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Marketing to Libraries: Interview with Suzanne Schmidt

Vikki Medaglia
Bates College

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Marketing to Libraries

Interview with Suzanne Schmitz

Vice President, Academic Market, NewsBank, Inc.

by Vikki Medaglia (Bates College) (vmedagl@bates.edu)

VM: Suzy, I understand that you have been working with NewsBank and their Readex division for 12 years. Can you tell us a little about your background?

SS: I was hired by NewsBank in 1984, having worked for a number of years in the computer industry. Initially in sales, I have spent the last 6 years in a number of management positions, and I am now Vice President, Academic Market, with responsibility for all development and activity in the Academic market.

One of the first concepts I learned was understanding the needs of librarians. I had come from a background in the computer industry, and knew very little about the academic libraries beyond being a patron. I certainly learned a lot about academic libraries in my first years selling the Readex collections! Even today, as libraries' collection development strategies change, we are constantly learning what their new needs are.

VM: Librarians are familiar with NewsBank products, and Readex products. Not everyone knows that you are now the same company. Can you tell us a little about the NewsBank/Readex partnership, and what characterizes the two product lines?

SS: Readex was purchased by NewsBank, Inc. in 1984. NewsBank had experience with academic, high school and public libraries; Readex had a number of very sought-after collections for the academic library community. Each company had collections suited to the needs of school and academic libraries, respectively.

NewsBank is one of the leading providers of current events and issues information in electronic and other formats. NewsBank was started by the author John Naisbitt in 1970 as an outgrowth of his research on trend analysis which led to his bestseller, *Megatrends*. Naisbitt used newspapers to indicate the occurrence of trends, by noting the number of times a topic appeared in various newspapers. The original NewsBank newspaper collection on microfiche was sold to the present owner, Daniel S. Jones, in 1972.

Readex began in 1950, by reproducing scholarly document and other collections in microprint format. The company produced microprint cards with reduced size reproductions of documents and books on them.

When NewsBank purchased Readex, we began to look at the combined repository of information that we hold and the newly merged company focused on the synergy between the two companies. NewsBank had indexing resources and reformatting capabilities which could enhance the Readex collections, and Readex had a long-standing reputation within the academic library community, as well as unique collections of information.

NewsBank created the Academic and Research Libraries Division which carries the Readex line of academic products, as well as those NewsBank collections which are useful to academic libraries; sort of "the best of both worlds," for academic libraries.

VM: I understand that the format for some of the collections you produce has changed over time. Can you tell us a little about the Readex product line and explain how it has changed in format?

SS: Albert Boni founded Readex in 1950. His vision was to gather the world's most important library collections and make them widely accessible. The first historical Readex collections came out in the 1950s, making available materials which most libraries did not have.

Some examples of our scholarly collections are the Readex collection of *Early American Imprints*, based on "The American Bibliography," by Charles Evans. The Readex Landmarks of Science collection is regarded by many scholars as the finest history of science collection in the world. It is important to note that the integrity of the information in our historical collections has withstood the scrutiny of scholars over time.

With the purchase of Readex in 1984, NewsBank saw the value of converting Readex collections which were in the antiquated microprint format. NewsBank used microfiche to enhance access to newspapers, and in 1986 was the first company to produce a monthly-updated CD-ROM product for libraries. Now, selected collections from the Readex product line have been converted to microfiche as well. NewsBank's extensive indexing capabilities have also been put to use enhancing access to various collections in the Readex product line.

The acquisition of Readex by NewsBank provides a combination of unique scholarly collections with an ability to deliver in various formats using NewsBank's expertise in various access methods. This is part of the "synergy" between the two companies I referred to earlier. We now produce CD-ROMs which contain full-text and bibliographic information for many of our collections.

VM: As a company with a product to sell, how do you adapt to market changes?

SS: We are always listening to librarians. Their input drives what we do. The best way we hear what librarians are saying, and how library needs are changing, is to have consistent representation in the marketplace. That means that a customer gets to know the same representative over time. One of the advantages of our academic representatives is that most of them have been with us for a long time, so not only do they get to know our customers, but they become real experts on our collections.

Our *United Nations Documents Collection* is one example of the manner in which librarians drive our product development. Until six or seven years ago, the *United Nations Documents Collection* was not indexed by Readex, and the only available index was in a paper format, with annual cumulations of the index on fiche. This caused frustration for many of the users of the collection.

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Readex began indexing the collection document by document, using suggestions from documents librarians resulting in a very successful index to UN Documents. Our UN Collection is now indexed on a monthly-updated CD-ROM, and the documents are all available on archival-quality fiche.

NewsBank also believes in the use of Advisory Boards for input on research issues and opportunities as they relate to our collections. The boards help us identify opportunities for our company by explaining where libraries are interested in developing

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To find a publisher's address or telephone number in *BIP PLUS*, you first go to the search screen and type pu = ("pu" for "publisher") followed by the name of the publisher, e.g., pu = Oryx Press. Second, hit Enter, which reveals 386 hits, meaning that Oryx has that many titles in *BIP* at this time. Third, hit the F10 key to display brief, one-line citations of the 386 titles. Fourth, select (or highlight) any title by pointing the cursor at it and hitting Enter. Fifth, hit F10 again, which displays the full bibliographic citation for the title selected and, for the first time, the F2 prompt, which appears at the bottom of the screen. Sixth, and finally, hit F2, the command to display directory information (mailing address, telephone, FAX, telex, etc.) about the publisher of the book selected. *BIP PLUS* would be improved if the user could go directly to publisher information from the initial search screen. NB: I have run into librarians and bookstore people using *BIP PLUS* who are either unaware that it contains directory information about publishers or don't know how to find it.

It is important to keep these niggling complaints about *BIP PLUS*'s interface in perspective. The purpose here is not to denigrate but to suggest ways in which *BIP PLUS* might become an even better reference source. Suffice it to say that *BIP PLUS* is a superior product. It exemplifies how CD-ROM technology can deliver enormous quantities of essential information in a convenient, comprehensive, practical, and cost effective manner. Clearly a winner, *BIP PLUS* is recommended to everyone — librarians, booksellers, publishers, vendors, writers, researchers, the literate public — who seeks current and accurate information about books published in English in the U.S. and, in some versions, abroad.

(For technical assistance or hardware requirements, call toll-free 800-323-3288.)

their collections, what areas they will not focus on for the near future, and what they like and don't like about collections that are available from various sources.

VM: Are there areas where your company may part ways with the desires of librarians?

SS: Not really. However, when it becomes obvious that a requested information product will not be economically feasible to produce, we cannot afford to publish it.

VM: What changes have you seen over the last few years in specific libraries, or in the library market as a whole? Can you identify some of the forces driving these developments?

SS: Access and technology seem to be two of the biggest issues impacting our company's change. Librarians recognize the value of the information we provide and our "value-added" features, such as the high level of integrity of our indexing. Because of this, we select the appropriate type of technology for delivering our products in a manner that will fit a library's budget. This is why many of our products are still produced in microfiche form, as opposed to expensive digital conversions which may be too costly for many library budgets. The bottom line for us is providing the information libraries need. We are dedicated to our customers; not just individual librarians, but users, and the library as a whole. This philosophy has been central to our relationship with libraries.

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Ads Manager: Edna Laughrey
phone: 313-429-1029, fax: 313-429-1711
Executive Support Services
740 Woodland Drive, Saline, MI 48176