June 2008

Library Marketplace -- Medium Rare Books, POD Wars, Instant Books Brought to You by Algorithms: Here's the Scoop

John D. Riley

Eastern Book Company, jdriley@comcast.net

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

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

Recommended Citation

Riley, John D. (2008) "Library Marketplace -- Medium Rare Books, POD Wars, Instant Books Brought to You by Algorithms: Here's the Scoop," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 20: Iss. 3, Article 23.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.2415>

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.

Library Marketplace — Medium Rare Books, POD Wars, Instant Books Brought to you by Algorithms: Here's the Scoop

Column Editor: **John D. Riley** (National Sales Director, Eastern Book Company)
<jdriley@comcast.net>

Books: Rare, Medium Rare, and All Well Done. The Hidden Rarities in Your Stacks & What You Need to Know to Protect Them

A few years back **Forbes Library** in Northampton, Massachusetts where I live, called in **Sotheby's** to appraise the books in their rare book room for possible sale to fund an expansion and renovation of their hundred year old building. The **Forbes Library** also serves as the presidential **Library of Calvin Coolidge** who lived here, once served as the mayor, and then retired here after his presidency. The library had also once served a dual role as the town library and the library for **Smith College** before **Smith** built its own. Of course the **Coolidge** presidential materials were unique and were never meant to be part of any sale, but there were many other items that were no longer germane to the collection and the trustees were hoping to raise some good funds for the renovation.

What turned out to be a total surprise to all involved was that the appraisers found that books in the open stacks were more valuable than the books in the rare book room! Most of the books there were of local or archival interest. But when the appraisers scanned the shelves they were astounded to find such things as an original *Diderot Encyclopedie* in the reference section and a collection of ornately bound **Blau** maps from the 17th century in the map section. This is New England, so people must have just taken it for granted that such antiquarian items could be found in a public library. As the appraisers continued working, treasure after treasure was unearthed and moved to a local auction house. During an extended number of auctions thousands of dollars were raised for the renovations. Most of the rarities that they uncovered had hardly ever been opened during their stay at the **Forbes**.

All of this occurred well before the Internet and the easy appraisal of books by anyone with a laptop. However, the situation we find ourselves in today is similar to the one faced by the **Forbes Library**: books on the shelves of our libraries may be much more valuable than we think. Let's call them the "medium rare" books. Many librarians become aware of them for the first time when they have to replace a lost book. The old fixed replacement cost of \$25.00 or \$50.00 doesn't buy much anymore. What the Internet marketplace has done for books is to make common books incredibly cheap (as low as a penny!) while raising the prices on scarce books to previously unheard of levels. Obscure books once languished in second hand bookshops for years. At one point the average life of a book in a used bookstore was seven years. Nowadays that scarce and

seemingly unimportant book is in demand somewhere in the world and it is getting priced according to its scarcity and possible usefulness.

What we find is that many technical and scientific works that appear out of date or incredibly obscure are still useful, either from a historical point of view or because they were the best book written on the subject. Also many art books, reference works and even pamphlets and gray literature are more valuable than ever before. These books are not generally considered "rare" in libraries, but they increasingly are becoming the rare books of today and tomorrow. What is a threat to libraries is that these books are easily sold on the Internet and are inviting targets for theft. Library markings used to be the kiss of death to the value of a book, but they no longer affect the prices of technical and scientific works that are some of the most sought after books. Interlibrary loan is also becoming an easy way to lose valuable books, as the replacement charge may be well below their market value. Another bothersome problem for libraries is that their security systems can be easily foiled or bypassed. What is needed is for libraries to self assess their collections and sequester these newly rare books. Most libraries are suffering from lack of space, but some part of the open shelving area can be converted to a more secure storage area.

I recently spoke with **Gloria Barker**, Director of Library Collections & Technical Services at **Wheaton College** in Norton, Massachusetts after they had just joined a new consortium and she had received an email from one of the member libraries alerting her to the fact that she had some very valuable books sitting on the shelves. They took action to place these books in a secure area, but just imagine how a potential poacher could scan your collection for valuable books and then request them on interlibrary loan. I also recently spoke with **Joe Toth**, Head of Collection Development at **Middlebury College** who had run his collection against the **OCLC** database and discovered that his collection contained over two thousand unique items. No one else in the U.S. has those books. These books would be ideal candidates for secure storage.

