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## Notes from Mosier -- Opportunities and Risks

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# Notes from Mosier — Opportunities and Risks

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While back **Katina Strauch** invited me to contribute a column to *ATG*, and I happily agreed to do so. Hence this is the first of what I hope will be an ongoing feature of the journal. After nearly thirty years in the book trade, I hope to offer a few kernels of wisdom gleaned from that experience.

The title for this column comes from a small Columbia Gorge town in Oregon named Mosier (population 430). I have the great good fortune to live about five miles up the hill from Mosier, in a house that looks out over the Columbia and has views of Mt. Hood and Mt. Adams. Those of you who know me will appreciate that Mt. Hood holds a special place in my heart, for it's there I and two Oregon librarians, **Faye Chadwell of Oregon State University** and **Nancy Slight-Gibney of the University of Oregon** organize the annual **Acquisitions Institute at Timberline Lodge**. I'll admit to being biased, but the **Lodge** is the best venue for a library conference on the planet. Mosier has a lot going for it — a fantastic location, creative and resourceful residents, and a great restaurant, **Good River**. Alas, what it no longer has is a library. The city lost the lease on the building that housed our little gem of a library, and to date no replacement facility has been found. At this writing the library's future is uncertain; at least residents have a very commendable alternative at the **Hood River Public Library** five miles away.

The loss of our library has prompted me to think about other casualties in the library

and vendor community. Perhaps recent events have informed my reveries — the demise of major financial and manufacturing giants to name but an obvious few — but it brings me back to a topic several of my friends and I have been mulling over for the past couple of years. Change — what does it mean for libraries, for publishers, for vendors? What do we risk losing? What new opportunities might we encounter? How will our worlds look in a few years time?

Change is of course not new. Rather, it's the intractable questions posed by change that seem so challenging, their answers so elusive. Look at the vendor community. If someone had suggested in 1967 that the **Richard Abel Company** would disappear in less than a decade, people wouldn't have believed it possible. Or, if ten years later someone speculated that **Faxon** would implode, it would have seemed ludicrous. Yet so it is now with **GM**, **AIG**, and others. In our own industry there are several once noble but now enfeebled companies lurching toward oblivion.

Some will argue this is normal: market forces and trends favoring the innovative and nimble, and discarding the inept and poorly managed to their fate. The burning question in my mind, though, is this: how does this ultimately affect librarians and the patrons they serve?

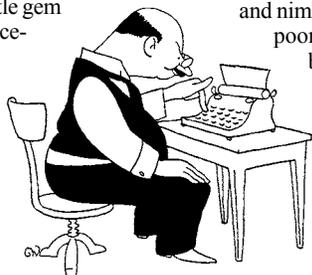
Let's focus on opportunities and risks. Under the opportunities column we must first mention the greatly enhanced range of resources

now available with the likelihood that ongoing digitization and capital investment will yield more content, access, and ease of use. Libraries have benefited from products and services arising from other arenas (e.g., **Amazon**) and their patrons' expectations and skill sets have largely been shaped by these same entrepreneurial enterprises.

Among the risks: that the new generation of digital natives will bypass libraries altogether (OK, nothing new about that argument) and reside quite contentedly in the **Google** embrace. That publishers, faced with ever dwindling demand for print resources, will either price content out of reach or simply decide not to publish in print. (Perhaps e or print on demand is the future.) That traditional vendors, faced with eroding margins, fragmenting markets, and stretched resources, will simply fail. That much of the supply chain of products and services essential to libraries will wind up in the hands of people to whom libraries are secondary at best, and who may well see little or no incentive to provide genuine, responsive service to meet their needs.

Is there some middle ground — a compromise that can yield world-class service coupled to the dynamism of the market? Is there a way to preserve the best attributes of conventional scholarly publishing reconfigured in a viable, sustainable economic model? Is a marriage of traditional vendor services with cutting-edge technologies, wrapped around a coherent, comprehensible package possible?

These are the questions and issues I hope to explore in the columns to follow. I welcome your feedback. 🌱



## Rumors

from page 6

Librarian, Coker College, Hartsville, SC) just posted on the *ATG NewsChannel Forums* about the **Kindle**. They have used the **Kindle** to receive the *New York Times* daily.

<http://www.against-the-grain.com/d/node/167#new>

Speaking once more of the **Kindle**, rode in a cab to the airport in Denver with **Mark Stover** (Interim Associate Dean, Library and Information Access, San Diego State University) <mstover@mail.sdsu.edu>. He pulled out a **Kindle** from his briefcase and said he liked it very much. However, he said that he did not like reading the newspaper on the **Kindle**. Hmmm...

According to the **Bookseller**, "**Sony** has revealed that it has sold 300,000 of its **digital e-book Reader** globally since the device was launched in October 2006 and that it is working on a wireless version of the product to rival **Amazon.com's Kindle**. So far three million books have been downloaded from its online library, which is home to 57,000 titles. ... **Amazon** won't release sales figures for the **Kindle** but gadget industry experts widely

report that sales of **Kindle** and **Sony Reader** are running neck and neck."

<http://www.thebookseller.com/news/72179-sony-divulges-reader-sales.html>

It's been **unseasonably cold** in Charleston. I usually wear my coat once or twice and I have been wearing it non-stop since early December. Crazy! But I know that a lot of you have had it even worse. Maybe the ground hog will have enough of winter by the end of February? I certainly hope so.

The indomitable **Sandy Thatcher** <sgt3@psu.edu> tells us he's retiring as director of the **Penn State University Press** in June 2009, but will continue as an **acquiring editor** for the Press in **social sciences**. **Sandy's** port of operation, however, will be **Frisco, Texas**, where he's moving next summer. **Sandy** will remain on the **AAUP** and **AAP copyright committees** and the **CCC Board of Directors**. Plus, he will continue to contribute his incredible thought-provoking and thorough columns to *ATG*! Hooray! See this issue, p.69.

Another university press mover and shaker, **Kate Wittenberg** has joined **Ithaka's Strategic Services** group as **Project Director, Client and Partnership Development**. In

her new role, **Kate** will focus on building partnerships among scholars, academic centers, publishers, libraries, technology providers, societies, and foundations with an interest in promoting the development of digital scholarship and learning. **Kate** spent most of her career at **Columbia**, where she was the Editor-in-Chief of **Columbia University Press** until 1999, and went on to found and direct **EPIC** (the **Electronic Publishing Initiative at Columbia**) for the university. **EPIC** was a pioneering initiative in digital publishing, and a model publishing partnership for libraries, presses, and academic IT departments. Some of the ventures produced by **EPIC** include **CIAO (Columbia International Affairs Online)**, **Gutenberg-E** (a reinvention of the monograph as an electronic work), and **Jazz Studies Online**. **Ithaka's Strategic Services group** specializes in helping promising digital projects to develop sustainable organizational and business models, and working with established institutions to rethink the ways they serve their core constituencies. **Laura Brown**, who leads the Strategic Services group says, "It is hard to imagine a more respected or resourceful voice in the field of digital publishing and we look forward to her help identifying and cultivating

*continued on page 16*