2011

ATG Interviews Stephen Rhind-Tutt

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Recommended Citation
DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.5992

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imagine how that opens eBooks to use? The ability to search within books just as you would search a journal article, all within a sweep of the breadth of the library’s collection, is a big leap forward in responding to user needs.

**ATG:** On an even broader scale, how will all of this work with Serials Solutions’ web-scale management solution, which is currently in development?

**KS:** We’ve talked a bit about the extra-ordinary research environment that’s being built by ProQuest, and that effort is being supported with services that enable libraries to manage their resources, particularly the growing dominance of e-content. Serials Solutions’ comprehensive knowledgebase is the core of support across the entire continuum of library services — from improving access and use of collections to easing librarian workloads, and ultimately to reducing operating costs. The new web-scale management solution is aimed at redefining how libraries manage operations, eventually eliminating the need for the ILS as we know it today. It will be a single, unified management solution for libraries that frees staff from low-value tasks and enables them to do the real work of librarians. In the broadest sense, web-scale management supports the researcher because it supports the library workflow — the researcher’s key partner.

**ATG:** Are there any new developments that you feel at liberty to give ATG a scoop on?

**KS:** Sure, we always have some interesting next-steps up our sleeves. We mentioned new products that will integrate ProQuest content with ebrary’s research tools. We’re really excited to see what researchers can do when they’re armed with journal and newspaper content powered by InfoTools and DASH! And more, watch for a tablet app for ebrary. Students will be able to work with eBooks right in the classroom from their smartphones. That’s a powerful way to embed research right in the workflow. I guess from the students’ perspective it’s also good cover when they want to update their Facebook status in class.

**TB:** The ProQuest research environment is going to bring users in further with capabilities that allow for content creation. We’re already exploring this with some of our vertical social networks, such as E村落 Interactions. We have scholars submitting updates to the database that are vetted by an advisory board of other scholars. This process allows for continual improvements and expansion that are directed by the user.

**ATG:** Thank you both for taking the time to talk to us. We appreciate your thoughtful responses to our questions.

**ATG:** If we’re not mistaken you got your start in electronic publishing with Gale and then with Chadwyck-Healey. Can you tell us a little bit about that?

**SR-T:** I began my publishing career at Abt Books, an offshoot of Abt Associates, one of the world’s largest consulting companies. Clark Abt, the founder, believed that CD-ROM had the potential substantially to help him develop the publishing world because it would allow for easy dissemination of Western knowledge. I found that more inspiring than selling Hellman’s Mayonnaise — which is what I’d been doing previously! We produced some pretty varied CD-ROMs that were ahead of their time (the National Portrait Gallery, a multimedia criminal justice database, and real estate data sets).

From there I was lucky enough to work at SilverPlatter (then the largest vendor of CD-ROM in the world), where I ran their Health Sciences division, on to IAC (now Gale), and thence to Chadwyck-Healey (now ProQuest). I’ve always published for libraries.

**ATG:** What gave you the inspiration to start Alexander Street Press? What were your first products like?

**SR-T:** I’d learned the value of controlled vocabularies at SilverPlatter and the value of full text at Chadwyck-Healey. I thought they could be put together far more effectively. I’d been reading Tim Berners-Lee about the semantic Web and Ted Nelson about the deficiencies of HTML and TCP/IP. It was the height of the dot-com era and everyone was trying to get rid of human intelligence. I thought we might go in the opposite direction and use librarian cataloguing skills to build semantic tags.

I realized that letters and diaries were in essence personal snapshots in place and time — and that with semantic indexing they’d become much more useful! And so I had the idea for a large collection of letters and diaries, indexed so that you could see what was written in a particular place at a particular time. NorthAmerican Women’s Letters and Diaries was our first product — it had important content, unavailable elsewhere in electronic form, with unique functionality and lots of input from librarians. We’ve tried to keep to that recipe ever since.

**ATG:** Since starting the company, you have expanded and now offer a variety of media to the library community. Was that in the plan all along? Or has it been a process of adjusting and taking advantage of new opportunities? Have there been any surprises along the way that have caused you to adjust or change course?