If you are interested in this subject be sure to attend the Out of Print Discussion Group at **ALA** in Anaheim where this will be our main topic of discussion. Sunday Morning 8:00-10:00 a.m. in the **Anaheim Convention Center Room 201D**

POD Wars

What may change this whole equation though is that the scanning of library collections and the availability of print on demand from those scans may burst the market for rare books. Of course books in fine bindings, artists' books, and other works of art from printers and binders will continue to increase in value, but mid market books may become as common as those penny books. Already a company by the name of **Kessinger** has made available thousands of rare and obscure books, much to the consternation of used booksellers who lament the flooding of the market with cheap reprints. One problem with **Kessinger** and many of the other POD companies is that every book is bound and printed exactly alike. For example, all **Kessinger** books are in a yellow paper cover with the title in a white square on the cover.

Speaking of POD's, **Amazon.com** is in the news for its announcement that from now on all POD's for sale on their site must be printed by their own subsidiary **BookSurge**. **Amazon** has left a little wiggle room for POD publishers, but it will require that they give **Amazon** a 55% discount, pay yearly fees, and provide warehouse stock if their books are printed elsewhere. This has opened **Amazon** up to complaints from the **American Society of Journalists and Authors (ASJA)**, the **Author's Guild**, the **Independent Book Publishers Association (PMA)**, the **Small Publishers Association of North America (SPAN)**, and the **National Writer's Union**. Writers are especially concerned because the increased discount that **Amazon** will demand on POD's not printed by **BookSurge** will come directly out of their royalties, especially if they are self publishers.

On May 19, 2008 the POD publisher **BookLocker.com** filed a class action suit against **Amazon**, citing the "tying" provisions in the **Sherman Act**. (That is the tying of printing to the sale, a possible restraint of trade violation.)

You can follow the progress of this suit on the **Writers Weekly** Website, a subsidiary of **BookLocker**. But the market place is waiting to see how **Ingram** reacts to this move by **Amazon**, since their subsidiary **Lightning Source** has nearly 400,000 books in its POD program and is **Amazon's** largest supplier of POD's and new books as well.

Amazon has said that they want to improve turnaround time on POD titles and that printing them onsite will allow that. But **Amazon** does not currently have the printing capacity

continued on page 36

to accomplish that. Furthermore they have raised a red flag with publishers who are now speculating that **Amazon** might sometime in the future want to control all printing of books that they sell. There is a precedent in that **Amazon** requires all publishers to meet their proprietary standard for eBooks in order to be sold on **Kindle**. The legality of **Amazon's** action on POD's will be tested by the courts and nobody really knows how this will turn out. It is unclear if one entity can be sued for restraint of trade. What it appears to me is a shot across the bow of **Google** who is busy scanning and digitizing library collections and now **Amazon** will be the default printer for those books. In fact **Amazon** has targeted university presses for inclusion in the **BookSurge** program. For now print on demand is a profitable niche market, but **Amazon** has correctly seen that it is the future of publishing, both for reviving out of print books and for supplying new books quickly without warehouses or back orders.

New Books Brought to you by Algorithms

"The 2007-2012 Outlook for Tufted Washable Scatter Rugs, Bathmats and Sets That Measure 6-Foot by 9-Foot or Smaller in India" (\$495 for 144 pages).

This is the title of a current book from **Icon Group International**. Wow! Talk about the long tail. This might have a market for what, one copy? The *New York Times* covered this in their April 14, 2008 issue. The publisher, a **Mr. Philip M. Parker**, has developed an algorithm for taking information off the Web and turning it into books, or rather computer files that can then be turned into print on demand books. He has 200,000 books listed as being in print! This is a reversal of the current process where books are moving to the Web. Here we find information moving from the Web into printed books. And **Parker** isn't the only one doing this. Images from the Web are making their way into art books too. There is an interesting video on **YouTube** where **Parker** runs through the whole process. (Search: "Patent for Long Tail" on **YouTube**.)

By the way, an algorithm isn't a new dance move by **Al Gore**, but "...a procedure

or formula for solving a problem." The word derives from the name of the mathematician **al-Khwarizmi**, who was part of the royal court in Baghdad and who lived from about 780 to 850. **Al-Khwarizmi's** work is the likely source for the word algebra as well. A computer program can be viewed as an elaborate algorithm. In mathematics and computer science, an algorithm usually means a small procedure that solves a recurrent problem." (Definition courtesy of *Ask.com*)

When you open one of **Mr. Parker's** books you will find the skeleton of a book: a title page, table of contents, "content" and many pages of graphics, all generated by his algorithm. He says it takes about thirteen minutes to generate a new book. **Parker** admits that his books are rudimentary at best and are really only suited for someone who doesn't know how to use the Internet. Not a huge market

continued on page 58

Crossroads: A Community for Students, Teachers & Scholars

— Working alone or in groups, researchers at academic institutions, globally or locally, can create their own collections of primary documents from online databases, permanently bookmark documents and tag, annotate and comment on a vast range of materials.

