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People Profile: Dr. Gregory Walker

Editor

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BORN: 19 June 1958 in Littlehampton, West Sussex, UK. Lived first 18 years in Bognor Regis and since then in or around Oxford.

EDUCATION: BA Hons and MA (Oxon). Read chemistry at St. Catherine’s College, Oxford and did research into aspects of radiocarbon dating.

FIRST JOB: Scientific lexicographer with the Oxford English Dictionary — “a harmless drudge.”

PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES: After five years with OUP spent a year technical editing for the British Standards Institution before joining Pergamon Press as Manager of their Scientific Encyclopaedias programme. In 1990 was appointed to run the materials science publishing programme for Pergamon. In 1994 was appointed Editorial Director for materials science at Elsevier Science Ltd, 1996 Publishing Director for the international materials science programme of Elsevier worldwide. In 1999 became Director of Academic Relations for Elsevier, running their research and relationship programmes with the global academic community.
From 1999-2002, Hon Lecturer at the School of Library, Administration and Information Studies at University College, London, supervising a PhD student and giving occasional lectures. From 2001, appointed as a Visiting Professor in the Dept. of Information Science at City University, London. For summer 2003, Visiting Professor, Information Science, College of Communication, University of Tennessee, Knoxville teaching a graduate summer school in scholarly communication.

IN MY SPARE TIME I LIKE TO: Try to speak better Italian, collect wine, visit archaeological sites and museums.

FAVORITE BOOKS: The Lindsay Davis novels set during the reign of Vespasian featuring the ancient private investigator Marcus Didius Falco; Hoggart’s The Uses of Literacy, Jane Austin Pride and Prejudice, Iain Pears’ An Instance of the Fingepost.

PET PEEVES/WAT MAKES ME MAD: Illogicality of argument; willful ignorance; the modern tendency to believe consoling but false truths.

PHILOSOPHY: To understand all is to forgive all.

MOST MEANINGFUL CAREER ACHIEVEMENT: Commissioning the world’s leading encyclopaedia in materials science.

GOAL I HOPE TO ACHIEVE FIVE YEARS FROM NOW: Owning a retirement home in Italy!

HOW/WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS: Hope: the “us and them” has become “us and us” as an evidence-based agenda overturns the emotionally-based one and we can all work on improving the lot of end-users rather than waste energy scoring points off each other.

Fear: everything just carries on as before with a waste of time, money and energy on emotional rhetoric to the detriment of everyone.

Dr. Gregory Walker

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FAMILY: Married to Anne, a teacher. Two grown-up children. We live near Oxford, UK.

POSITION: Since 2002, freelance consultant on library management, currently serving as Project Manager for the CURL-CoFoR project described in the article.

CAREER: Mostly spent developing collections in Slavic and E. European studies, first at Lancaster University then (for 31 years) in charge of the Slavic collections at the Bodleian Library, Oxford University. From 1986 until retirement in 2002, also Head of Collection Development at the Bodleian, overseeing collecting policies, acquisition budgeting and legal deposit.

SPECIAL INTERESTS: Russian and Soviet publishing (PhD thesis, book, articles); library collections in the UK on Russia and E. Europe (four directories); bibliography of British theses in Russian and EE studies.

EDUCATION: Slavic philology at Cambridge; PhD on Soviet publishing at Sheffield.

SPARE TIME: Travel, translating (Russian and German), amateur acting.

FAVORITE BOOKS: John Le Carre; Hans-Hermann Hertle, Chronik des Mauerfalls.

PET PEEVE: Librarians’ inborn tendency to look at every tree and ignore the forest.

PHILOSOPHY: Don’t be afraid to recognise that something obvious needs doing — then do it.

Walker profile continued on page 66
ATG: Tell us about ebrary. When was it begun and by whom? Why? Who owns ebrary? What is the technology underlying your system and how is it different from your competitors?

CW: The beginning of ebrary... there are two beginnings really: The initial idea and then the actions to start the company and the development process.

In one sense, it all started while I was attending the University of Utah when a television special aired in which Steve Jobs described the computer as a bicycle for the mind. It inspired me to build a bicycle of my own. While conducting research for the bicycle, I realized that someday, all of the world’s information would become accessible from computers. This beginning was followed by years of wonder as to what such a system would be like and how I could contribute to it.

