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Dr. Jekyll (Library Science Professor) and Mr. Hyde (OP Book Vendor)

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I recently celebrated my fourth anniversary as a small Internet book vendor. At work, I'm Dr. Jekyll — professor, scholar, and consumer of high culture. At home, I've gone over to the dark side to become Mr. Hyde, the Internet vendor who values books, CD's, and movies not for their intellectual content but for their marketability. Mr. Hyde scarcely looks at the great works of literature unless they are very cheap or used as college texts but instead seeks out quirky non-fiction. He especially buys books on self-help, astrology, religion, or sex. While Dr. Jekyll wouldn't ever read these books, Mr. Hyde is quite willing to sell them since they offer a good profit.

How did I transform into Mr. Hyde? I got started selling on the Internet after having written as the lead author what I believe to be the first serious, methodologically and statistically sound study of changes in the out-of-print book market.¹ I became interested in the topic because I used the out-of-print meta-search engines to value my library donations and found that almost all items, even strange ones from small presses, were available and that prices were dropping considerably. The research on four samples of buy and sell ads in *AB Bookmans Weekly* confirmed this hypothesis with 95% availability and a 45% price drop in inflation adjusted dollars.

After spending so much time researching the op market, I decided that I might have enough intelligence and entrepreneurial drive to enter Mr. Hyde's capitalistic world. I have a very large, dry basement where my books and papers had not mildewed after a decade's storage. I also had the remnants of a large research collection that I had purchased on a whim at the end of an estate sale to give to the **Wayne State University Libraries**. I listed my first books at *Half.com* because of the ease of entry into this venue, made my first sale for \$3.75 a few days later, shipped the book, and got paid. The rest is history as Mr. Hyde was born. He has sold over three thousand five hundred items and Dr. Jekyll has learned many lessons about how the Internet book market works. These lessons have enriched Dr. Jekyll's writing and speaking though Mr. Hyde has still made more cash.

The first lesson from my four year's of selling is that I won't get rich. I considered starting to sell books in part as a way to have a revenue producing hobby when I retire. Hyde's average sale is around \$5.00, which is better than it seems since the average cost per item is around twenty cents and he gets many books for free or next to nothing. He has found a few rarities. His best find is a limited edition on one of the California missions that sells for around \$1,000 that a library sold him for \$1.00. What amazes me is that this book was available for

sale in the book sale room for at least a week before he bought it. In sum, Mr. Hyde makes more selling books than Dr. Jekyll does writing articles. Plus, I'm having fun.

Hyde's business and Jekyll's libraries share a second lesson about how fickle customers can be. While I know the market much better than when I started buying books for resale, choosing the right ones is about as tricky as collection development in an academic library. I'm often surprised at what sells and what doesn't in the same way the studies show that a high percentage of library books in research libraries never circulate. The only "sure thing" right now in the op market is selling copies of *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* for \$.75. The same principle used to apply to the *Da Vinci Code*, but Hyde has had an unsold copy for two years. Mr. Hyde likes purchasing bag lots at the end of library, rummage, and church sales because he often finds treasures that he wouldn't have considered purchasing individually.

Another lesson is that format is important. Hyde likes buying paperbacks because virtually all sellers think that hard covers are worth more than paperbacks and charge accordingly. At many sales of all types, he finds multiple copies of last year's best sellers, almost worthless in most Internet markets, at three to four times the price of university press trade paperbacks. Dr. Jekyll has caused problems for Mr. Hyde by giving presentations to library groups where he talked about these "pricing mistakes." Mr. Hyde visited one of his favorite library sources a few weeks later to learn that the price for trade paperbacks had quadrupled to \$1.00.

Hyde also share two problems with libraries — organization and storage. While Jekyll started his career as a specialist in classification, Hyde tried out several different systems before arriving at one that works well. He initially arranged his inventory by title. As his stock increased, he was forced to remember the five different places where he had shelved titles beginning with "c." I also learned that the folks at *Half.com* sometimes used records that didn't match Jekyll's cataloging perception of what the title should be. (Customers encounter the same problem and can be unhappy if what they receive isn't what they thought they ordered.) Hyde was wasting so much time looking for titles that he reprocessed his inventory to add a location symbol for each item and started to code new materials by date. This change allowed him to intermingle materials without any regard for the first word of the title. His latest change is to label all materials by box or by shelf. The customer ordering from Hyde may find "bms-3gen5" to be an incomprehensible cryptic note at the end of his description, but it tells him to look on the fifth shelf (5) of the third (3) metal shelving unit (ms) in the basement

(b) among the general materials (gen) since some books on the shelf are already arranged by title or date.

