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Adventures in Librarianship -- Dear Gabbey

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AMAZONDRIA

by Sandra Beehler (Lewis & Clark College)

In 286 B.C. the city of Alexandria set out to build a library containing all existing books; in the twenty first century A.D. Internet moguls are attempting the same feat. "Respecting [a book's] physical form while transcending its limits," Amazon has embarked on a huge project that aims to make information in the physical book accessible to potential purchasers. Amazon founder Jeff Bezos sold publishers on digitization by convincing them that increased searchability will increase sales—and by offering digitized pages only as a search tool. Brewster Kahle—founder of the Internet Archive and the Million Book Project—wants to bring books into the Internet realm where most of the world's students do their research, but, to avoid copyright hassles, concentrates on titles in the public domain, which can then be searched, downloaded, and copied. With the help of "print on demand" technology, both parties hope to use digitization as a means to make the entire body of human knowledge represented by books accessible to a wider public.

See — "The Great Library of Amazonia" by Gary Wolf, in *Wired*, 11.12 (December 2003), p. 214-221.

OPEN SOURCE SYNERGY

by Sandra Beehler (Lewis & Clark College)

The open source idea that began with software such as Linux is quickly spreading to other disciplines—and challenging the status quo in patent and copyright law. Proponents of open source argue that it is a highly effective and revolutionary method for innovation in all fields of human endeavor. True open source is a collaborative process—the collective result is greater than individual efforts alone could achieve. The Internet is open source's great enabler; intellectual property is its nemesis. Citing projects from Wikipedia to PLOS Biology to Australia's Cambia biotech project, the author proposes that property should be distributed rather than protected and that doing this would ultimately be of benefit to the companies that now fight hardest against it.

See — "Open Source Everywhere" by Thomas Goetz, in *Wired* 11.11 (November 2003), p. 158-211.

THE PLOT THICKENS

by Bruce Strauch (The Citadel)

Press baron Conrad Black, late of Hollinger International, began with a clever strategy: buy the primary newspaper in an isolated market, cut costs and boost advertising. That worked so well he moved into prestige papers — *London Telegraph*, *Chicago Sun-Times* and all the majors of Canada. This provided him with a multi-mansioned lifestyle and a flashy journalist wife with scads of Manolo Blahniks.

Now he's up against the ropes as Hollinger shareholders have learned that as CEO of Hollinger he sold off papers to companies controlled by himself. Most curious is the *Mammoth Times* which went for \$1(!) beating out a \$1.25 million competitive bid. And over a seven year period, Hollinger paid out \$224 million in management and other fees to companies owned by Lord Black.

His spokesman says he's confident the facts will show he acted in the best interest of the shareholders.

See — Elena Cherney and Robert Frank, "Lord Black Held Stake in Buyers of Hollinger Papers," in *The Wall Street Journal*, Jan. 30, 2004, p.A1.

THE MERRY-GO-ROUND STARTS TO SLOW

by Bruce Strauch (The Citadel)

Scientific journals had been pretty much the same since the birth of *Lancet* in 1823. Academe grew and "publish or perish" became a universal rule so the industry grew. Then Reed Elsevier bundled hundreds of titles into ScienceDirect and offered it online.

The price is steep and Reed's science-medical revenues doubled to \$2.33 billion to provide 40% of its operating profit. And annual subscription increases have run around 7% a year.

Universities saw their periodicals budgets eaten up and were able for the first time to count how seldom many of the journals were read. But to unbundle and make any savings they had to slash scads of journals.

But Reed titles are being cut as resistance builds. Along with this is the movement to use free online peer-reviewed journals. And a bill before Congress would remove copyright protection for publicly funded research.

See — Charles Goldsmith, "Reed Elsevier Feels Resistance to Web Pricing," in *The Wall Street Journal*, Jan. 19, 2004.



Adventures in Librarianship — Dear Gabbey

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

Dear Gabbey,

I am a 15-year-old high school senior and boy, do I have a problem. My local public library carries a way cool skateboard mag called *Crusader*, so I go in every

Saturday to check out the new issue. Well, there's a girl who works there, kind of straightening the magazines, rolling carts around and stuff, and I think I've fallen in love with her.

The problem is she's old, maybe twenty. But I can't stop thinking about her, the way she chews her pencil, the way she holds her nose around the bag lady, how the florescent lights show off the green streak in her hair.

Gabbey, I'm just a crummy slacker kid. How do I get her to notice me?

Perplexed in Pennsauken

Dear Perp,

Oh, to be young again, prowling the library stacks in search of enlightenment and whatnot. Don't be put off by the age difference. Your Madonna may have well-concealed maternal instincts. Or you might consider impressing her with your maturity. If you asked, let's say, "Can you point me in the direction of your Salinger collection?" she might simply swoon. If you said, perhaps, "I noticed you've migrated from Dewey to LC" she'd be bowled over by your knowledge of library procedures. If that fails, Commander Salamander sells a lovely little Shakespeare nose ring. Might do the trick!

Dear Gabbey,

I'm a librarian at a large university in the Midwest. Over the past two years I've become addicted to BIP surfing. I don't know how it happened. At first I just logged in and searched by subject for new engineering titles. Then I was searching by author... any author at all, just for the

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Issues in Vendor/Library Relations — Offices

Column Editor: **Bob Nardini** (Senior Vice President & Head Bibliographer, YBP Library Services, 999 Maple Street, Contoocook, NH 03229; Phone: 800-258-3774 x. 3251; Fax: 603-746-5628) <rnardini@ybp.com>

The set of activities known as “library-vendor relations” aren’t usually thought of as a place-bound phenomenon. But, of course, these “relations” do unfold, at least in part, in certain places, or rather types of places which all of us come to know well. Convention hall exhibit floors, the sidewalks of convention cities, library meeting rooms, off-campus restaurant tables or tables at on-campus dining facilities all are familiar examples, each with a different protocol.

