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On the Road

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On the Road

Column Editor: **Don Jaeger** (Alfred Jaeger, Inc.) <jaeger@ajaeger.com>

Two Hours in the Parking Deck

by **Forrest E. Link**

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In a kinder and gentler time before mad-men parked bomb-laden Rider trucks beneath landmarks, I made one of my regular day-trips to New York City. This was in the fall of 1990, shortly after the birth of my twins, and my father-in-law had traveled from Poland to attend their baptism. He had never been to New York.

Since he would be with us for a month or so, and I had business to do in the City, my wife and I devised a plan whereby she and her father would come along to do tourist things and meet up with me at the end of the day. And so it went, I dropped them off at Washington Square Park and they oohed and ahed their way up Fifth Avenue while I visited libraries.

Late that afternoon, we met at (where else?) the lions at New York Public and I drove them down to the World Trade Center for more gawking and a five-dollar beer. When I arrived, I realized anew how hard it is to park in lower Manhattan and, with visions of my day's wages sailing away, turned reluctantly into the parking deck below the Trade Center.

I was pleasantly surprised, as I drove down the ramp, to see a police officer directing me into a spot. "Great security," I thought.

About a half-hour later, our appetites for overpriced drinks and hors-d'oeuvres sated, (and remembering, too late, that most of the time New York is too hazy for the view to be very good), we came back down the elevator to the parking deck only to find my car in the middle of several others behind a

yellow CRIME SCENE DO NOT CROSS ribbon. I found a nearby police officer (there were several around) and inquired as to the nature of my discomfiture. In typically laconic New York fashion, he pointed me to a line of people. "Talk to the detective," he said.

I excused myself from my visibly annoyed wife and nonplussed father-in-law and joined the well-dressed queue. There, in speaking with the man behind of me, I learned that a body had been discovered in a car parked just a few spots away from mine. The stiff in question had been a Long Island contractor who had somehow run afoul of local organized crime. Apparently, he had been rather neatly murdered elsewhere, driven to the City, and left in the parking deck behind the wheel of his new Cadillac. The detective wanted to see our tickets from the machine at the entrance to the deck, presumably to question those who arrived before the victim. I hadn't, which explained the directions I received at my entry.

As I left the detective, I overheard the man I had spoken with in line respond to the detective's question with a classic example of New York sangfroid: "I saw him when I came in, but I didn't think anything of it. I thought he was sleeping."

Coming home that evening, we looked for our adventure on the New York television news, as if seeing it would make the story more real and less fantastic. The coverage lasted maybe 15 seconds and was told in "other news of the day."

In the end, I was somewhat embarrassed that my guest's first exposure to New York had confirmed all of the worst stereotypes. My wife relayed this to her father who was remarkably philosophical about the whole thing. "It happens in Warsaw, too," he told her.

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primary information delivery tool. If access to resources on the Web did not initiate major hardware upgrades, then these formatted document types will.

Just as the Web browser wars are being waged, PDF versus other document formats (SGML and HTML for example) are being debated. The consumer can expect to benefit from the battles as the best features of each will be incorporated into standard desktop tools. Wishful thinking? Absolutely! Reflect on the improvements that have been made in word processing programs over the last 5 years or so. It is not unrealistic to expect that a PDF reader/viewer and editor could be bundled into a desktop software suite in the not-too-distant future.

Back Talk

Business Not as Usual

by **Tony Ferguson** (Associate University Librarian, Columbia University)
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It's presidential election time and we are once again treated to the opportunity to vote for the candidate who will not conduct "business as usual." Insider politicians, since they are not businessmen, we are told, can't be trusted to understand the simple truth that you can't spend more than you collect in taxes. Outsider candidates, on the other hand, can be trusted.

Our current slate of "outsider" candidates will include an incumbent President who is really just an Arkansas governor intent on battling a beltway Congress made up of professional (read: deceitful) politicians; a crusty but lovable, if we could only get to know him, old soldier who has sacrificed his life in the Senate to battle the tax-and-spend liberals; and a billionaire businessman who because he is an engineer understands that all you have to do is define the problem, brainstorm solutions, and debug what you decide to implement. They all claim to have a monopoly on the ability to keep an eye on the bottom line and not lead us into debt and ruin. They all portray their job to be making choices between good and evil.

