September 1997

Todd Hallman-Acquisitions Editor-ABC-Clio

Ron Chepesiuk
Winthrop University

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

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

Recommended Citation

Chepesiuk, Ron (1997) "Todd Hallman-Acquisitions Editor-ABC-Clio," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 9: Iss. 4, Article 12.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.2214>

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.

ATG Interview with Todd Hallman

Acquisitions Editor, ABC-Clio <thallman@ABC-cliobooks.com>

by Ron Chepesiuk (Winthrop University) <rchepesiuk@winthrop.edu>

Founded in 1946 by Eric Boehm, ABC-Clio began *Historical Abstracts*, the premier indexing and abstracting service for world history. ABC-Clio launched *America: History and Life* in 1960 after recognizing a need to document the growing study and literature of U.S. and Canadian study and culture. Today, these two serials are published in print and electronic format and cover 2,000 journals in over 40 languages.

The book publishing program was established in 1967 and concentrates on enriching access to history through bibliographic sources for the library market.

Today, ABC-Clio specializes in easy-to-use subject encyclopedias, dictionaries and handbooks for high school, academic and public libraries. Over the past five years, ABC-Clio has won over 55 top reference book awards from publications such as *Choice*, *Booklist*, *Library Journal*, and *School Library Journal*.

To learn more about ABC-Clio and its future plans, *Against the Grain* contributing editor Ron Chepesiuk talked with Todd Hallman, the publisher's Acquisitions Editor. Hallman conceptualizes and acquires reference books in the humanities, including folklore, literature, mythology, religious studies, urban and rural studies, popular culture, social history and women's studies.

ATG: *ABC-Clio is an interesting name. What does it mean is there any significance in its use?*

TH: ABC-Clio is an amalgamation of "ABC," short for the **American Bibliographic Center**, and **Clio**, Greek muse of history. Our founder, Eric Boehm, started ABC-Clio as a history bibliographic service, hence the name.

ATG: *So how big a share does ABC-Clio have of the reference book market?*

TH: We've been very aggressive and growth oriented in terms of the number of new titles published annually, as well as revenue goals. So far, the library market has responded tremendously to the titles we publish and the direction we've been heading in. But our list is relatively young compared with other companies such as **Oxford University Press**, **Macmillan**, **Gale Research**, and others, so we expect our share of the reference book market to continue to grow.

ATG: *How would you characterize the state of the reference book market?*

TH: Competitive, from a publisher's point-of-view, and discretionary from a librarian's point. Library funding always seems to be in jeopardy in most institutions, and the newest way this has surfaced is increased funding for computer hardware and products and decreased funding for print materials, particularly in high schools. Still, there will always be a need for good reference information despite the delivery format. Libraries need reference material and if a publisher provides quality content for a reasonable price in a desirable and usable format, the material will sell.

Many of our books end up in circulating collections as well as reference collections and most are interesting to sit down and read, though I've found that through necessity rather than intent I'm still of the opinion that you can't yet snuggle up on the couch with a good interface, and so I think books will be with us for quite a while, reference and otherwise.

This feeds into my next belief that individuals will buy reference books if they know how. Ironically enough, the electronic interface that has many publishers scrambling also allows access to the general public via the Web.

ATG: *Why doesn't ABC-Clio branch out into other areas of publishing?*

TH: ABC-Clio is primarily a reference

publisher, however we are always exploring better ways to reach a larger and larger audience. We were pioneers in electronic publishing and our history databases have been available online and in CD-ROM for years. We're investing heavily in interactive media. Three years ago, our first interactive media product, **Exegy**, began publication and won the **Best CD-ROM 1994** award in *Library Journal*. This year and next, we will be publishing over ten new interactive media products and will continue to build this program.

We also have made a strong push globally and made our products and services available to the international marketplace through our own representatives and agents. We've been quite successful selling subsidiary rights, like translation and trade paperback rights, so our publications are also reaching a general trade audience in the U.S. and abroad.

ATG: *How many proposals do you get a year to research and write reference books and how many do you accept for publication?*

TH: Like every publisher, we receive hundreds of unsolicited proposals. Very few unsolicited proposals are accepted for publication. In the past five years we've accepted three to five out of all the hundreds we receive each year. Offhand, I can only think of two unsolicited manuscripts that I've been involved with. About 99% of the books we publish are conceptualized in-house and we seek out the proposals, so the majority of the ideas are approved before the proposals are written. By the time we solicit a proposal, the book idea and scope has been worked out, the project approved, the potential author deemed qualified, and a writing sample examined. So, of the proposals we receive, about 95% or more are approved.