Blending the past with the present — Crossroads can enhance the value of primary source collections by allowing users to add background and context to books, broadsides, newspaper articles, government publications and related materials. Crossroads can be used for everything from creating and sharing lists and bibliographies to creating customized groupings of available materials on any relevant topic.

How does Crossroads work?

— Crossroads can be used to meet a variety of research, teaching and collaboration needs in academic settings. Privacy functions allow project creators to keep their work private or to permit viewing and/or editing on a limited or unlimited basis. Researchers can work alone or in collaboration. Also, in support of a course syllabus, teachers can create compilations of specific documents and customize those selections by annotating documents to define unfamiliar words, draw connections to other works or pose discussion questions.

For more information: www.readex.com/.

ATG Interviews Remmel Nunn

Vice President, New Product Development, Readex

The Company's Newly Created "Crossroads" Interactive Research Environment

by **Katina Strauch** (Editor, *Against the Grain*) <kstrauch@comcast.net>

The Readex division of Newsbank, publisher of the Archive of Americana online databases, recently invited all libraries that have access to the Early American Imprints to accept free access to a new research "environment" called Crossroads. Here is the Against the Grain interview with Remmel Nunn, vice president for new product development at Readex, who explains what Crossroads is and why it was developed. Further information can also be obtained at: <http://crossroads.newsbank.com/>.

ATG: You've written that Crossroads took three years to develop. As the publisher of the Archive of Americana, Readex is chiefly known as a content provider. Why did you devote so much effort to creating something that isn't content, at least in the traditional sense?

RN: Crossroads is content, but you are correct that it is not content in the traditional sense. Thousands of scholars use the Archive of Americana every day. Crossroads will enable them, for the first time, to create new additions to the archive, in the form of posted and attributed annotations or even much longer commentaries or theses. Those contributions and the archived discussion webs between the authors will form an ever-growing and evolving

intellectual context for the historical texts in the Archive of Americana, and add a huge amount of value to them in the process.

ATG: Who will hold copyright to the contributions?

RN: As the "Terms of Use" section of Crossroads makes clear, the authors of the contributions retain copyright to them. Readex obtains digital distribution rights, but the authors may do whatever they like with the material they choose to make public in Crossroads.

ATG: Please clarify what you mean by "choose to make public?"

RN: One of the most interesting trends that we discovered when we began researching digital scholarship was the growing number of multi-institutional research projects. We also learned that the organizers of these collaborations often do not want them made publicly available until the project is completed and "published," as it were. For this reason we built Crossroads to facilitate the creation and management of such projects but we give users a choice of conducting their project publicly or "in private," as it were, so that only the author, or a class, say, or any assigned group of scholars has access to the project.

continued on page 57

research library down to \$565 for a two-year college library.

ATG: *Given this fee, how would you describe the value proposition here to the librarian?*

RN: One thing that librarians are keenly aware of is the value of meta-data. Catalogs, indexes, bibliographies — these are among the key tools that librarians use to serve their patrons, and **Crossroads** is in a very real sense an extended form of metadata, a potent one that has the power to reveal hidden facts about millions of historical documents. The tagging and annotation features of **Crossroads** create an organic, self-indexing system, which is particularly needed for the millions of items that exist online but have not been cataloged at all. Newspapers are a prime example of this. The **Archive of Americana** contains more than two thousand of them and is growing, and it provides some title-level metadata, but true item level indexing for newspapers is not issue-level indexing but article-level indexing, and the sheer number of articles in the **Archive of Americana** — one hundred and ten million to date — is too vast to ever be indexed by any single institution. They could be indexed in the long run, however, if the thousands of users of **America's Historical Newspapers** could tag and annotate to the article level, and that is what **Crossroads** enables them to do. It won't happen overnight, but it will happen. By providing their patrons with this ability, librarians are contributing to one of the largest indexing projects ever undertaken. They are also, of course, providing their patrons with access to the thousands of annotations that will be created, and with a way to communicate with the contributors. 🌱

Library Marketplace from page 56

there, but with 200,000 titles and no inventory there is definitely a shot at profitability. **Parker** is already producing many other types of books including crossword puzzles, annotated foreign language books where his algorithms can translate the harder words in the margins, and he is even moving into video production with animated figures controlled of course by...algorithms. His next project is to crank out romance novels. I guess they are formulaic enough to succumb to **Al-Khwarizmi's** blandishments.

