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ATG Interviews Steve Bosch

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*Column Editor's Note: Steve Bosch is Materials Budget, Procurement, and Licensing Librarian at the **University of Arizona**. Steve's abilities exceed the length of his title; he manages content and change with the grace of a **University of Arizona** point guard. We've worked with him many years. Steve is a resource and a great guy. — DB*

ATG: You are a big University of Arizona sports fan. What does the average fan need to know about your job and profession?

Steve Bosch: About my job and profession — probably nothing! Although, one good thing to know about the Library is that for "Tailgaters" the Library has the best public restrooms closest to tailgate parking and the stadium. Also good to keep in mind that the Library has some great sports stats in case a fan needs to stock up on little known sports trivia to impress their friends.

ATG: University of Arizona Libraries is well known for its team concept. What's team-based collection development like?

SB: Herding cats? Who's on first? Can decisions really get made outside of geologic time frames? Pushing decision-making to the lowest possible level and empowering people to act works really well most of the time, as long as the basic parameters are well understood and agreed on. There are problems with getting everyone on the same page at the same time especially in rapidly changing environments like we are seeing now. Since there is a need to shift focus from local collections to delivery and access the traditional selector roles are changing so we are now "herding fewer cats" and that is getting easier. Despite drawbacks we do get a lot done by a small number of people and users seem to appreciate their efforts.

ATG: U of A embraces technology and organizational change. Which technology knocked your socks off? What could you have done without?

SB: I don't think there has really been any "wow" technology that was really instantly transformative. Most of the biggies kind of crept up on us, so I still have my socks on. Of course the Web and email have been the two most transformative technologies, if you can call those things technologies. I think those two items have totally changed the way things work and what and how we do things. On the other hand I guess I'm pretty much a Luddite as far as the social networking and twitter scene goes. It just could never hold my attention for long. I guess I work so much in the Web that I really want to do other things with my free time and so far I have not seen any real enhancement to business communications from social networking sites.

ATG: Lately, there's been much talk about "discovery services" which promises more effective and efficient cross-searching of library databases and content — a veritable academic library Google. Thoughts?

SB: Ah, the holy grail of libraries — the better than **Google** search. If you really think about it, since **Google** permeates and dominates the world of discovery, is it reasonable to think that a service a library could offer would really compete with that? It makes more sense to embrace **Google** and work with it instead of trying to provide a comprehensive search at a local level. I think it will become more important to make library holdings as transparent as possible so that discovery can happen at the network level. If we have to rely on local catalogs to find local content then we are creating barriers in the discovery process. We need to be sure what we do breaks down those barriers and provides widest possible discovery. Libraries need to focus on aggregating all our users to all our content and it seems that network level discovery is key to that.

ATG: What is your take on the constant consolidation in library publishing?

SB: We all joke about how before long we will just write a check to "   " and be done with it but I suspect that we won't really ever see that day. To be sure there are economies of scale in publishing especially the tech side of things and it really is better to be bigger since you can than afford the next technological wiz-bang that comes along. When the capital markets were a bit less tight, buying up competitors was a good way to grow the bottom line. I suspect that market forces will work to cut down on large mergers due to the difficulty of raising the required funds and I don't see a lot of investors flocking to this market since the margins are so thin. We may have seen the high water mark on big mergers for a while with the exception of the PE firms getting out of scholarly publishing / library markets.

ATG: What was the most challenging electronic resource deal you've worked on? What has been the most fun?

SB: Actually these are one and the same. The **Arizona Universities** consortia did a group purchase for streaming video from FMG that was essentially a patron initiated plan where we exposed all the content, then purchased the streamed video based on use. Since this was brand new and the technology not mature there were all kinds of things that came along and once you thought you had one thing fixed another thing popped up. Things were constantly changing and this really was a case when we were trying to nail jello to a wall. In the end things worked really well and the users loved us for bringing up the service. We had to keep shifting the purchase trigger up as use sky rocketed. Since this was brand new and cutting edge there was a good deal of feel good about getting it up and running.

ATG: Is the era of the "big deal" in library content over?

SB: Who the heck knows? If I really knew I probably wouldn't be in a library but would be out consulting, showing folks how to make the transition. I suspect that we will continue to see content bundled to get reduced prices, but I also suspect that a hard look will also happen concerning the low use content that gets into the agreements. Libraries will be increasingly concerned about buying content that isn't used. Unfortunately there isn't a business model now that can really support "you only buy what's used" but that could be a real "killer app" in the library marketplace.

ATG: Is there a role for collection development — and the library for that matter — in "open access" publishing?

SB: A better question might be is there a role for collection development in the world of networked digital information. It is not about the collection any more so we should really be thinking about information resource management at the network level. I seem to be having to unlearn everything I thought I knew about collection development as things shift in focus from local collections to network level discovery and access.

ATG: What's Steve Bosch working on for the Fall 2009 semester?

SB: Patron initiated acquisitions will be the big thing this fall as we move from testing to implementation across several fronts.

ATG: Is there a Lute Olson for the librarianship in the Google era? Or do we need a Bobby Knight?

SB: Frankly, we don't need more/better coaches, but we sure could use some **Michael Jordans** — folks who can finish plays, put the rock in the hole, and energize the fan base and get them back in the door and excited 'bout the game. 🐾