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ATG Interviews Maurice "Mo" Shattuck Jr.

Marketing Manager, Emery-Pratt Company <mo@emery-pratt.com>

by Katina Strauch (Editor, *Against the Grain*)

I interviewed Mo Shattuck early on a Saturday morning. He was as upbeat and cheery and very positive as you would expect of someone who is young and whose company has been in business for 125 years. Read on. — KS

ATG: *Emery-Pratt* was founded back in 1873. That was 125 years ago. Congratulations on your company's longevity! Tell us more.

MS: We've been in business a long time. **Emery-Pratt** was founded in 1873 by **Wesley Emery**, as a retail bookstore, also selling items such as office supplies, greeting cards, wall-paper, etc. Several years later his son **Archibald** took the business over. In 1916 Archibald's son-in-law, **Hubert Pratt**, joined him in the business. My grandfather, **Burdette Shattuck** and his brother **Maurice**, purchased the company in 1956. Consequently, there have been only two families involved with Emery-Pratt since it was founded.

ATG: When did Emery-Pratt become a library distributor?

MS: Emery-Pratt began distribution to libraries shortly after the business was purchased in 1956. Our first account was the **State Library of Michigan**. **Michigan**

State University was one of our first academic accounts.

ATG: How many people work at Emery-Pratt? Tell us about your facilities? What kind of services do you offer?

MS: Our offices and warehouse are located in Owosso, Michigan. We moved here from Lansing in 1966 due to urban renewal in downtown Lansing. We have approximately 50 people including several outside and telemarketing sales representatives.

We offer a variety of services to help our customers with their ordering: 1.8 million titles from over 70,000 sources, custom invoicing, comprehensive reporting, cataloging, paperback binding, standing orders, duplicate order alert, electronic ordering, publisher prepayments. We will go to any source to get materials that a library requests. We will accept orders any way that they are sent to us: mail, fax, phone, PC and email. We work with automation vendors (**DRA, Innovative Interfaces, Dynix** etc.)

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the Internet, electronic commerce, how they're managing change. I read a lot of general management business material. Specifically on the industry I've also got five people who are out there either going to conferences, exhibits, reading listservs, literature, seminars, subscribing to journals. We have a research department that looks at market trends and usage. I'm an ALA member so I get all the library journals. I go to many, many conferences and seminars throughout the year and speak at many of them. I'm on the STM publisher's committee so I'm very close to the publishers and I get all the STM updates and publications. And I spend a lot of time in the marketplace. I talk to a lot of customers. I listen to what they have to say.

ATG: Did you encounter a lot of resistance when you got your job at Blackwell's? I mean, you are from outside the industry and all that.

JR: Not at all. I really, really enjoy the people in this industry, because they're very intellectual — a general statement but obviously very intellectual just by the nature of what they do. They're usually very cooperative. They usually have lots of suggestions and are very helpful. How I was received in the industry was — "here's this guy who doesn't have an MLS but who has perspective so let's try to work with him." That was great. People have been very helpful and supportive and I really appreciate it.

ATG: Is Blackwell's stable? I mean, it's a family-owned business, a privately held family-owned business. Some of us remember what happened at **Faxon** which was a private family business. **Faxon** was a very profitable company and then it was torn apart with family squabbling. And I know that some of the changes that have taken place at Blackwell's over the past year have been perceived as the result of family squabbles. Do you want to make any comment?

JR: Oh yes, I'll comment on it. It's helpful for me to hear what the market perceives. And I also encourage you to ask Toby this question when you interview him this summer. Most people say, and what Toby would say if he was here, is — We've been in business for 120 years and we are committed to this industry. The Blackwell family is passionate about this business. It's still very much a family held business.

One of the reasons that I enjoy being at Blackwell's so much is because it is privately held. I worked for a **Fortune 500** company — Dun and Bradstreet you'll remember — and you always get these quarterly earnings needs and short term pressures on earnings and therefore you don't invest in the business in the long term. As Toby said, it's his name over the door. If it was your name, you would take a different focus.