Like libraries, Hyde needs to weed. Jekyll knew from his readings about the book trade that the biggest problem in selling books is when to remove them from inventory. Like most used book sellers, Hyde recovers his purchase costs quickly; but he makes much of his profit from selling items from older stock. In the last few weeks, he has sold five items that he listed for sale in 2005. He doesn't have the sophisticated repricing software that the large dealers have so that his older materials may be too expensive so that they don't sell or too cheap so that someone gets a wonderful deal. Two USPS rate increases have also made selling some books unprofitable because they weigh too much. When retirement arrives, Hyde will most likely devote an hour or two each day to repricing older stock. Somehow Hyde has managed to fill up his incredibly large basement because he can't pass up a good deal. Mr. Hyde deals with his wife's occasional concerns that she can no longer get to the holiday decorations by asking her how many husbands have hobbies that make money. Would she prefer him to buy a boat?

Libraries benefit from what Mr. Hyde can't sell. His spouse has first choice for her high school media center but is quite selective due to space concerns. A local public library, the one above that raised its prices, gets the media as a "thank you" for having supported his father's voracious reading needs for large print books. Dr. Jekyll's own academic library doesn't want gifts right now because it lacks space to store them and staff to evaluate and process them, but he puts the obvious rejects for an academic library in the book sale room so that his own library can make a little bit of money selling them to the less demanding public. I had the most difficulty with the final category — books that Mr. Hyde couldn't sell but that Dr. Jekyll believed might possibly be worth adding to an academic library's collection. Surprisingly, I had problems finding a library that wanted these books. After three rejections, a local specialized university agreed to take them. I asked only that they evaluate items for the collection before putting them in the book sale. The positive news is that this library has used my gifts and those from a staff member to create a recreational reading collection that has become quite popular with students.

Mr. Hyde attributes much of his success to honesty and good customer service, traits that all service organizations, including libraries, should possess. He describes his items for sale as accurately as possible so that the buyer is pleasantly rather than unpleasantly

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One Book, Twelve Hundred Downloads: How the LYRASILS Mass Digitization Collaborative Is Bringing The University of Scranton's Out-of-Print Books Back to Life

by **Kristen Yarmey-Tylutki** (Digital Services Librarian, The University of Scranton Weinberg Memorial Library)
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In June 2008, **PALINET**, the Mid-Atlantic regional consortium of cultural heritage organizations, announced that it had won a \$1 million grant from the **Alfred P. Sloan Foundation** to create a collaborative digitization service for its members. **PALINET** partnered with **Internet Archive**, a nonprofit organization that aims to provide "permanent access... to historical collections that exist in digital format,"¹ and set a goal of digitizing 60,000 books. Just over a year later, **PALINET** (now **LYRASILS**, after a merger with **SOLINET**) is well on its way to meeting that goal, with 33 institutions signed on to participate in its Mass Digitization Collaborative and over 6,200 items digitized.

A participant from the beginning, **The University of Scranton Weinberg Memorial Library** witnessed the growth of the Collaborative from a thirteen member mini-pilot to its current production phase. Along the way, the Library digitized 169 volumes with **Internet Archive** and has watched their download counts grow by the day — giving these books, most of which are out-of-print, new life in a digital world.

The **Weinberg Memorial Library** is a mid-sized academic library, serving a population of approximately 5,000 students. In order to provide digital access to Special Collections materials, the Library's Digital Services department scans photographs, slides, negatives, and documents in-house. In the summer of 2008, we were exploring the possibility of purchasing a book scanner and training our staff to digitize part of our book

collection, but had not found it to be cost-effective. The **PALINET** announcement, then, caught our attention; the Mass Digitization Collaborative seemed a solution for providing digital access to our Special Collections books in an affordable way.²

At the end of August 2008, with an invitation from **PALINET**'s Digital Services Manager, **Laurie Gemmill**, the **Weinberg Memorial Library** joined the Mass Digitization Collaborative's mini-pilot. **PALINET**'s goal in running this pilot was to test out their plans on a small group of diverse participants and solicit feedback on all aspects of the project before opening the Collaborative to all members; on our part, the **Weinberg** team wanted to participate at this early stage in order to contribute to the refining of the Collaborative's structure and workflow.