In libraries, we sometimes fall prey to the same simplistic thinking. We are information decision-makers who make choices between good and dumb (read: other points of view). We focus on the bottom line and, when needed, downsize, cut serials, sacrifice content continuity to meet current customer needs, sacrifice current and future needs to bask in the legitimacy of the digital library and technology's bleeding edge, etc. We make decisions. The buck stops here! Isn't life wonderful?

Scientific periodicals (fewer and fewer books published since they don't make money) publishers, whether they report to an owner, shareholder, or society of scholars, pull at the legs, wings, necks, etc., of the library geese who lay golden eggs, and deny any share of guilt for the bloodied and broken carcasses that remain on the battlefield.

Like librarians, their eyes are on the bottom line. Unlike librarians, they must not only balance the books, but make increased profits annually.

Book and serial vendors are different. They claim there is no right or wrong. They take money from customers and suppliers alike. Publishers are right. Customers are right. Both are consoled. Both pay.

Business is business we are told. It's not personal. So information professionals are free to downsize, cut serials, gut collections, charge outrageous prices, take money from publishers and customers alike, all in the name of nurturing the bottom line.

Is this any way to run a business?

Since "Back Talk" is the name for this column, I sometimes start out thinking what back talk do I want to dish out. After all, how often does anyone get a chance to lash out at the injustices of the world, to vent about what is "bugging" them? I have vented. I feel a little better. But there are other things that make me feel better about some of the issues discussed above.

First of all, apparently even in business there is recognition that by focusing solely on today's bottom line, tomorrow's success is imperiled. On page B1 of the September 27, 1996 *Wall Street Journal*, is an article entitled "Some Companies Try to Rebuild Loyalty" by Joseph B. White and Joann S. Lublin. They note: "Corporate attitudes are changing in part because employers realize that talented employees can easily jump ship in today's relatively tight job market. Although corporate layoffs haven't stopped, job creation is far outstripping jobs eliminated." They go on to describe a variety of job enrichment opportunities being given employees and job security guarantees.

Since libraries tend to mimic business on a time-lag basis, we will all probably experience some of these benefits as well. University librarians have always received free tuition and some have tenure, but these are the exception. Numerically, most librarians lack these benefits. One wonders if publishers and vendors will take steps to nurture company loyalty. If so, the gossip about who is switching to which competitor in *Against the Grain* will become much less interesting.

Treating employees as important factors in a business or library's long-term success is critical. For librarians who feel stretched between the public service, collection development, processing, learning about the Internet and how to become a Web-masters, and serving on countless committees, they need reassurance that their work is of value, that they are not just widgets that can be

added or deleted according to the whims of the people who pay the bills.

A second manifestation of the good things happening, relates to the development of policies in libraries to govern how we treat each other and our patrons. At Columbia, we developed a **Human Resources philosophy statement** that declares we are all committed to:

- * work together with skill, dedication, and creativity.
- * treat each person with dignity and respect.
- * encourage individual development of skills and knowledge.
- * articulate the expectations of the workplace.
- * value individual contributions and experience.
- * understand how functions of the library and academic computing contribute to the larger community.
- * have understanding and compassion for people experiencing exceptional personal crises.
- * practice fair and equitable treatment of all individuals throughout the University.
- * support the University statement on non-discriminatory policies.
- * maintain open and clear channels for communication.

We are not singular in the development of such statements. Many libraries preceded us. All such statements, when implemented, make information work more enjoyable and productive.

Finally, I was cheered (read: awestruck and shaken) this past week when I was told by a representative of the major European scientific periodicals publisher that they were offering digital and print journals (yes, I know this goes against one of the commandments laid down in my last column) for only 3% more than print alone and they threw in guaranteed annual increases of less than 10% in exchange for a no cancellation agreement (yes, I understand they are scared about the future but I don't reject Christmas presents just because it makes Santa feel good). While the suggested increase level is still above the percentage our budget will increase, the concept is definitely headed in the right direction. This comes on the heels of an offer from a major American medical sciences publisher to discuss guaranteed print journal price increases. November 5th will come and go. We will have a new/old President. Life will go on. We will continue to face challenges. Let's all try and remember that if we work together, we can all win. If not, there will be short term winners and losers, but we will all lose in the long run.

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3. Query the library when order information is in doubt.
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