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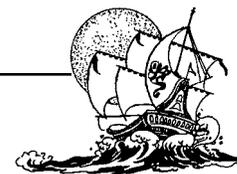
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International Dateline — “In the Gap”



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Column Editor's Note: Against the Grain has invited *East View* to contribute a series of articles for *International Dateline*. We're pleased to have this opportunity to share the perspective of a mid-sized company specialized in sourcing foreign-produced research content for libraries worldwide. — **RL**

With the click of a mouse, researchers have instant access to an ocean of global research content. Technical and political barriers to international trade and scholarship are at an all-time low. And, with the advent of broadband networks and new tools, a maelstrom of media, languages, and formats is effortlessly integrated into library systems. Fortunately for the Anglo-American researcher, foreign content is nearly always available with clear metadata, English-language interfaces, and tailored to the specifications of western library science.

Were it only that simple.

The gaps between content produced for a home market overseas and what is compatible with a western library's needs are several and not insignificant. Fundamental differences often exist between the essential needs of North American libraries and the home environments where these resources come from. Issues that may be imperative for European and North American libraries, such as perpetual access licenses or unlimited simultaneous use, can be anathema to foreign aggregators or publishers' grant of rights. Commercial models originally designed for a home market with 100% literacy in a given language sometimes require fundamental adjustment when products are imported as special tools for a select audience. And, particularly with the increased sophistication and size of those home markets, simply adapting to the “US way” may not be a foregone conclusion.

East View's portfolio is an expanding suite of “exotic” but critical information resources from China, the Former Soviet Union, and now — the Middle East, in both electronic and traditional media, overwhelmingly in the vernacular. True, the act of commercially engaging these regions has become considerably easier: gone are the days when publishers and libraries of the USSR were not permitted to enter into contracts with foreign entities; when Chinese publishers were not easily able to make their content available outside of the People's Republic; and when e-content was still unknown in the Arab world. But just as these horizons have improved, new challenges have become apparent.

Even technical assumptions can be largely divergent. Fortunately, Unicode is embraced more broadly in all countries. But cataloging standards are anything but universal (impacting not just online products, but presenting chal-

lenges for the import of shelf-ready books as well). The **Macintosh** platform, beloved in Tacoma, has far fewer users in Taipei, Tehran, or Tobol'sk, and has not been a development consideration for many foreign producers. We are constantly educating overseas partners that not only subject specialists, but generalists such as Technical Services librarians need to be able to work with a product, at least on a basic level, and this is why we agitate to localize installation and error message interfaces. For some publishers, specific technologies prevalent in the US, from proxy tools to citation software or link resolvers, may be wholly unknown.

With the immediacy and global impact of economic, ecological and other events, no region is truly alien anymore. And the need to access more global (and particularly vernacular) primary source content is ever greater. Yet we are observing the shrinking and consolidation of foreign-bureau capability among US media outlets. An unprecedented variety of career and study options abounds for students focusing on regions that were formerly the province of a small cadre of specialists; yet libraries struggle to maintain the internal resources necessary to find, negotiate, integrate, catalog, and serve “exotic” information products to patrons.

All of these issues represent the gap we are trying to fill as intermediary. The substance of our work is, in essence, to advocate on behalf of western information consumers.

We are engaged with a variety of information providers in China, the FSU, and the Middle East to establish western-standard MARC records, greater ILS and link-resolver compatibility, and business models that best meet the requirements of libraries in North America and Western Europe. The sources we negotiate with range from massive state-owned conglomerates to small, but innovative pioneers. Though our regions of focus differ radically from one another in government, economy, and culture, there are surprisingly consistent elements to the

challenges we encounter. The landscape of problems in copyright law, business models, local library culture, and accounting practices is different in each context, but may have similar features (*Who owns copyright to individual newspaper articles? Why is it impractical for libraries in North America to pay for subscriptions in monthly installments? What does permanent access really mean?*). In some regions, the lay of the land is crisply defined, if different from our own; in others, the territory is not well charted, and navigation requires a different kind of patience and flexibility.

