

November 2013

Back Talk-Chemical Warfare and Frog Soup!

Anthony W. Ferguson
Columbia University

Tom Gilson
College of Charleston Libraries

Follow this and additional works at: <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg>



Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Ferguson, Anthony W. and Gilson, Tom (1997) "Back Talk-Chemical Warfare and Frog Soup!," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 9: Iss. 4, Article 11.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.2213>

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

And They Were There
from page 69

Cecily Johns of the University of California, Santa Barbara, talked about using vendor-provided MARC records in a "fastcat" operation. The Fastcat unit in Acquisitions handles Blackwell's "MARC with books" service for a 90% match for their domestic approval books. The vendor supplies fully upgraded MARC records and an additional table of contents service — thus cataloging and processing of these titles is completed in Acquisitions, at the point of receipt. UCSB also loads MARCIVE records for documents.

According to Johns, advantages of this service are as follows:

- the goals are met, in that books get to the shelves faster, the records include more complete bibliographic information, books with full copy are handled by staff at lower levels, and there has been a considerable reduction of steps needed in the process;
- processing has been streamlined in Ac-

quisitions with the addition of the Fastcat unit;

- upgrading of CIP has been eliminated, with the savings of one FTE staff position;
- the process has been speeded up by about two months; and
- the quality of cataloging records has not suffered.

Disadvantages can be perceived in the following areas:

- a delay of about one week does occur in receipt of the approval books;
- some duplication does occur (about 0.5%);
- some spine labels are incorrect;
- initial staff resistance to the plan, which has diminished by now;
- some training and coordination issues have surfaced which caused a redesign of the workflow.

Last, Karen Wilhoit, of Wright State University fame spoke of the current situation at her institution, two years after they outsourced all cataloging in 1995. After

eliminating the whole Catalog department, they contracted with OCLC TechPro for original cataloging, including item creation, with PromptCat for their Yankee approval program, and with Autographics for their government documents MARC records. Prior to outsourcing, they had estimated their in-house cataloging costs at about \$17 per title, versus about \$5 per title with TechPro.

Wilhoit mentioned that all this resulted in enormous savings in staff costs and in much more streamlined processing, which gets books to the stacks within a week and the bibliographic records in the catalog at the same time. Thus Technical Services at Wright State is moving to PromptCat for most of their receipts, while fine-tuning their TechPro contract. Wilhoit saw no problems with the quality of incoming records, 65% of which are DLC and 25% member copy. The disadvantages she mentioned had to do with the drastic staffing cuts which left her department with little flexibility to deal with new developments, and/or special projects.



You Gotta Fo To School For That
from page 92

ceased their assault on our bastion of knowledge. We were exhausted. But we had survived.

I shook my head and looked around. The endless miles of sand and dunes reformed into book shelves and carpet. The stone fortress became the paper-cluttered wooden reference desk. I noticed that Bill was looking at me funny.

"Are you all right," he said cautiously. "You look a bit glassy eyed."

I rubbed my eyes and peered into the stacks. "Yea, I'll make it. Just thinking that it's quiet out there ... too quiet."


"Huh?" said Bill.

"Oh, nothing. Just thinking."


Bill scratched his head. "Well, better you than me. I'm not on the desk today. I just came here to check my schedule and ..."

"Oh my god," said Margot.

"What?" blurted Bill and I as we turned to the now bloodied "volunteer."

Margot had a pained look in her eyes as she stared out across the library. "Oh my god," she said slowly. "Here they come again." 

Back Talk
from page 94

and identified my favorites. I invite you to send me <ferguson@columbia.edu> your suggestions on any other alternatives that occur to you, or ideas on which of the listed alternatives you think should be adopted. I will collect them and feature them in a future column. I fear that unless we develop more innovative solutions to the STM journal pricing problem, we will have a lot in common with the frog in the warming water. By the time we discover it isn't a Jacuzzi tub, it will be too late. 

ADVERTISERS' INDEX

43 ACADEMIC PRESS	25 DICTIONARY OF ART
29 ACCENTS	35 EASTERN BOOK
95 ALFRED JAEGER	47 EBSCO INFORMATION SERVICES
65 AMBASSADOR	69 FAXON
13 AM INSTITUTE OF PHYSICS	45 GREENWOOD
39 AMIGOS	11 INFORMATION QUEST
41 ANNUAL REVIEWS	51 INSTITUTE OF PHYSICS
87 ASHGATE	2 JAEGER GLOBAL ENTERPRISES
5 ATG	73 MAJORS
61 AUX AMATEURS DE LIVRES	19 MCGRAW HILL
7 BAKER & TAYLOR	96 MIDWEST LIBRARY
3 BLACKWELL'S	33 READMORE
75 BLACKWELL'S	53 RICH, LLOYD
77 BOOK HOUSE	57 SCHOENHOF FOREIGN BOOKS
85 BOWKER	27 STOCKTON
78 BROADWATER	21 SWETS
31 BRODART	37 UMI
15 CARL CORP.	71 WESTVIEW PRESS
81 CASALINI	9 WILEY
91 COGNIZANT COMMUNICATIONS	17 WILEY
89 COLUMBIA U. PRESS	23 WILEY
67 COUTTS	59 YBP
63 DE GRUYTER	

Ads Manager: Edna Laughrey Internet: elaughey@aol.com
phone: 313-429-1029, fax: 313-429-1711

Chemical Warfare and Frog Soup!

by **Anthony W. Ferguson** (Associate University Librarian, Columbia University)
Phone: 212-854-2270; Fax: 212-222-0331; <ferguson@columbia.edu>



Many science librarians have a problem. They are surrounded by hostile forces. Their faculty, the world's STM publishers, the University and in some cases, the heads of collection development at their libraries are all out to get them. Or at least it probably seems so some of the time.