ATG: *What criteria do you use in choosing reference books to publish?*

TH: First, whatever we publish has to do with history, whether it's the history of literature, the industrial revolution, or something else. Then, we want to create reference books that serve the needs of the library community and we always start by identifying a gap in the reference literature. That gap may be poor execution of a past reference book by a competitor, a new interest in a particular subject, or a different take on a subject that is always

popular. There are countless other reasons for initiating a project.

First and foremost, though, we talk to librarians and educators to see if there is a need for a particular book on a certain subject and, if so, what should that focus be? Who will use this title and for what? The book must be timely, on a subject tied to both the high school and undergraduate curriculum, and of interest to the general reader.

ATG: *How many copies do you print in a first run?*

TH: We typically print a short first run of 1,000 to 1,500 units and reprint as needed.

ATG: *What are some of your best selling titles?*

TH: Some of our best selling titles are *Women in Classical Mythology*, *Encyclopedia of the Persian Gulf War*, *Dictionary of Native American Mythology*, *Dictionary of Symbols*, *Recycling in America* (in the Contemporary World Issues series), and *Encyclopedia of World Sport*.

ATG: *How is the decision to publish a reference book made and what is your role in it?*

TH: The decision to publish a reference book is made by an editorial board consisting of the publisher, the editorial director, the director and managing editor of our Oxford office, and the acquisitions editors. We meet once a month for a few hours. There are various projects in various states that we discuss, and we give each other feedback on.

The typical flow for a project is that it will be presented as an idea, we'll discuss it, and then the idea will be approved, shot down, or recommended for further research. Once the idea is approved, the editor will search for an appropriate author and solicit a formal proposal that will be presented at one of the subsequent editorial board meetings. Generally, though, it's not as smooth as it sounds. We discuss focus of particular entries and get into some of the real mechanics of content, presentation, and marketing. Projects are always at different stages. My role is to present ideas and proposals and offer feedback on other ideas and content.

ATG: *How does ABC-Clio market its books?*

TH: Our books are marketed primarily through direct mail pieces and our catalogs. We also attend numerous library exhibitions every year, advertise in leading trade journals, and have an excellent publicity effort. Reviews in key journals are very important.

The Web is also emerging as a potentially important marketing vehicle.

ATG: *How important is the library market for your success?*

TH: It's our core market in the U.S. and the key to our success. We do, however, have an international presence as well with sales coming in from trade channels.

ATG: *Your company is based in Denver? Why?*

TH: There are a number of established publishing companies in the Denver area that provide a good pool of publishing talent and services for ABC-Clio. It's also centrally located and an easy place to travel from.

ATG: *Any advantages being away from New York City, the hub of the publishing world?*

TH: There are many advantages. Overhead costs are less, as is the cost of living. There is less turnover among employees and countless other everyday advantages, such as the Rocky mountains and a fairly tame rush hour.

ATG: *How about disadvantages? Are there any?*

TH: None that I can think of.

ATG: *ABC-Clio has won numerous awards? Are they important for the business?*

TH: Approximately 25% of the titles on our list are award winners and winning an award does mean you will sell more copies of a book. Yes, it is good for business. Just as importantly though, it means we're heading in the right direction and providing reference books that people want to have and that they need. Another advantage to winning awards is that it helps us acquire top authors for our books.

ATG: *If ABC Clio was to start out today, could it be as successful, given current publishing climate and trends in publishing?*

TH: I doubt that ABC-Clio would start out as what it is today, but I have no doubt that ABC-Clio could start out and be successful at what it does; that is, contextualize history and culture in an easy-to-use and comprehensible format.

ATG: *How much impact is multimedia having on your operation? Is multimedia the wave of the future for reference book publishing?*

TH: It's having a lot of impact and will continue to do so. The new technologies are wonderfully suited to reference publishing and we're committed to making a contribution in this area. Three years ago we launched *Exegy*, an award-winning CD-ROM-based subscription product on countries and current history that is updated repeatedly throughout the year. That was our foray into interactive media publishing and it was quite successful and very well received. Since then, we've been developing a whole program of interactive media products.

