September 1990

Elsevier: Then and Now

Nat G. Bodian

Publisher's Marketing Consultant

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

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

Recommended Citation

Bodian, Nat G. (1990) "Elsevier: Then and Now," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 2: Iss. 4, Article 9.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.2249>

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.

Reflecting on Elsevier, Then and Now:

A Comment on Hamaker's June Comments

by Nat. G. Bodian (Publisher's Marketing Consultant)

It was fascinating to read in the June issue of *ATG* Chuck Hamaker's remarks on Elsevier's annual report for 1989—especially the comment that Elsevier had 1,746 employees, and that this was its largest single expense.

It brought to mind the early days of Elsevier in New York City in 1963. It was then called American Elsevier Publishing Company. The entire staff of the New York City office consisted of the late Ben Russak as president; his deputy—me, a secretary assigned to me, Stella Patt; an office manager, Eleanor Siddall—a very proper English lady; a bookkeeper, Muriel Gur, and a file clerk to assist the bookkeeper, a matronly lady whose name I cannot recall.

I'd come on board the newly-established company early in 1963 as "Promotion Manager." The title "Marketing Manager" had not yet come into vogue for publishing promotion. However, my responsibilities covered a broad spectrum of activity, of which 'promotion' was only a small part.

We had no outside ad agency, so all advertising and direct mail promotion was done in house, as was copy for catalogs and library 'Previews of New Books.' In addition, the office manager forwarded all calls to me if anyone asked for Sales Manager, Production Manager, Editor, Special Sales, Rights, or what have you.

In addition, I also bought book paper and designed books and jackets for our fledgling domestic book production program, dealt with warehouse inventory and inventory problems, and in-between attended various

conventions and exhibits around the country.

Further, early on American Elsevier began importing books from various British publishers, to augment those coming in from Amsterdam. I also served as coordinator with U.K. publishers for import titles, provided corrected title and copyright pages for books in the works.

As books arrived from overseas—whether from Elsevier in Amsterdam, or from various U.K. publishers, another of my functions was to prepare a review list for each new title, have my secretary type review slips to accompany review copies, and submit the list to our warehouse shipping center for mailing. Scribner's "Book Warehouse" handled book warehousing and billing.

As one can see, as diverse as American Elsevier's activity was in the early 1960s, labor costs for

the skeletal staff were minimal. My own salary (in 1963) of \$10,000, because of its enormity, had to be approved by the Elsevier board in Holland before Ben Russak received approval to hire me.*

I couldn't resist commenting on Chuck Hamaker's June *ATG* review because times certainly have changed at Elsevier. But his article included a figure that has hardly changed: He wrote, "Sales to the U.S. accounted for 38% of net sales." In the early 1960's, the Dutch company saw the U.S. as 40% of its world market, so the 1989 figure parallels Elsevier's early 1960's goal.

* It may be of interest that American Elsevier augmented 1960s salaries with an employee pension plan, which I am now of an age to receive, and which I spend each month in a single sitting with my wife at a local diner. ☘

Then it's agreed...We don't allow any more measles research.