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against the grain

Patrick C. Sommers

BORN AND LIVED: Cape Girardeau, MO until I joined Dun & Bradstreet in 1969. Since then I have lived in 11 different cities and 18 different homes.

EARLY LIFE: Grew up in an idyllic small town in the ’50s—’60s — did all the things you read in books and see in movies. At 14 got my first job in the food services business (curb hop), and when I was 16 upgraded to working in the local public library.

FAMILY: A wife (Barbara) and a daughter (Whitney) living in Minneapolis.

IN MY SPARE TIME I LIKE TO: Read, play golf, listen to music, travel.

FAVORITE BOOKS: Very eclectic taste — same in music.

PET PEEVES: Hidden agendas, anything less than the truth.

PHILOSOPHY: Understanding requires Context. We have the opportunity to define the future if we are bold enough to let go of the past.

MOST MEMORABLE CAREER ACHIEVEMENT: All of them are memorable — I have been fortunate to have worked with some outstanding people during my career.

GOAL I HOPE TO ACHIEVE FIVE YEARS FROM NOW: I hope to be in a position to make a small positive difference in the world. I also hope to get my handicap down to a single digit.

HOW/WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS: It depends on the industry’s willingness to embrace change. The convergence of technology, changing business models, and the Internet is accelerating. This will have a profound impact on libraries and our education systems and consequently those industries serving them. You don’t need to look any further than the newspaper and periodical industries to see how a long-term, stable business model can come apart and relatively quickly.

Consequently, we believe that the subscription business is not impacted by a general-interest title’s inclusion in a database any more than free copies in a doctor’s office impact subscriptions. Licensing royalties are incremental revenue to general-interest publishers.

In addition to serving users with quality information in the context of other searchable content, aggregated databases promote brand awareness for publishers. The value to publishers — smaller ones in particular — is that their brand is served up along with other quality publications and is highly visible to hundreds of millions of information-seekers annually. This exposure frequently leads to individuals seeking out subscriptions to a publication they were not aware of previously.

We still believe there is tremendous value to aggregated databases. That said, we also see tremendous value to new product concepts that we are developing. Our portal products — Global Issues in Context, GREENR, Career Transitions, and more — take information delivery to the next level by providing information in context, with Web 2.0 community tools and Website-like interfaces.