To help address the resource crunch facing western institutions, we have placed much emphasis on ease-of-use issues, including not only interface localization and metadata, but acquisition and selection services. Recently, we have introduced an Approval Plan service for eBooks from China, and we also contribute to the **OCLC Vendor Record Contribution Program, WorldCat Selection Service, and Language Sets Programs**, to help public libraries acquire books in vernaculars their constituencies need but which may outmatch internal resources. Need US MARC records for your Chinese eBooks? Want Russian title lists presented in German transliteration

continued on page 81

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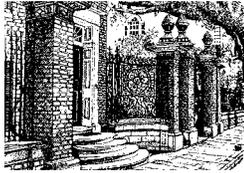
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International Dateline – Adventures All from page 80

out: “as one coterie became established, so another was on its way out.” He just wanted to get their selections into print; on the proviso, of course, that he judged them to be “worth the candle.”

Publishing worthwhile work, as was **Basil** and his father’s wont, was not enough to guarantee their publishing house. Added to which, many of their writers scurried to London as soon as they were recognised. **Basil** saw his “names” appearing in the lists of **Macmillan**, **Cape**, **Faber**, and many more: “Sic vos non vobis mellificatis apes,” he declared – “thus not for you, ye bees, ye honey make. But although the great names may have forsaken him, **Basil** nonetheless established his own place in the market. And although the old **Blackwell** habit, of bearing the costs of publication, had to go, it never did, totally. **Basil** continued to provide **Blackwell** support for writers whose work could never be commercial. The *Story of Alfred Williams*, in **Basil Blackwell’s** own words, typifies the approach that he and his father took to “publishing”:

“Some years ago there reached me through the post a typescript on thin green paper, bearing the impress of a hard-worn typewriter. The accompanying letter stated that the work was a translation from the Sanskrit, that the Professor of Sanskrit at Oxford had written an introduction, and that if we should decide to publish the book and thought that pictures might be able to add to its attractions, a certain young artist might be able to make them for us. The letter was signed Alfred Williams. The Translator’s Preface showed that Alfred Williams could write English. The Professor’s Introduction testified to his scholarship. The address typed on the letter gave the name of a village near Swindon, and the best course seemed to be to invite Alfred Williams to come over to Oxford and discuss the matter. He replied that he would be happy to come, and on the appointed day he arrived punctually, a man seemingly in his fifties and with a charming smile. As soon as he entered my room I was aware that I was in the presence of a rare spirit, but being slow, and often wrong, in my estimate of men, I could not tell what lay behind the serenity, the cheerfulness and the gentleness which both his face and his manner revealed. Our discussion raised no difficulties. He would revise his typescript according to my suggestions, and bring it to Oxford again in a week or two to meet the artist in my room, and to complete the preliminary plans for publication.

continued on page 82

International Dateline — In the Gap from page 79

standards? Provide price quotes in Canadian dollars or Euros for a product from Hong Kong? Such is the stuff of a typical business day for us. Meanwhile, our data center is managing the synchronization of over 80TB of data with servers in Moscow, Beijing, and Cairo — no small task in itself.

The specialized tools, travel regimens, and human resources required to capably procure and support exotic content are essential, but entail considerable investment. This means multilingual staff in the areas of Publisher Relations, Acquisitions, Sales and Marketing, Customer Service — even Finance. Yet the market for such products, compared to more broadly-used Anglo-American resources, is relatively small. And because of the nature of the content we specialize in, we must also maintain IT capabilities equal to, and in some ways more robust than, more mass-market suppliers. With these complexities and the vagaries of foreign currency fluctuations, it is crucial that we manage responsibly to remain a stable and viable supplier. We’ve managed to find that balance for more than 20 years, during a period of revolutionary change in the financial, political, and economic environments of our source partners.

Our niche in the information industry can at times feel like an advance frontier post, with all attendant excitement and challenges. With the help of suppliers and customers, we’re charting that frontier more every day.

The goal is to be an efficient channel for this content, for the benefit of sources and consumers alike. We seek to listen to our customers, to acquire relevant resources and make them as easy as possible to understand and use. Along the way, our desire is to create the most comprehensive and relevant possible suite of research tools for our areas of geographic focus, and to minimize the library’s burden by providing a consistent support experience. We look forward to future appearances in this column, and welcome feedback from other readers with ideas for topics in the spirit of **ATG** — bringing publishers, librarians, and vendors together. 🐜