P.S. If you have never seen the episode "The Obsolete Man" from the **Twilight Zone**, treat yourself to it on **YouTube**. As usual, **Burgess Meredith** plays a great librarian. While you're on **YouTube** be sure to check out "Ghosts in Libraries." There seem to be quite a few of them around. 🌱

ATG Interviews Tom Richardson

Director, Institution Sales & Service, The New England Journal of Medicine

by **Katina Strauch** (Editor, *Against the Grain*) <kstrauch@comcast.net>

ATG: *Tell us about NEJM. When did it begin? Was it always a publication of the Massachusetts Medical Society?*

TR: We began publication in 1812 as the *New England Journal of Medicine and Surgery, and the Collateral Branches of Science*. We've also published as *The New England Medical Review and Journal* and the *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal*. The **Massachusetts Medical Society** purchased the *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal* in 1921 and changed the name to the current *New England Journal of Medicine* in 1928.

It's been interesting looking through some of the older journal issues, as we're in the process of digitizing all of our content back to 1812. We expect that this will complete sometime in 2009.

ATG: *Are your subscribers mainly institutional or are they mainly individuals? What type of advertising do you take and do you see this continuing?*

TR: We have always been a publication with mainly individual subscribers. Nearly 90% of our subscriptions go to individuals. That's the main reason why we were late in understanding library needs for online access. Now we have a group that focuses on institutions every day.

We accept advertising relevant to physicians such as pharmaceuticals, medical devices and educational institutions, along with physician recruitment advertising. I expect that to continue, but we're in a slow market right now for pharmaceutical advertising.

ATG: *When did you start a Website and how has that effected your advertising dollars and subscription base?*

TR: The **NEJM Website** went online in 1996, with full-text access available to subscribers beginning in 1998. The shift to online communication creates challenges and opportunities for all of us. The mix of revenue sources is different than when everything was about print.

ATG: *Is your main model a subscription model? Do you provide any open access material? How is this determined?*

TR: Our main access model is the subscription. We do make original research articles freely available on our Website, six months after publication; this has been our policy on research articles since 2001. From time to time, we also make articles with important public health implications free to all at initial publication. Video interviews, images, podcasts and audio summaries are often available for free. Our editors make that determination. Our weekly content alert and Resident E-bulletin are also free with registration.

ATG: *There has been a lot of controversy over the "politicization" of the NEJM. What*

were the more questionable articles? In hindsight should they have been handled differently?

TR: The *Journal* does not shy away from accepting cutting edge or controversial scientific papers, which often generate coverage in the news media. The editorial process for acceptance of papers, however, is based on merit through peer review. Papers are evaluated on the basis of the data submitted by the authors — on occasion we have had to publish corrections when we learned from the author that data was missing or incorrect. This is part of the scientific publishing process.

ATG: *Tell us about the NEJM Beta Website. What is it and why did you do it? When did you start it?*

TR: The **Beta Website** (<http://beta.nejm.org/>) gives us an opportunity to experiment with presentations of articles, images, audio, and video. This way we can test ideas to find the good ones before we integrate them into our main Website. We launched it in July 2006.

ATG: *The Beta Website is pretty cool. What projects have you done there that have been implemented on the main Website?*

TR: Some of the projects we have tested and implemented include a new search interface and engine that reflects community opinion; lists of most popular, downloaded, blogged, news cited and emailed articles; **PowerPoint** slides for more types of articles; and *NEJM* for a handheld device.

ATG: *We notice that you are making use of Google, Amazon and Yahoo! tools on the Beta Website. Are these also available on the main NEJM Website? How do these types of partnerships (is that what they are?) work? Is YouTube next?*

TR: These tools work on the main Website. They're not partnerships; we're working to provide our tech savvy users the new information tools they want to use. We have RSS feeds on **Google** gadgets and podcasts on **iTunes**; our videos have even found their way onto **YouTube**. We want to distribute our content to users through their preferred tools.

ATG: *Tell us about the NEJM Videos in Clinical Medicine in a new full-screen player. How are these made available to subscribers?*

TR: We launched our **Videos in Clinical Medicine** feature with the April 13, 2006 issue. They are a video form of *Review Articles* and they are indexed in **Medline**. We've worked with an outside company to develop the video player that you see on the Website. The full-screen option is our latest update to the player.

Like all of our *Review Articles*, the **Videos**

continued on page 59

<<http://www.against-the-grain.com>>