**SR-T:** There were big surprises. I didn’t see Google Books coming — I thought libraries would do that themselves. I didn’t think discovery services would get such traction. But in both cases we’ve adjusted — by publishing much more rare, hard-to-find and in-copyright material and through alliances with the discovery service vendors. In almost all cases we’ve stayed true to our mission. Our goal has always been to provide the best we can within disciplines. Video performances were a natural extension of drama texts. Oral histories were a natural extension of letters and diaries. When we acquired Classical.com it became evident how we might do this at scale.

**ATG:** Up to this point Alexander Street Press has focused on the humanities and social sciences but with your new product Nursing Education in Video you seem to be branching out into the sciences. Is this something we should continue to expect?

**SR-T:** Absolutely. Expect titles in business, law, architecture, medicine, and many other areas. We like to enter new disciplines with a must-have landmark collection. There’s been a lack of large, definitive, well-indexed video collections for libraries, so that provides us an entrance into many new disciplines.

**ATG:** What elements go into your decision-making process when you decide to bring a new product to market?

**SR-T:** Simply put, our mission is “to make silent voices heard.” This is a way of saying that we look for content and voices that need to be amplified and made public. A good electronic publisher also looks for ways to add functional value by making these content and voices easier to discover, analyze, annotate, search, and understand.

We aim to stay within specific disciplines because that lets us understand and respond more effectively to what academics and librarians need. We think that librarians already have an abundance of choices, so we try not to duplicate resources that are already out there. This is what leads us to collections as disparate as Underground and Independent Comics, Counseling and Psychotherapy Transcripts, and Nursing Education in Video.

Librarians are essential in this work. They’ve suggested and helped us find rare material, whether it’s unusual newsreels or previously unpublished drama.

**ATG:** You are an advocate of semantic indexing over traditional forms of indexing. Can you explain the difference? Is semantic indexing used in Alexander Street Press databases? How does it benefit users?

**SR-T:** Semantic indexing has a broad range of meanings. My preferred definition is to tag “the conceptual content of a body of text by establishing associations between those terms that occur in similar contexts.” It’s much more than a fancy way to describe subject indexing. It includes the addition of
metadata about those subjects. As an example, it’s not just tagging content for occurrences of a particular battle, it allows one to say: “Give me all battles in which more than 1,000 people were killed.” Or, “Give me documents written by women under the age of 20 that talk about marriage.” Or, “What Phase 2 clinical trials of ACE inhibitors have been successful in the past 2 years?” The benefit to users is that it allows richer reference.

This Scientific American article on the Web does a better job than I of describing the importance of the concepts behind it.

ATG: Last year at the Charleston Conference you dared the audience to “imagine…that for each term within a discipline there was a page on the web that organized all of the surrounding content for a particular subject within a discipline.” You also said that is what you were aiming for at Alexander Street Press — and that you were close to achieving it for music and drama. What would such a page look like and have you achieved it in your databases?

SR-T: Yes, we’re aiming for this. We’re relatively far down the tracks in music, less so in drama. I don’t think that such pages necessarily need to be controlled by Alexander Street. What’s exciting to me at the moment are initiatives that allow third party content to be easily linked. To this end we’ve just spent much of the past year developing an Alexander Street Metadata Repository that will allow third parties to link to any and all of our content. Commercial and non-profit organizations alike will be able to build reference pages and links directly into our content, and to have those pages update easily and at a low cost.

ATG: Pricing is always an issue. We hear from librarians that they are impressed with your innovative and valuable products but that the prices are too steep — especially from the perspective of small- and medium-size libraries. Is there any fairness to that perception?

SR-T: I think it’s an outdated perception. Philosophically, our approach has always been to price to allow broad access — we’ve always had lower prices for smaller institutions. I’m sure every vendor thinks that it offers good value, so what I’ve tried to do below is give you some objective comparisons. Perhaps the greatest proof that we’re pricing fairly is that many partners license to us, and despite tough economic times our products are selling well to libraries.

