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As I See It! -- Will Books Ever Go Out of Print? Printing Technology and the Future of the Book

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sion for eighty-five of those 100 years since there may not have been anything to change. But certainly over the last decade and a half, we should have been rethinking how we serve up what we do. We face numerous challenges today, most of them threatening to assume our place at the information delivery table.

Academic librarianship has always been that round peg in the square hole in academe. We're not really faculty in the most common sense of that word, though every time I say that I get tons of hate mail — mostly from my own faculty. Of course, we're not really administration, either. We're a blend of both with some other *tertium quid* thrown in. While we are educators to be sure (in any sense of that word), we're not faculty in the sense of the work that defines that word. We've tried desperately to be faculty, even trying, with very limited success, I think, and often to our own detriment, to define ourselves in the same fashion as faculty in its — not our — holy trinity: teaching, service and scholarship. It is as if we think being a librarian isn't good or honorable enough, so we have to fake something else.

But why pretend or fake anything? Why not just refashion what we do to meet the challenges of the times while redefining our service in terms of what we do? The ubiquitous **Steven Bell** and **John Shank** have been doing just that, and they have come upon a redesigned librarianship they believe positions us uniquely in academe, while delivering better services and more than the "neat" or straight-up version. Whether we like it or not, our profession is being marginalized, they argue, and we had better get busy with rethinking, refashioning or redoing it.

The usual suspects have created our marginalization: automation, the Web, digitization, **Google**, eBooks, software and courseware, **Amazon.com** and more. The end result, they contend, is that the library "no longer is the de facto resource of first [and possibly not the second or third] choice for those it exists to serve."

Enter the **Blended Librarian**. The concept, they contend, is configured to enable librarians to take advantage of instructional design theory and practice and apply it to the teaching of library usage and the development of information literacy skills. But it is also more than that as the authors add the **Blended Librarian's** Manifesto in six basic principles:

Taking leadership positions as innovators and change agents in delivering library services;

Developing campus-wide information literacy initiatives;

Designing instructional and educational programs and classes to assist academic community members and patrons in gaining requisite information literacy skills for lifelong learning;

Communicating with instructional technologists and designers to facilitate the mission of the academic library;

Redesigning and overhauling library instruction using new instructional design technologies and theories; and,

Transforming our relationship with faculty to integrate technology and library resources into "blended/hybrid" courses, while collaborating more extensively to improve student learning, achievement and outcome assessment in information access, retrieval and integration.

Bell and **Shank** continue their discussion at www.blendedlibrarian.org and provide guidance on how to join the **Blended Librarian Online Learning Community**. Thousands of librarians are already members along with many other educators outside the library. Librarians, skeptical or not, should at least take a look if they haven't already.

What does all this mean? **Bell** and **Shank** have distilled more in their 2007 **ALA** publication, *Academic Librarianship by Design*, but even there it isn't fully fleshed out. Indeed, both **Bell** and **Shank** contend that, "The **Blended Librarian** is an idea in its infancy. We have yet to fully understand its entire ramification or the cascading consequences it may produce, either

positive or negative. We believe we would be amiss if we failed to admit we are uncertain about its future growth as a concept that has meaning for all academic librarians. But we do believe that the time is ripe for action that lays the groundwork for deeper integration of our profession into the mainstream functions of higher education."

In the short run, I think it means that librarians must become more proactive about everything they do and seek ways to be sure their constituents know what it is they do, why they are doing it, and why it's important. I think it means insinuating ourselves at the heart of information delivery via technology and its associated instructional technologies. I think it means taking on new, different and even some less familiar roles on campuses than we've taken in the past. I think it means we strive to be involved in every aspect of information delivery wherever it occurs on our campuses: in the library, in the classroom, in the dorms, anywhere.

In case you've missed it, we're rapidly being outsourced by many new and, I believe, inferior delivery systems. The reliable and thoughtful are being replaced by the rapid and voluminous, regardless of whether the rapid or voluminous answers any inquiry. It does not take a bean-counting evil genius to look at the free use of **Google** against the expensive use of aggregate databases to draw a conclusion that spells the end of library services as we understand them. We must attempt something new, something better and something more obviously value-added if we intend to survive. Blended librarianship may be the first step on that long, difficult and surely bumpy road.

Naysayers will contend that everything I've written here is exactly what we've always done. Nothing to see here, they'll say, let's move on. But it's just that view that has left us as the fading flowers in the garden of academe. We're wilting fast as a profession, and it's high time we took a proactive approach, not just for our collective futures, but for the future of students we have so long and so loyally served. 🌱

As I See It! — Will Books Ever Go Out of Print? Printing Technology and the Future of the Book

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Publishing scholarly monographs has not been easy for the last twenty-five years. The number of copies a publisher expects to sell to the library market has steadily diminished as library acquisition budgets have been diverted to support the journal collection. Yet the costs of processing manuscripts, typesetting and

preparing the book for printing have remained the same. The result has been an escalation in prices that has further reduced sales. The **ARL** estimates that **ARL** libraries are purchasing 25% fewer monographs per student today, compared with 1986 (**ARL** Statistics 2005-06, **Association of Research Libraries**, Washington DC, 2007).