ATG: *Some librarians told me that they have a gripe about some of your electronic databases. CD-ROMs like *Historical Abstracts and America: History and Life* have excellent content but the search engine used is clunky and not at all intuitive. Are you going to update to a Windows-based system?*

TH: We're always looking to improve our electronic products and will continue to do so. The fact is, though, that most of our subscribers are academic institutions that operate on a Unix system. Our subscribers are also international. We have customers on every continent. DOS is the lowest common denominator for the world. It operates on all systems and is very stable. We continue to look at offering our customers a Windows alternative, and it is likely to happen in the future.

ATG: *Why haven't you made databases available via services like OCLC's First Search?*

TH: This year we're aggressively pursuing various online distribution options for our databases, which will include numerous opportunities for our customers to get online information conveniently. Right now, we're looking at tape loading, Web based services, and also working with information aggregators.

ATG: *You have also branched out in the last few years and published one volume "Companions," as well as one-volume encyclopedias on a number of topics? What is the difference between your "companions" and encyclopedias?*

TH: A "Companion" is different than an encyclopedia in the focus of the content. Companions have a social history focus, more so than most of our encyclopedias. The *ABC-Clio Companions to American History and Life*, the initial companion series, is designed to place movements and trends in US history in social perspective. The second series, *ABC-Clio Literary Companions*, is designed to guide readers to genres and provide detailed lit-

erary information in a historical perspective that is not readily available anywhere else. The third series, *ABC-Clio World Companions*, focuses on the social implications of the topic addressed in the title, exactly the same as the first series does.

ATG: *Why are these titles being published as single volumes and no attempt is being made to unite works on similar topics into multi-volume sets?*

TH: Each of these titles is designed to stand alone, but by publishing these volumes in a series, we make it less expensive for librarians to purchase those titles they need.

ATG: *What about the future? Any new directions for ABC-Clio?*

TH: We're exploring multi-volume sets on topics that need that type of treatment. We recently published *Encyclopedia of World Sport* — a three-volume cross-cultural history of the origin and play of sports. Look for this type of multi-volume set from ABC-Clio in the future on a variety of topics.

As I've already mentioned, we're also concentrating heavily on developing interactive media. In the past year we instituted an Interactive Media Department and

have been developing new titles, such as the forthcoming *American Leaders* CD-ROMs.

We're also exploring new formats and markets, such as publishing reference books for the trade market and using our intellectual assets to develop textbook companions for the classroom. No matter what we do, we will remain focused on providing historical context on topics with anything we publish.

ATG: *This has been very informative for our readers, I'm sure. Thank you. Anything you wish to add?*

TH: I'd love to have feedback from librarians and vendors on specific types of reference books they'd like to see. Please contact me at <thallman@abc-clio.com>. Thanks again. 🐾

Contributing Editor **Ron Chepesiuk** is also Editor-in-Chief of *International Leads*, the international arm of ALA; a contributing editor to *American Libraries* and *International Library Times*; and serves on the editorial board of *Reference Books Bulletin*. He is currently under book contract with ABC-Clio to research and write the first encyclopedia of international drug trafficking and the War on Drugs

Electronic Print from page 22

classified using an alpha-numeric designation based on the scheme used in ALA's *Guide to Reference Books*. In the print *Reference Reviews Europe Annual*, each abstract is assigned a specific abstract number which is the number that actually aids the user in finding the entry. There is a title index but none for subject, although one is promised for the 1997 annual. (The Web version depends on the Netscape "find" command to locate specific entries.) Each entry lists the title in the original language and then in brackets, the English-language title. This is followed by the authors or editors, the place of publication, publisher, date, page numbers, ISBN, the price in foreign currency and in some cases the publisher's address and phone and fax numbers.

This combination of annual print publication along with Web archiving and updating is a good mix. It provides access to both timely rough draft and authoritative finished product. One wonders if this represents a developing trend or a blip on the screen. Only time will tell. 🐾

The State of the Art ...working smart

READMORE IS A BLACKWELL COMPANY

Information industry leaders
providing subscription services,
article delivery and library
automation software.

ROSS® Online ordering, claiming and searching of journal and publisher databases.

Remo® Mouse driven serials management system.

Electronic Interfaces & Customized Automated Management Products EDI and proprietary formats for all major systems.

ReadiCat Our comprehensive Internet catalog of serial titles searchable by a number of access points.

Backserv/BackMed Internet lists solely devoted to the informal exchange of serial back issues among libraries.

World Wide Web
<http://www.readmore.com>

READMORE, INC.

22 Cortlandt Street • New York, NY 10007 • Phone: 1-800-221-3306