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Letters to the Editor

Editor

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Letters to the Editor

Send letters to <strauchk@cofc.edu>, phone or fax 843-723-3536, or snail mail: *Against the Grain*, MSC 98, The Citadel, Charleston, SC 29409. You can also send a letter to the editor from the *ATG* Homepage at <<http://www.against-the-grain.com>>

Dear Editor:

To respond or not to respond is the question. I thought long and hard about after reading Barry Fast's letter to the editor in *ATG* (June 1998, p.6). Ultimately, I decided that a response was in order.

First, the half-dozen or so lines attributed to an unnamed "senior executive of a library bookselling company" in "Partnering: A Powerful 'What to Do' Management Tool or Just Another Fad?" (*ATG* (February 1998, p.70-73) were not intended to be disparaging.

Second, I'm aware of Barry's dislike of the use of "partner" as a verb, but I am dumbfounded by his concern for its innovative use. I love words; mostly I try to find the right word to express a thought (*le mot juste*). In speeches, and it is my speeches that get published, finding words that sparkle and dance is far more important than pleasing grammarians.

Partnering, verbed noun that it is, is not found in popular dictionaries, but is very much a part of today's business lexicon — and for good reason. As Barry says, we have had a friendly debate on "partnering" for years, though focused more on our different approaches to doing business than on usage. For over a decade, Gary Shirk, YBP Corporate Director, and I have been speaking to the need for libraries and those businesses that deliver the products and services they use to form productive working relationships that enable the partners to create new value together. Since the early 1990s, we have called the action that sparks this collaboration "partnering."

Barry, over the past decade, has argued that the relationship between supplier and customer (vendor and library) is not a partnership. His thesis is that "the relationship between a customer and a supplier is commercial and unequal." Moreover, he says, the noun, partner, is appropriate only when speaking of spousal or collegial relationships. Barry's narrow usage is an antique that flies in the face of reality. Alliances between organizations are the modern way of life and are far more concerned with establishing productive relationships than with equality.

Librarians who understand their environments do not think of their organization as an island. They are tearing down the walls that block the flow of critical information and are coming together in partnership with their institution's administration, faculty, students, and yes, key suppliers. We see increasing momentum toward supplier-customer partnerships. Some are fleeting alliances built around IT development. Others are long-term alliances built to exploit opportunities together.

Look around at our environments. They are highly complex and rapidly changing. Going it alone makes no sense, not when we look at the competitive realities facing our enterprise. "Collaborative, congenial, collegial, and as cordial as both parties want" will not enable libraries and vendors to create a sustainable niche. We must create the future symbiotically — by co-evolving — and so YBP is betting on strong and close cooperative arrangements between the organizations that make up our value-chain.

Finally, we have never had a library end a relationship willy-nilly — a right Barry bestows on customers because of his "commercial and unequal" view of library/vendor relationships. Great customer service on the part of the supplier engenders customer loyalty. Mutual respect and trust engender loyalty in both directions. When entrepreneurship and common vision are added to a relationship, a long-lived supplier-customer partnership is possible.

Sincerely,

John R. Secor

Chief Executive Officer, Yankee Book Peddler, Inc.) <jsecor@ybp.com>

Dear Editor:

I write to strongly commend *ATG* and two authors for what I believe to be the kind of article and/or column which should be routinely appearing in the library literature — and particularly *ATG* which has shaken off so many of the hide-bound and obsolete editorial policies, attitudes, and platitudes which characterize the bulk of the library literature. The article I have in mind is that in the June, 1998, issue written by **Hunter Kevil** of the Univ. of Mo., Columbia, entitled "The Paper Library: Beyond the Automated Card Catalog" (pp.76-77) and the last several columns of "Back Talk" by **Anthony Ferguson**.

The Kevil piece is an authentically forward-looking prescription for what the circulation segment of an integrated catalog/circulation system should look like if the library infrastructure is developed in keeping with the larger objective of strategically repositioning the library along the lines of becoming a genuine user-responsive organization. (See the **Op Ed** piece in this issue of *ATG*, pp.30, 33-34.)

The last several Ferguson columns have been pointing in the same direction of recasting library principles and practices to strategically reposition the library to regain the allegiance of diverse groups of users and thereby lay the groundwork for recapture of the vast financial ground which has been lost by libraries in the last three decades.

I hope *ATG* and at least some of its authors will continue adding to this body of thought and to the momentum for the radical change in perception and thinking and approach which the critical need for strategic repositioning calls for.

Sincerely,

Richard Abel

(1730 S.W. 90th Ave., Portland, OR 97225)

Dear Editor:

The article by **Margaret K. Powell** ("Approaching Clairvoyance: Notes Toward Selection for Off-Site Shelving," *ATG*, June, 1998, p. 23-24, 26, 28) offered an insider's take on what must be a very uncomfortable subject for bibliophiles. Perhaps not all librarians are as aware as Powell is of the sense of ownership that many faculty patrons have over the collections in "their" libraries. Powell contends that faculty need be included in the process of selecting titles for the offing, but surely it must be tempting to some librarians to plow ahead and make such decisions in the absence of faculty input. Certainly it would be easier, at least initially. But, surely those librarians who ignore faculty sensibilities will rue the day they ignored Powell's advice.

Many library patrons are prone to knee jerk negative responses to any proposal to off-site, miniaturize (microfilm or fiche), or digitize journals and texts in their field. Even a conscientious and deliberate action can be misinterpreted. For example, this article could unintentionally provide ammunition to those who oppose such moves. While it is not fair to remove sentence fragments out of context, like everyone else, I'm going to do it anyway. Consider the two fragments below. The first appears early in Powell's article, the second near the end, as if to soften the blow. If embossed and sheltered from each other by accompanying text, these words do not seem contradictory. But when laid bare, the reader is left to ponder the long-range plan for off-sited materials. ... "to take full advantage of the low cost of off-campus shelving, a library should transfer only those materials that will not be needed ..." (p.23) ... "off campus shelving that offers an optimal environment and responsive service, a pledge to return materials to campus when usage patterns change, and a delivery commitment (within 24 hours to anyone on many on-campus sites) that can be an attractive addition to stack-browsing." (p.28)

The first fragment reflects a hope and belief that offed materials will never be used. The second promises immediate access and the belief that offed works are important. The passionate skeptic, when reading both, is inflamed. Where is the truth? The line between offing and weeding becomes less clear.

Sincerely,

Rick Heldrich

(Professor of Chemistry, College of Charleston) <heldrichr@cofc.edu>

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