While this process of at-

trition has continued, digital technology has transformed the production and distribution of books, particularly specialist titles with sales in the hundreds rather than thousands of copies that are targeted at the library market. The most prominent manifestation of this is, of course, eBooks. eBooks have revitalized many publishers' backlists, and have been steadily taken up by academic libraries in order to deliver online content to faculty and students. Never-

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theless, there has been little research other than anecdotal evidence on how eBooks are used, and whether they truly provide a satisfactory substitute for the printed edition.

Recently emerging evidence should give us pause for thought. While the availability of eBooks has enabled libraries to boost their collections, and even secure 'new money' for such acquisitions, it appears that scholars are not necessarily interested in using eBooks unless they are forced to. In the UK, **CIBER**, the Centre for Publishing at **University College London** has been investigating usage activity in respect of eBooks (www.publishing.ucl.ac.uk/research.html). While **CIBER's** research is ongoing, preliminary findings indicate that viewing times for eBooks are very short, and that the eBook is used more for browsing — "power browsing" in **Professor David Nicholas's** words — than for a detailed reading of the content. If the book is important to his/her research, the reader will want a printed copy. Is the eBook an incomplete substitute for the printed artifact?

While eBooks have gained ground in science and medicine, where researchers already do much of their work online, it is clear that eBooks represent a much diminished service as far as scholars in the humanities and some social sciences are concerned. They use the library as their laboratory, browsing books on the shelf. Their scholarship is a

development of what has been written — and published — before.

It is at this point that digital printing technology may have come to the rescue of the printed monograph. Books have traditionally been printed by a process called offset litho. Until recently, many publishers have doubted whether digital printing would provide the quality they require — yes, publishers spend a great deal of time and effort in creating books that are readable, durable and with a look and feel that is pleasant to the reader.

While the processes of typesetting, editing and plate-making have been computerized for many years, offset printing has continued to require a minimum print run of 500-800 copies in order that the book can cover its costs. The stock has to be warehoused and distributed world-wide via local distributors and/or library vendors. And if it does not sell, it has to be pulped.

Digital Printing Confers Three Significant Benefits

- Very short print runs at an acceptable cost per copy means that the publisher can print fewer copies, and ties up less money in stock that would otherwise be held in the warehouse.
- Instead of a single offset printing facility, digital technology enables the publisher to print locally to meet demand. This is still an embryonic production system, called "Distribute and Print." It relies on sending PDF files of the book to facilities

around the world where small quantities can be printed to fill local orders. This dramatically reduces distribution costs and provides much shorter delivery times to the customer.

- It lies behind Print-on-demand (POD), already exploited by **Lightning Source**, one of the leading companies in this field.

Of these benefits, "Distribute and Print" is the most promising for the printed book. Publishers can publish books that would otherwise lose money if printed in the traditional way. With constantly improving digital technology, smaller quantities can be economically produced, with little wastage. The costs and complexity of warehousing, transportation and supply chain management are greatly reduced. The process, being local to the customer, is environmentally friendly, as the carbon footprint involved in world-wide distribution is reduced.

While Distribute and Print may involve a higher per-book production cost it enables the publisher to print and sell only hundreds of a title, based on customer orders, instead of printing a thousand and then selling only part of the print run and disposing of unsold stock. It also means that titles can remain in print, however obscure or specialized.

All modern typesetting and editorial systems now produce print PDFs, which can then be sent electronically to local printers around the world. The printer simply checks the files

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to ensure that all fonts and graphics files are present and correct, and then prints locally. Books for libraries in, say, Australia can be printed and delivered locally. The customer and the publisher both benefit.

Distribute and Print Services Already Exist

- **International Print Network** (www.ipnglobal.com) is a consortium of 50 companies in 189 cities around the world with a combined turnover in excess of US\$2billion. It was formed in 1993 to stimulate international business for its member printers.
- Because printing costs in the USA are high, a number of US printers have already incorporated "Distribute and Print" in their future development. Most of them are based in the USA, simply because US conventional printing costs are high. Examples include **Odyssey Press**, based in New Hampshire, and **The Sheridan Group**.

Distribute and Print may be no more than POD writ large. The foremost exponent of POD is **Lightning Source**, a subsidiary of **Ingram Industries** and a sister company of **Ingram Digital**, **Ingram Book Group** and **Coutts Information Services**. It operates digital printing facilities at two locations in the USA and one in the UK. It is examining the establishment of locations around the world. **Lightning Source** is an interesting example of how digital printing is changing the way business may be done.