To cite another minor example, airport boarding lounges become a twice-yearly venue of library-vendor relations under an ironclad schedule surrounding **ALA Conferences**. Conference-goers who happen to have been booked on the same flight are sure to encounter one another as they wait for the airline agent’s call to line up and get on the plane. While this can be a chance for a moment of bonding forged in small talk over some shared hardship inflicted by the airline, or can be a providential opportunity to talk with someone whose attention you wouldn’t get otherwise, these encounters can also seem a little unfair, since nobody feels quite on duty as yet, and since unlike other venues, whom you run into isn’t predictable.

Suddenly you are standing or sitting near someone whose face you recognize but whose name you don’t recall. Do they recognize you? You don’t know. Or worse, clearly they do recognize you and seize the chance for conversation. Use your wits to make the best of it. Or you do recognize them, but you’d much rather take up their particular piece of business via

email. Do you engage them, or look away? Or maybe you don’t want to talk to anyone at all just yet. After all, it might be 6:35 a.m., you may have a thousand things running through your mind—if your mind is active at all at this point—and what you really want is to request that the agent announce to the lounge on your behalf, “I want to be alone.”

In fact, our protocol allows that. Airport boarding lounges are one venue where it is permissible to refuse eye contact, to make perfunctory conversation or no conversation, to relocate to the very perimeter of the common space, and turn your back on everyone; even to walk away.

But airport lounges are a backwater of library-vendor relations. To get to the heart of things, where the place-bound element of our mutual business really is defined, it’s necessary to discuss offices. Not vendor offices, since librarians and vendors only occasionally encounter one another on the vendor’s distant premises. Far more common to find librarian and vendor sitting on either side of a desk in the office of a librarian.

All the clichés about offices apply, of course. If you, the vendor, find yourself sitting in an expansive, nicely appointed, upper-floor corner space with a splendid view of campus spread out below, probably you are in the director’s office, in case you are wondering. If, on the other hand, you sit in a windowless square room outfitted with state-issue furnishings and last painted maybe eight or nine years ago, you are more likely in the office of the assistant acquisitions librarian.

Either way, it’s a good thing to be there at all, and an invitation to sit with the assistant acquisitions librarian might actually be the better opening. No rule says a librarian has to let a vendor representative into their office. An office is quasi-personal space, and to share it even momentarily with an outsider is a welcoming gesture, possibly an implicit state-

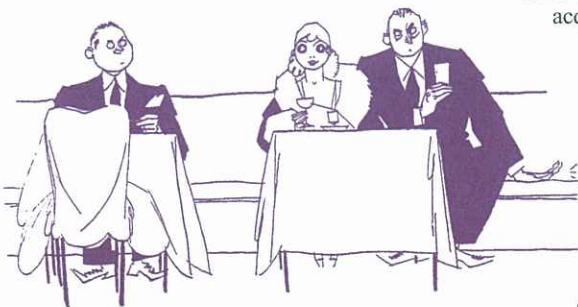
ment that you, the librarian, are open for business. There are plenty of other library spaces where it’s possible to receive vendors, after all—conference rooms, teaching labs, workspaces in the back, hallways, tables in the reference department, standing up over the circulation desk, sitting in the café (more and more often), someone’s cubicle, someone else’s office.

Not a good sign for a vendor to see nothing but a succession of these library spaces. When the librarian you really want shuts their door on you, perhaps literally as you are spotted down the hall, well, there’s always email. “Sorry we didn’t get much chance to talk last week when I visited,” you start the message, and wonder what to say next. When an office serves as a perfect refuge that only email can penetrate, things can only get better, would be the way to look at it.

More happily, “Why don’t you come into my office?” is an invitation no vendor rep refuses. At the very least there will be a chance to sit down and make conversation. That will be easy enough even on first meeting, since every office in the world is like a museum exhibit, but one all about the curator. Is the librarian in the middle of an important project? If so, there’s evidence among the papers, notes, and reports spread out everywhere. Did you used to live in Montana? The framed wall map begs visitors to ask the question. Just back from that big conference? The badge, mug, and program are pretty good clues. Hobbies, heroes, hometown, family, favorite films, sports favorites, significant books, treasured travel spots, alma mater, pets, politics, any or all are likely on display.

If not, the absence of this kind of paraphernalia might instead mean, “I’m all business, so please get to the point.” Usually an office will concretely express some overriding metaphor in the librarian’s mind. Is the office a study, dominated by the bookshelves lining the walls such as you would expect to see in the History Department or Philosophy Department? Is it a parlor, with healthy green plants, Oriental rug, a sofa? Or is it a hub, a busy command center buzzing with communications and comings-

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coworkers are starting to suspect. I try to block the screen whenever one of them walks past my desk. I can’t sleep. I’m losing weight. Help me, Gabbey, before it’s too late!

Melancholy in Michigan

Dear Melan,

Losing weight? Maybe you’re on to something! No, seriously, you’re not alone. You wouldn’t believe how many letters I get from people who can’t stop surfing the BIP, Ulrich’s, even Dialog. Oddly, they’re almost all from Michigan. Hmm... I won’t speculate.

adrenaline rush. Now I’m spending my days going through full publisher lists. I think my

Try calling your local chapter of LWP (Librarians With Problems). They have trained counselors available and a nine-step program to help people such as you. For BIP surfers, admitting the problem is the first step toward recovery. You are in my prayers.

Dear Gabbey,

How can I be sure that my girlfriend likes me for me, and not for my collection of early twentieth-century sheet music?

Uncertain in Utah

Dear Uncert,

You can’t. Does it really matter? 