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ATG Interviews Bill Cohen

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ATG: Bill, it’s been a whole year (hard to believe!) since the merger of Haworth Press into the Taylor & Francis Group. How has the transition been from your point of view? From T&F’s point of view?

BC: The anniversary of the merger forges ahead with most positive feelings. Some of Haworth’s 200 academic journal editors were of course initially nervous. However, these sentiments quickly changed. The Taylor & Francis Group is an “acquisitive” company and was well-versed with all details involved with an acquisition like this. Their executive staff swiftly took charge, with sensitivity and supportive insight. In addition, a number of key Haworth editors were hired by Taylor & Francis and moved to Philadelphia, where their primary North American journal office is located. Senior Haworth personnel included Kathy Rutz, Dr. Ushai Singh, Dr. Shrikrishna (Krish) Singh, Sean Bepple, and more.

Taylor & Francis greatly increased their office space at their handsome main headquarters at 325 Chestnut Street to accommodate the increased workload.

I hope librarians at all levels and in all departments will understand the enormous amount of effort and coordination involved from the technical side. Any interruptions in Internet service were tackled with utmost possible speed. This is no easy feat, as the Haworth computer system bore little relationship to the Taylor & Francis computer system. Our 200 journals were also twice the number of the previous large journal acquisitions by Taylor & Francis, that of Larry Earbaum Publishers. At one point, the Haworth computer was “tweaked” so that it operated at something like 40 times its previous speed. I tried this myself. It worked.

ATG: You seem to be actively involved in the operation of Haworth despite what it will be. Where are you located?

BC: Taylor & Francis indicated we should “carry on as if nothing is happening” during the first several weeks of the merger planning. Thereafter, however, it was Kevin Bradley, the powerhouse President of the Taylor & Francis North American operations, who undertook all managerial roles, and delegated the responsibilities. During the first six months my role was to caretake just the 32 library and information science journals, while the others were split up amongst various specialty editors. A number of medical and pharmaceutical titles went to Informa Health, a separate division of T&F in New York City, while others were segmented appropriately in different departments in Philadelphia. Jill Millard is Publisher, Routledge US Journals Program, Social & Behavioral Sciences, Arts & Humanities & Education, while directly under her is Concetta Seminara, Associate Editor, Business, Economics & Sociocultural Studies. Both executives deserve the highest praise one can formulate for their broad understanding of scholarly and academic journal publishing, and the editorial management skills required. Several months later, Stacy Stanislav came on board to take over responsibility as Managing Editor, Information Science. She was fantastic in all respects. I met too briefly Ed Cilurso, Production Manager, who overwields one with his profound knowledge of every nuance involved in production science, from manuscript to print/Web publication. Dr. David Green, Publishing Director from the UK, also presented himself, and presided over several meetings with most rare efficiency and facilitative wit. I met up also with Bev Acreman, who has taken up an important new leadership role within the UKSG, involving both their Marketing and Education Committees.

I am leaving out too many of the huge number of other leaders of the great Taylor & Francis team in the United States and the United Kingdom. I have never seen such a multitude of people power invested with such talent, creativity, and vigor.

Relating to my own role: it is mainly to facilitate where possible, adapt as required, advise where necessary … and also just sit back quietly and learn. I am still working from my home office in lower Manhattan. When any Haworth journal editor or book author hits a “snag,” they might usually contact me for advice and help, and I do my best to help veer them in the right direction. Within the area of librarianship, one major development that might come about — if not now, then possibly in a later year — could be the official adoption of our flagship journal, The Serials Librarian, by NASIG. Negotiations on this potentially historic event may be taking place as this interview is being provided, so it would not be appropriate for me to expand upon this, with the exception that I do hope that this comes about. SL was the first peer-reviewed journal devoted to the study of serials librarianship, and indeed the first journal if you don’t count the older newsletter-type publication, Serials Slants.

Taylor & Francis is also now the largest publisher of peer-reviewed journals in library and information science, in terms of numbers, eclipsing Elsevier. It is appropriate that formal ties with leading library organizations be identified, discussed, and hopefully considered. T&F now has a library journal relating to almost every library function — ranging from administration (Journal of Library Administration) to cataloging (Cataloging & Classification Quarterly) to electronic resources (Journal of Electronic Resources Librarianship) to reference (The Reference Librarian) and more than 30 more. The opportunities almost beg for action.