First and foremost, **Lightning Source** is a digital print contractor. It receives orders direct from the publisher, prints the order from PDF files supplied by the publisher and stored by **Lightning Source**, and dispatched. At its UK plant, roughly half of its output is delivered back to the publisher, and the other half is dispatched ("drop-shipped") direct to the customer. It can print the publisher's invoice and include it with the individual order.

What makes **Lightning Source** a good example of how Distribute and Print might operate in the library market is its business model for dealing with book wholesalers and library vendors. A license agreement between **Lightning Source** and the publisher permits it to sell the publisher's titles in specific markets (for example, a US publisher might license it for sales in Europe, the Middle East and Africa, or a UK publisher licenses it to sell its titles in the USA and Canada), through agreed sales and distribution channels, e.g., online booksellers such as **Amazon** or **Barnes & Noble**, and/or wholesalers and library vendors such as **Baker & Taylor**, **Ingram Book Group**, **Gardners** or **Bertrams THE**. The selling price is set by the publisher. The books supplied are manufactured by **Lightning Source** from PDF files supplied by the publisher. But the whole transaction is handled by **Lightning Source**, with the publisher receiving the net revenue received by **Lightning**

Source after trade discount, and its print and distribution costs have been deducted — not unlike a royalty on sales.

The technology on which digital printing is based is expensive. The market is dominated by **Océ** and **Xerox**. Their equipment can print in black and white, or two colors, or full color. But the equipment is expensive to install and run. Downtime is significant, as the equipment needs a high level of servicing. At present, suppliers have to build in redundancy into their plant and equipment in order to meet the fast delivery times promised to publishers. The problem is that the technology is not yet robust enough to guarantee fault-free running. Nevertheless, the technology will improve. It is only the beginning of a transformation in scholarly and professional publishing.

The consequences for scholarly book publishing are interesting. While the cost of warehousing and distribution may diminish, the management of the supply chain from

publisher to library will become more complex to manage. Every publisher will use a mixture of offset and digital printing to produce its program, including licensing library vendors and booksellers to print locally. The choice of production method is not one of digital versus offset; it is more a question of selecting the most appropriate and effective technology to produce each title. It is a choice to be made book-by-book.

What digital printing brings to the publishing table is the opportunity to meet scholarly needs better. It makes low print runs cost-effective. It meets continuing demand for back list titles. It reduces costs by matching printing to actual sales. It provides a more rational way of meeting worldwide demand by local printing. In short, more books in print for longer, and a greener world. Not bad for a medium that pundits dismissed as obsolete. The printed book is by no means dead. It has just become modern. 🌱

Papa Abel Remembers — The Tale of A Band of Booksellers, Fasicle 6: 1959 – A Year of Uncertainty and Turmoil, Followed by Radical Change

by **Richard Abel** (Aged Independent Learner) <rabel@easystreet.net>

As 1959 approached, it appeared that all was moving forward in an orderly way, and the firm was well postured to deal with an increasing purchasing volume as well as an increasing number of West Coast academic and research library accounts. However, as the ever-changing evolution of all human affairs and the ever-unforeseeable cycles of achievement and vicissitude seem to dictate, 1959 turned into a year of uncertainty and turmoil, followed by radical change. This altered state of affairs grew out of a 1959 U.S. Court of Appeals decision (**C.F. Mueller Co. v. Commissioner**) that declared the profits of **C.F. Mueller Co.** could not be exempt from income taxes even though **Mueller** had organized as a Delaware corporation in 1947 to donate its profits to the **New York University School of Law**, an educational non-profit institution, and thus avoid taxes. As is the wont of all tax collectors, the **IRS** issued a draconian body of rules governing the kinds of income that

not-for-profits could claim as exempt from taxes. The **Reed College Board** and legal counsel assessed these new rules and concluded that **Reed College Bookstore, Inc.**, a taxpaying corporation, jeopardized the not-for-profit tax status of the College. Thus, in late summer or early

fall, a committee of the Board instructed me to close all operations and disband the corporation as quickly as possible or, at the very latest, by the end of the calendar year.

Now what? **Reed College's** name — and mine — might readily be tarred for renegeing on the mutual commitments inherent in every market exchange between the Bookstore and the libraries or publishers. I went to the committee of the Board to argue that this was not a wise decision. But my pleas and arguments could not sway the judgment that the College ran too grave a tax risk to modify or rescind its earlier decision.

I spent a long and troubled weekend mulling over the matter. On Sunday afternoon I sought out an old friend of mine, who was also a longtime friend of **Reed College**, to recommend a good attorney who could represent me and implement a strategy of resolution, which I had developed over the previous days (and nights), with the Board. He put me in touch with **Alan Hart**, who would become a long-term advisor as well as counsel to the firm over subsequent years. **Alan** agreed to help and we were off, rolling the dice once again.

My plan was the essence of simplicity but involved some delicate negotiations, which **Alan** carried through with admirable tact — and success. I offered to buy the firm for its then book value, including all inventory, receivables, payables, bookshelves, and few pieces of office furniture and equipment. I

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