book Peddler, there's still plenty of unmet demand among the libraries we serve. Our biggest challenge now is keeping up with our own growth. In a very depressed market, we have a great deal of optimism about the future of the company, though we have no illusions that the industry as a whole will likely not be a cheery environment in the coming years.

ATG: From a vendor's standpoint, what is one thing you wish most librarians knew but sometimes seem to forget or need to learn?

BS: Those of us in the commercial side who conduct ourselves professionally really are colleagues and deserve the same respect as fellow librarians. I think too many librarians still see us either as a necessary evil, or not worthy of much consideration and it's frustrating. Some of us is bookselling, I think, really want to be of assistance, and to be part of a larger library environment that provides knowledge to society. From my vantage point in sales, I see struggles all the time just to get appointments, let alone the opportunity to find and create positive synergies. Sometimes that frustrates me.

ATG: Do you find it difficult to compete with large companies/vendors?

BS: If anything, the opposite is true. For all the value that large companies promote to libraries, they don't necessarily provide levels of service that meet all needs. There are a great many libraries of all sizes, from ARL to very small college libraries, that are looking for better options, which creates opportunities for companies like Franklin Book Co., Inc. What pleases me, as Director of Sales & Marketing

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bookselling services but also integrate our selection, acquisitions, and shelf-ready processing services into the workflows of libraries. This integration must help libraries reduce their costs while getting the material into the hands of users faster.

Much of our development is focused on these issues. And that is not just IT related development but people development as well. We need people who thoroughly understand how libraries operate and can talk intelligently about how to integrate tools that aid selection, acquisitions, etc. Setting up workflows and integrating those into the various computer systems is a key element of success now.

Once we have established efficient ways for libraries to select and acquire material we can further improve library cost reductions by making more things available including non-English language material, non-book material, and electronic information.

To tie this all back to the Everett's and Academic situation, you can see that this requires significant resources. It will be harder for smaller companies to finance and provide these services in the future.

ATG: Dan, you have been with Blackwell's a good while. How will these changes affect our role in Blackwell's?

DPH: First, I have never had more fun nor worked as hard as I have for the last five years. I started in this business with Richard Abel many years ago. Having the opportunity to come back to this company after so many years and help prepare it for the future is a great deal of fun. Blackwell's has the resources, people, capital, systems, and the commitment that allows me to be creative and challenged.

I serve as the President and CEO of Blackwell Book Services as well as a member of the Blackwell, Ltd. Board of Directors. I am involved in strategy at the highest levels of the book business, not just libraries, but retailing and a bit of publishing.

The recent changes will only make the job more challenging and FUN! ✿

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