The faculty, one chemistry professor recently told me, view immediate access to the periodical literature as "an entitlement." At large decentralized universities, immediate access means having all interesting journals in the faculty's own library, for which they would have personal keys and 24-hour entry. Further, immediate access does not mean that the titles are in another science library, even 50 yards away. In this sort of environment and quite likely at other more centralized library systems, many faculty members come across as hostile, even if they are appreciative of everything else done for them, when their librarians periodically ask the faculty to identify titles for yet another journal cut project.

STM publishers, in the past, present and presumably the future are also intent on keeping these brave librarians in trouble. Over the past decade their price increases have consistently outstripped increases in our science library budgets. I recently calculated that if we had kept up with inflation in the chemistry literature since 1989-90, our chemistry library's 1997-98 periodicals budget would be about \$220,000 larger than it is today. The future, unfortunately, doesn't look any better. In a recent newspaper article, it appears that one of our favorite publishers, Elsevier, is intent on making sure that the electronic tomorrow will have a sense of continuity to it. ("Stodgy Publisher Is Turning Electronic." *Wall Street Journal*. August 11, 1997, p. A10.) Reed Elsevier PLC, the article notes, has amassed a war chest of \$1.7 billion dollars to make sure it is a dominant force in the new digital world. The article also notes that its chief competitors Thomson Corp. and Wolters Kluwer NV are doing likewise. Clearly, our science librarians' subscription cutting skills can continue to be used.

Even where university administrations have provided generous library materials increases

in recent years, these increases have not kept pace with the double-digit price increases inflicted by the major STM publishers. In the past, libraries responded by cyclically cutting subscriptions. More recently, they have also substituted access for ownership for less than critical journals. Is this all we can do?

Recently, I went back to school, and in one of my educational management courses I had to do a policy brief focusing on a real-life problem related to an area of my work. I decided to deal with the Chemistry Library's journal subscriptions problem. As future consultants we had to consider all potential alternatives, their strengths and weaknesses, and then to propose what our imaginary clients should do to resolve their problem. Here is my list of options:

- Join others to end tenure. This was my professor's favorite. He quickly figured out what was driving the chemical research engine and divined that an end to tenure would reduce publishing by two-thirds and our race to fiscal oblivion would grind to a halt.
- Get university presses to provide less expensive alternatives to those published by commercial STM publishers.
- Switch from print journals to digital journals. The above-mentioned newspaper article noted: "Yet scientists are now looking for cheaper alternatives on-line ... many scientists and academics hope to form their own journals and information 'communities.'" Elsevier is aware of the implications of this course of action and therefore developed its \$1.7 billion dollar war chest.
- Sign price-control licenses with publishers to trade the right to cancel for reduced annual increases.
- Substitute ownership for access and buy that which is needed, when needed. Columbia and others have been doing this successfully for a number of years.
- Join with other libraries to develop a completely new paradigm that both captures and distributes the intellectual output of academic researchers without involving traditional publishers.

- Continue the status quo. Employ what I term to be "biblio-Darwinism" and continue to trim less used/important journals in favor of more used/important journals.

I disposed of four of these options fairly quickly: Joining in any anti-tenure efforts would erode our relationship with the faculty. It is true that there are faculty members who oppose tenure, but it is part of the academic fabric and it will not disap-

pear even with our help in the near future; The current electronic journal solution is also not practical. There are not sufficient freebies and the future seems to be more of the same: commercial and very profitable not-for-profit firms publish at prices we can't afford and we annually buy an increasingly smaller share of the world's journal output; I still have hope for price-control license agreements but they do not appear to be in the business plans of the major STM publishers who take 80% of our money; Finally, I don't think we can afford to continue with the current status quo. In class we learned about the boiling frog syndrome. If you drop a frog into boiling water, it leaps to safety as soon as its webbed feet hit the water. However, if you put it in cold water and gradually increase the heat ... well, you can guess what happens. We have been in the water for the past 15 years and the bubbles are beginning to appear.

So, what is left? I think we should pursue two of the above-mentioned options as short-term actions while we work on a longer-term solution to our journal pricing problem: First, we need to buy a very lean core group of print journals based upon frequency of use and employ document delivery as a supplementary means of meeting user needs. This won't work in the long run since the core journals and document delivery costs will gradually increase and we will have jumped into a new pot of warming water. Second, we need to subscribe to, when the quality is first-rate, research journals published by university presses or other truly not-for-profit publishers whether in print or digital format. I don't hold a lot of faith in the degree to which this solution will really make a difference, but it will contribute to the success of what I think should be the long-term solution: working with others to develop a new digital research information-gathering and distribution paradigm.

There isn't a group out there yet who has fully developed such a paradigm, but there are stirrings that suggest something is happening. At the most recent ALA meeting in San Francisco, a large group of ARL library directors met to discuss how they might work together to develop an alternative electronic publishing initiative. The group reviewed the extent of the fiscal challenges facing libraries today, changes in the environment that might signal an ability to develop more radical solutions than in the past, and asked everyone to discuss with others back home what possible courses of action might be pursued. This group will meet again in the near future. Hopefully, it will be a success.

I have shared my list of potential solutions,

continued on page 93

Box Facts excerpted from Nat Bodian's The Joy of Publishing, available from Open Horizons Publishing Co., PO Box 205, Fairfield, Iowa 52556 at \$29.95.