If you're just CEO of XYZ Company and you get a paycheck and you get some stock options, you do things differently, you behave differently. But when Toby hears a customer's

changes or that somebody had a bad experience at Blackwell's, that cuts to the heart. It's his name and he's very passionate about it. The response is from the heart as well — that we want the best for our customers.

At a recent board meeting, we approved over \$15 million for investment. Toby wants the business here for another 100 years. The family is looking at the longer term. We're not looking to try to get earnings for the next quarter and watch our stock price go up. The number one priority for the family is for the business to be here for another 100 years. Making money is important — obviously the business needs to be profitable, but if it's a choice of doing something in the short-term to make an extra hundred thousand, or of doing something for the long-term benefit of the company, they would choose the latter. It's a very long-term commitment.

NB — I didn't want to end this interview without talking about **Blackwell's Bookshop** in Oxford which is dear to all of us who have visited there. Jim was telling me about the last time that **Bill Clinton** visited the Bookshop — apparently he always visits every time he is in England. It was an impromptu stop and the **Secret Service** closed off the whole shop. BUT there is a picture of Clinton in front of the shop. I hope we can include it with this interview! — KS

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as well as providing our own acquisition system for our customers to use if they wish.

ATG: What kind of changes have you seen in book distribution in your time at Emery-Pratt?

MS: Libraries have changed drastically. The advent of the electronic age has put a whole new emphasis in libraries. Library catalogs are now all accessed by computer. The Internet has also made a great difference.

In our office, I can remember when the majority of the work was done by hand. We have had computers in our office as long as I can remember, but today computers are relied on so much more. It would be hard to operate without them. We work hard to keep up with changes in the library marketplace.

We're still pretty much a family business. My father now runs the company and my mother works in customer service. My grandfather is semi-retired but still comes in and works every day. He will be 83 in August and loves staying in touch with what's going on.

ATG: Tell us more about yourself.

MS: My wife and I grew up here in Owosso. It's a homey little town of 17,000. A lot of people commute to the Lansing or Flint area and work in the automotive in-

dustry. It's a safe community where you know lots of people. We have one daughter. My wife teaches math at the local high school. I received my BA in Business from **Indiana Wesleyan University**. In my spare time I enjoy working on my house, playing softball and tinkering with my 1981 Corvette.

ATG: Emery-Pratt is known for your personalized service. I like your phone system. It seems like I spend most of my time these days when I'm on the phone either listening or punching numbers and it's hard to have contact with a real human being. It can be maddening!

MS: I know what you mean. At Emery-Pratt we are proud of our personalized service. We feel our customer service is the best in the industry. Our phone system doesn't cut out the customer. When you call Emery-Pratt, we try to answer each call personally, then direct you to the proper individual. If that person is not available, you can then leave a message in their voice mail.

We want to make it easier for the library. That's why we've been in business so long and we hope to be in business a lot longer!

Mo tells me that he will be at ALA in Washington and I think we should all stop by and see him at booth 1905! — KS

Rumors from page 20

Chuck Longfellow (Delaware Technical and Community College) <chuck@hobbes.dtcc.edu> who says that although he defected to systems librarianship, he needs to keep in touch with what's happening in the acq world! Chuck used to be at Delaware State University and we have an interview upcoming in **ATG**!

Hrmph! You have to keep your eyes on these printers all the time! **Bonnie Martin** (U. of Virginia, Health Sciences Library) <bmm2n@virginia.edu> tells me that the center pages of the Feb. issue of **ATG** were never stapled in! Hmmm ... If this happens, send the issue back so I can get a refund from the printer and — not to worry — we will send you a replacement! Sorry about that!

Speaking of which — got an email from **Carmel Akta** (Periodicals Section, Wix Library, Weizmann Institute of Science, Rehovot, Israel) <RACARMEL@WEIZMANN.weizmann.ac.il> who wanted to claim some **ATG** issues — I wish the postpeople would find something else to eat. Also, she told me that **ATG** was sent all the way to Israel plain, not in an envelope or nylon covering! This should not be happening. **ATG** is mailed in the U.S. sans an envelope, but not abroad. Let me hear if you encounter a problem. If you don't talk, we don't know ...

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