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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 needs and look for ways to say “yes” before you jump to “no.”
- Never forget we’re booksellers to libraries, 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 selling 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 minute share of the market 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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<http://www.against-the-grain.com>
Adventures in Librarianship — New Dumbster Collegiate

by Ned Kraft (Ralph J. Bunche Library, U.S. Department of State) <kraftno@state.gov>

Preface

Dumbster's New Collegiate Dictionary, 12th edition, builds on the scholarship of past editions and corrects nearly half of the mistakes in the 11th. For instance, readers will be pleased to see that we have changed the citation of "plural" to the technically more correct "plural." And where the phrase "new trinity" may once have been, for a very short time, acceptable, we have settled on the more broadly prescribed: neutrality.

In a daring move, our editors have broken with tradition and overthrown the tyranny of "alphabetical order." Dumbster's 12th has been organized by a "length of word" standard developed by our editorial engineers. This puts shorter words such as "a" and "i" toward the front, and mightily long words such as "quantumization" and "individuality" toward the back. The editors feel that this approach is not only more cost effective, but will add a certain serendipity to the dictionary experience. With a nod to democracy in action, our lexicographers have added to the 12th edition new words selected by a reader referendum. These new words plug obvious holes in our language and will be useful to students and laymen alike.

For instance, we can now call a small apartment a "condominium." An annoying young person is now a "juvenirritant." And we can feel both correct and well read when using "thebutant" to describe an uninformed theatergoer.

For the 12th edition, Dumbster chose contemporary usage over archaic whenever faced with disputed definitions. Guidance for much of contemporary usage came by way of Mr. Anthony Soprano, a charming character who goes by "Snoopy Dog," and my niece, Amber. Consequently, "ax" has to do with questioning, not the chopping of wood. "Baked" has much to do with intoxication and little to do with bread. "Nepers" are no longer related to you by blood. And "bomb," which was once a very bad thing, is now a very good thing. We believe these changes will help increase essay exam scores in our nation's high schools and community colleges.

The use of pictorial illustration has been...