All of this led me to Adobe Systems, where I worked on Acrobat, Octavo where I conducted feasibility studies on the digitizing of rare books, the Arion Press in San Francisco, where I learned about publishing, printing and bookbinding, and Stanford University, where I met Mike Keller and Vicky Reich, two people who gave me a chance to formulate and express the ideas behind ebrary. Then in 1998, there was the action and creation of ebrary, which was initiated by my need to incorporate in order to become a contractor at Stanford.

The second and most important beginning of ebrary was when I met with Kevin Sayar, a friend of mine from high school, who was a lawyer at the law firm of Wilson, Sonsini, Goodrich and Rosati. When I approached him with regard to becoming a corporation of one, he suggested that we start a business together. I told him the idea, he said “lets do it,” and we did. This was over the roof of his car after lunch. Kevin is the president of ebrary. We then brought in Mohammad Al-Baghdadi, who is our VP of International Sales and Channel Development and together, along with the help, blood, sweat, and tears of our employees and numerous librarians, we fleshed out what would become ebrary today.

ebrary is a privately held corporation that is, as of this writing, owned by our investors: Random House, McGraw-Hill, Pearson, some private investors and our employees.

ebrary’s underlying technology essentially deconstructs PDF and builds a database that allows for the support of several different business and usage models. Incorporated within this system is Digital Rights Management, Full-text Search, Display technology, multiple Discovery engines as well as some interfaces that we have developed to facilitate integration. The system is built with the intent to be as flexible and scalable as we can make it.

ATG: Where did the name ebrary come from? How does your Website work? A lot of material is available free of charge but much of it is not available or costs a fee to view. Can you explain the model that you are working with costwise? This is an important question to answer clearly. Please spend more time on this one.

CW: I came up with the name “ebrary” while on the train, on my way home from work at the Arion Press. It was not taken. I had checked on Internic the moment I got home, so I registered it. The New York Public Library told us a couple of years later that we had beaten them to the name by a mere month. I don’t even remember what some of our other considerations were.

ebrary supports a number of business and payment models. Our primary focus is aggregating databases of content from leading publishers that we license to libraries and other institutions. We also license our technology to customers that need to distribute and archive their own content, under the business and payment model of their choice. We also operate a few sites for individuals: ebrary Discover, a fee-based site designed for individual researchers who do not yet have access to our databases through their library, and our Library Center, a complimentary site that provides news and information for librarians and MLS students.

For our content aggregation business, we work with leading publishers to create dynamic databases, which we license to libraries and other institutions worldwide. We offer aggregated databases in multiple subject areas as well as collections from single publishers such as Datamonitor and D&B. Our databases primarily include full-text books, but we also offer most music, maps, journals, reports, magazines and other documents.

Libraries pay us an annual license fee for our databases based on type of library and size for simultaneous, multi-user access to content. Typically there is no cost involved for the end user, the library subscribes to multiple databases, which many of our customers do, they get access to all of the databases individually, but the library may also request that their site be configured to provide access to a database that seamlessly integrates all of the different collections. This is one of the most powerful features that ebrary offers.

For our technology licensing business, customers pay us an annual license fee based on the number and type of documents, bandwidth and customization requirements. Customers that license our technology control the access and pricing models. For example, some customers who license our technology offer content for free, under a completely Open Access model including the downloading of the source PDF. Other customers stream information, but don’t allow downloading. We also have customers that either provide restricted access, or access only with paid compensation either through subscription or via micro-transaction payments.

We recently announced that both ALA and SLA are licensing our technology to distribute their publications online. ALA is using ebrary to distribute and archive American Libraries magazine, while SLA is using our technology to distribute and archive Information Outlook. We also distribute Advanced Technology Libraries, a newsletter published and edited by Judy Duke.

Furthermore, we even have some librarians that have digitized either their collections or their publications using our services for distribution of their content. Stanford University, which is using ebrary’s software to distribute information from their collections, as well as their publications that they have digitized, offer numerous collections to their user community. UC Berkeley and the Library of Congress both distribute some of their books through ebrary’s aggregated databases, and of course a percentage of our publishing partners are university presses.

When it comes to models, we attempt to offer multiple options. This combined with the cost-efficiency of building databases through our software provides an effective, commercially viable means for distributing electronic documents. We believe that we arguably have the most efficient means for creating and publishing commercially viable databases on the planet.

ebrary’s strength is in its ability to build cost-effective databases with flexible business models to provide commercially viable solutions for distributing electronic documents. We have leveraged this strength to provide a very successful service and become a leader in the international library market.

Additionally, ebrary offers sites for individuals: ebrary Discover, which features a full-text database of books, maps, reports and other documents spanning multiple subject areas, is continued on page 67.