ATG: The title of the journal Acquisitions Librarian has been changed to the Journal of Electronic Resources Librarianship, and there is a new Editor. Can you tell us about this publication?

BC: This title change was planned before Haworth was acquired by Taylor & Francis. Post-acquisition, I learned that T&F was ever so much more cautious and conservative in regard to serials title changes than Haworth. In a nutshell, of course, all publishers aim to avoid title changes. They don’t want to lose the momentum built up by a journal’s historic growth. Yet some title changes are unavoidable, even other desirable, and librarians have established precise rules for dealing with these. On the ordering and record-keeping side, many librarians abhor title changes because they disrupt a neat and tidy bibliographic record. Some years ago, a newsletter called Title Varies kept up with changing serials titles. About 8 to 12 annual awards were given to title changes which struck a particular nerve, or else were unintentionally funny or seemingly illogical. Going back now to the above-mentioned question: The Acquisitions Librarian was launched under the Founding Editorship of Dr. Bill Katz, author of the bestselling textbook on acquisitions in his day, and a lion in the field. He died tragically after a long struggle with brain cancer. We attempted to find a successor editor, but two fell by the wayside. Why? We were entering the Age of Digitization, and libraries were not so much “acquiring” as they were “licensing.” There were no longer a sufficient number of manuscripts to support a journal in this area. We had to “go with the flow,” and this flow was an electronic one. We approached Bonnie Tijerina, Digital Collections Services Librarian at UCLA, and also Conference Organizer for the yearly “Electronic Resources & Libraries” event at ALA, proposing that she take over the journal under the new title, Journal of Electronic Resources Librarianship. We were ecstatic when she agreed to come on board. The journal has now just issued its 2nd number, with the 3rd and 4th on their way. It covers the gamut of electronic resources practice, theory and research, ranging from faculty vs. librarian involvement in electronic resources licensing, to standardized reporting and assessment requirements for institutional repositories, to budgeting and management of large bundles or aggregated product offerings. From the get-go there was an understanding continued on page 62

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that electronic resources management was not simply serials librarianship re-named. It is, in so many ways, the new librarianship in practice.

ATG: What other new journal publications are in the works? Books?

BC: I am not really privy to new journal launches at this point in time. Book publishing is carried out by entirely separate divisions.

ATG: What predictions do you have for the future of Haworth? Will you continue to be a separate imprint of Taylor & Francis?

BC: Haworth’s journals should grow and prosper. I anticipate they may advantageously be folded into a broader, Routledge/Taylor & Francis imprimatur. By far and away, one of the most immediate advantages is that the publication lag time (defined here as meaning the time from receipt of final copy in the publisher’s office, to final print/Web publication) has already been cut from six months to three months. That time reduction will be a magnet for highly cited authors. In addition, Taylor & Francis promotes on both sides of the Atlantic, and maintains a 15-member sales force for “Big Deals” and other types of journal packages. Other factors includes T&F’s participation in low-cost journal programs for libraries in most of Africa; technological improvements to make the Haworth journals Counter compliant; and once again the vast advantages of informaworld, the Taylor & Francis platform, which is so extraordinarily robust.

ATG: Do you regret your decision to sell Haworth Press to Taylor & Francis?

BC: No, not at all. At this time in my life, I could not go it alone. More importantly, I see the journal business as changing radically on many fronts. There is a unique paradox facing us. On the one hand, the Internet allows anyone to distribute information globally with the greatest of ease. In addition, costs of typography are decreasing rapidly. This makes a new journal launch duck soup from one angle. Yet simultaneously many libraries are in a period of punishing budgetary stress. The planets, one could say, are out of alignment. However, I believe new strategies of competition will be found on a number of fronts, with the aim of providing the best possible services for scholarly, academic, and professional end-users. But I have utmost confidence in the people of Taylor & Francis. Although it has indeed been only a year since the acquisition of Haworth by Taylor & Francis, it feels ever so much longer. Taylor & Francis was founded in the City of London in 1798, and it is unique in structure as it is in history. Many companies courted Haworth when it first appeared on the market. It took however but one meeting with their principle contacts, Roger Horton, Chief Executive from London, and Kevin Bradley, to ascertain that this would be our preferred and rightful home.