Practically, I think the easiest way to show this is in examples: American History in Video has approximately 5,000 video titles in it and academic subscription prices range from $1,100 to $2,500 depending on the type and size of the institution. The Music Online listening package contains the equivalent of more than $8,000 CDs and costs from $1,600 to $2,000 for an entire university to subscribe to for a year. The same content on iTunes would cost a single professor $300,000 to buy, and that’s without all the tools and searchability we provide.

We do offer the ability to purchase content — and this costs more. But again I don’t think it’s excessive to ask for $15,000 to $30,000 for our Filmsakers Library — that’s $13 to $26 per title for titles that sell for hundreds of dollars each.

ATG: Can libraries customize selections from your databases and come up with a mix that is more affordable? For example, will this type of flexibility be available with your new integrated online repository of academic video titles that is available via the new platform, Academic Video Online?

SR-T: The documentaries — from our Filmakers Library imprint and the counseling and therapy videos from our Microtraining Associates imprint are available as single-streaming titles for $200 to $300 individually. We’re in the process of securing licenses to sell more titles like this. However, for some of our collections the original licensors will not give us single-title rights, and even when they do, they’re naturally concerned about losing money if we discount too heavily. So by far and away, the best value for libraries is through our collections.

ATG: While most of your recent offerings have been audio and/or video collections, you are releasing a new database called Anthropology Online that will focus on primary sources like written ethnographies, field notes, seminal texts, memoirs, etc. However, it will be cross-searchable with your Ethnographic Street Metadata Repository. Is this the wave of the future? Can text-only resources stand alone, or do today’s scholars expect access to multimedia resources?
the intersection between intellectual property law and competition is one of the most important — but most neglected — topics in the field. How do you reconcile freedom of the marketplace and antitrust laws with the exclusive rights granted to owners of intellectual property? "Intellectual Property and Competition," edited by Michael A. Carrer, contains a mixture of classic and newer articles dealing with the issues and potential conflicts raised by the overlap of these two separate fields.

There is a debate in the library world over what to do with compilations of previously-published materials. Should we purchase these for our collection? Or should we consider them redundant and instead direct our clients to view the original articles? The answer to this question often depends on what type of library you represent and on the depth of your journal holdings. Of course, it also depends on the richness of the articles selected by the compilation editor.

In the case of "Intellectual Property and Competition, Michael Carrier has selected a variety of articles by some of the most distinguished and forward-thinking scholars in the field. In fact, a perusal of the table of contents reads like a Who’s Who of IP-Competition scholars: Herbert Hovenkamp, Richard Posner, Robert Pitofsky, and Carl Shapiro. Although many of the articles were published between 2000 and 2002, these authors are so advanced in their analysis that mainstream scholarship has only now caught up. For example, Carl Shapiro’s 2000 work “Navigating the Patent Thicket: Cross Licenses, Patent Pools, and Standard Setting,” is very heavily cited. (This chapter was originally published in Volume 1 of Innovation Policy and the Economy). There are also a number of classic articles, such as William F. Baxter’s influential 1966 work “Legal Restrictions on Exploration of the Patent Monopoly: An Economic Analysis” (originally published in the Yale Law Journal).

The collection starts with Herbert Hovenkamp’s historical analysis, “The Conflict between Antitrust and Intellectual Property Rights” (originally a 2005 chapter in The Antitrust Enterprise: Principle and Execution). Richard A. Posner and Robert Pitofsky contribute articles on the new economy. Several articles deal with global approaches, and the editor has selected material covering patent pools, unilateral refusals to license, the pharmaceutical industry, and standards-setting organizations.

The work in this volume is outstanding, and still retains its cutting-edge quality. In terms of whether to purchase this volume or rely on the original materials, firms probably will not. Similarly, some universities supporting Ph.D.-level economics programs (but not law schools) might find the work useful. Also, it would be useful for specialized medical research institutions that create lots of patents. "Intellectual Property and Competition" is highly recommended for these types of collections.

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Endnotes