Throughout the next month, the thirteen pilot participants, including academic and public libraries of various sizes, a historical society, and a museum, met five times (via conference call) to discuss the program's procedures and report on progress. We were each tasked with selecting five to ten books or microfilm reels for digitization at one of **Internet Archive**'s regional scanning centers in Indiana, New Jersey, or New York.

Selection was a more difficult task than anticipated. **PALINET** encouraged pilot participants to digitize "unique items of regional interest"³ and to select either items in the public domain or items for which permission to digitize

could be obtained from the copyright holder, since the digital images would be available to the public on **Internet Archive**'s Website. **The University of Scranton**'s selection team (made up of the Special Collections Librarian, the University Archivist, and myself as the Digital Services Librarian) further narrowed down our options by ruling out any books that were already available to the public in digital format. In examining our collection, we were surprised to discover that several of the books that we had thought were relatively unique had already been digitized by other institutions and were publicly accessible via either **Internet Archive** or **Google Books**. We eventually chose six books on the history of Northeastern Pennsylvania, because of their appeal to our University community as well as our local Scranton community. Three were out-of-print; all six were in the public domain.

Since **Internet Archive** pulls descriptive metadata from library catalogs, our next step was to open a Z39.50 connection in order to share our MARC records. This process was time-consuming and was not completed for approximately three weeks; thankfully, the connection only had to be set up once. (Note: Since the **LYRASILS** pilot, **Internet Archive** has changed this process so that only large collections utilize a Z39.50 connection; smaller collections provide metadata via a customized spreadsheet tool called "WonderFetch.")

With books selected and our Z39.50 connection functioning, we were finally ready to digitize. While Collaborative participants can ship books to an **Internet Archive** regional scanning center in whatever manner they see fit, **The University of Scranton** chose to send our Special Collections Librarian to personally drop off our first batch of books at the **Princeton Theological Seminary** site in Princeton, New Jersey, in order to view the facility and observe the digitization process. **Internet Archive** employs "scribe" scanning stations, where books are placed on a cradle under a glass platen. Two digital single lens-reflex cameras photograph the recto and verso pages of the book, and then the scanner operator lifts the glass platen with a foot pedal and turns the page by hand. To keep file sizes reasonable, **Internet Archive** captures full color images not in TIFF but in JPEG2000 format. An ISO standard, JPEG2000 is used by the **Library of Congress**⁴ and the **Harvard University Library**,⁵ among others, but is still somewhat controversial among digital preservation experts who are concerned about the ease of future data migration for a format that has not yet been widely adopted.⁶ Books are scanned at between 300 and 500 dpi, depending on the

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Dr. Jekyll ...
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surprised. He sometimes sells rarer books that are in terrible condition, but he describes them as such. He's received a few negative and neutral evaluations, but he would have adjusted the price or refunded the purchase if the buyer had contacted him first. Even a careful examination can sometimes miss faults or hidden problems, especially in media. Hyde has decided to honor the principle that the customer is always right to the extent that he's reshipped books for free when the buyer gave the wrong address and given refunds when customers mistakenly ordered the wrong item.

To conclude, Mr. Hyde has sold a reason-

able number of books to libraries of all types — academic, public, school, and special. To keep his anonymity, Dr. Jekyll is hesitating whether to tell one of his best friends that her library bought one of Hyde's books. On a final note, Mr. Hyde would like me to tell you his vendor name so that you might order some of his solid academic titles, but Dr. Jekyll convinced him that discretion is the wiser choice. 🍄

Endnotes

1. **Holley, R. P.**, et. al., The effect of the Internet on the out-of-print book market: Implications for libraries. *Library Collections, Acquisitions, and Technical Services* v. 29 no. 2 (2005) p. 118-39.