November 2013

Oliver Theodor Sitea Obituary

Editor

Under the Hood — The Library Ecosystem

Column Editor: **Xan Arch** (Electronic Resources and Technology Librarian, Stanford University Libraries, Stanford, CA 94305-6004; Phone: 650-725-1122; Fax: 650-723-4775) <xanadu@stanford.edu>

An ecosystem in the natural world is made up of all the organisms that share the same habitat. This model of a Web of interdependent elements translates well to many aspects of human interaction as well. For example, a software ecosystem usually centers around a particular software platform and is made up of complementary products and components produced by third parties. Each element and producer needs to play well with others and occupy its own niche to keep the ecosystem balanced and stable. Unstable states occur when a system dominates the market and thus does not allow for healthy competition or there are too many products in the same space and some must die in order for the system to find equilibrium.

The Library Ecosystem

What is the library ecosystem? If a library is a platform, like a software system, library vendors and publishers are the companies producing parts and components to plug into this platform. Some of these products are competitors and strive for the same niche, while others live in harmony. However, for library acquisitions and library vendors, the ecosystem is changing rapidly. Just as global warming drives animals to new habitats and forces them to find new adaptive strategies, the changes brought by the move to electronic publishing are forcing us to change the game.

Speciation is the process of evolution that results in new biological species and the library ecosystem is undergoing speciation as providers of traditional services are moving into new markets. Monograph vendors are selling eBooks and databases, serial vendors are offering license management, and libraries are hosting e-journals as every element in the library ecosystem struggles to adapt to environmental changes.

As vendors' offerings increasingly overlap, they will need to adapt to find their niche in order to survive in the new environment. One adaptive advantage is the ordering or acquisition system. Many book and serial vendors now have some sort of online platform for selecting, purchasing, and claiming material. These ordering systems are relatively new on the market and in different stages of development depending on the vendor. Increasingly, ordering systems are an adaptive advantage for the company who can produce an efficient way for libraries to interact with the vendor's goods for sale. New products can be showcased in the online system to further develop the vendor's market. How can vendors best leverage the adaptive advantage of an ordering system?

Feedback

Feedback in an ecosystem could mean the survival of a new species. If you change your behavior and it leads to a better food supply, you have received positive feedback and will continue the new behavior. For a vendor, being chosen on the basis of an ordering system is positive feedback. These ordering systems will begin to be a factor in libraries' choice of vendors, since they provide automation to the library ordering process and can make dwindling acquisition departments more efficient and effective.

Many systems however, are not developed to the point of being an advantage for vendors. In this case, a more incremental kind of feedback is needed to help develop the system. Feedback from librarians is important for these ordering systems since librarians know what they will need and want from these products. However, those who are most involved in using the product often have the fewest established lines of communication for requesting additions or changes in the software. Vendor advisory groups are usually higher level librarians who are able to travel to meet with the group or able to spend part of their work day interacting with vendors. The staff that use the product on a regular basis are more likely to be library staff that do not travel or meet with outside parties. How can vendors seek out practical feedback so their product can grow to meet the needs of its users? Online tools can help, whether user forums for questions and answers about the software, Webinars that encourage users to ask questions and make suggestions, or just a prominent link to a feedback form from within the system.

Librarians are not off the hook either. Libraries may not always be competing for a niche like a private company, but they can still suffer the consequences of not working symbiotically with vendors. If we do not know what we want and do not ask for what we want, we certainly won't get it. Before we attend conferences and visit vendors' booths, we should be checking in with the staff that are using the vendor's system — the ordering staff, the serial claiming staff — and listening to their complaints or their praise. This is what the vendor needs to hear. Sometimes the feedback should be documented, possibly with screenshots or video, to make sure the vendor can pinpoint the issue.

The most effective feedback is structured, with clear documentation of the problem or request. On the recipient's side, the feedback should move into a transparent product development system whose outgrowths are communicated clearly to all parties involved. In other words, the vendor needs to be given the information required to understand the problem and in turn advise the library how, when, and if the product will be changed in response. If a request is not possible or doesn't fit with the development path, the requester should be told so. The alternative is promising something you can't deliver. A library giving feedback should understand that they are one of many, often with specific needs, and they might not always get what they want.

Finding your Niche

The ordering system is just one possible adaptive advantage to a vendor in the library ecosystem. But the need for symbiotic evolution holds true across a large part of our relationships. As libraries and library vendors adapt to a rapidly changing environment, we must talk with each other about what we need to survive, and what we can realistically accomplish along the way. 🐢

Oliver Theodor Sitea Obituary

August 23, 1929 - April 15, 2009

From *The Oregonian*, April 26, 2009 — **Oliver Theodor Sitea** died of lung cancer on April 15, 2009, just four months before his 80th birthday.

Born to Romanian immigrants, **Teodor** and **Dorothy Sitea** in East Chicago, Ind., **Oliver** spent his boyhood and young manhood in Indiana Harbor and Chicago. Early on he became and remained to the end of his life a dedicated, true bookman. Starting in retail books in Chicago and southern California, he joined the Portland-based **Richard Abel Co.**, a university library book vendor; then the Oxford, England-based **Blackwell, North America**; and before retiring he started **Oliver's Books**, his own out-of-print search service.

Oliver moved to Portland with his family in 1972 and loved Oregon for the rest of his life. In addition to books, **Oliver** lived for music, the arts, film, travel, food, and most of all — people. He was admired by everyone who came into his life for his erudition, his wit, his gentleness, and his loyalty. He will be sadly, achingly missed by many, many friends and family.

Oliver is survived by **Eleanor**, his wife of 57 years; daughter, **Olivia** and son-in-law, **Larry Walters**; daughter **Rachel**; son, **Theo** and daughter-in-law, **Carol**; brother, **Ted** and sister-in-law, **Ruby Sitea**; sister, **Margaret Romero**; brother-in-law, **Gerald Reynolds**; and many loving nieces and nephews.

A gathering to honor and celebrate his life was held at a later date. The online guest book can be found at *www.oregonlive.com/obits*. 🐢