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ATG Interviews Eileen Sutter

Marketing & Sales Director, Dictionary of Art, Grove's Dictionaries

by Tom Gilson (College of Charleston) <gilson@cofc.edu>

ATG: Eileen, you have worked in reference publishing for a number of years in a variety of positions, but for our readers who don't know you, could you fill us in on your background?

ES: I started my publishing career in 1970 at **Prentice-Hall** working as a copywriter in the division that sold books from all parts of the company to the library market, and eventually became manager of the advertising department. My first years in publishing were back in the "good old days" when library acquisition budgets were vigorously meeting the needs of the baby boomers attending college in record numbers, and companies like P-H could support a field staff of 20+ reps calling on libraries across the country. "Electronic access" meant having a remote control on your TV, the fax was unknown, secretaries had not yet been replaced by email and PCs, and the system of sales reps calling in to a telephone answering machine was a cutting edge sales management tool.

Prentice-Hall had developed a library approval plan system which efficiently fed books into collection development categories selected by the librarian: a precursor of the approval plans offered by academic wholesalers today. P-H's biggest challenge in selling books to libraries in the early 1970s was to keep the roster of sales reps fully staffed, motivated, and out on the road. When I left P-H to join the Trade division of **Oxford University Press** in 1978, books were still the preferred format for content, but affordable computer access to bibliographic information was creating a revolution in the reference section of the library. Publishers were quick to recognize the exciting possibilities for delivering reference content electronically. For example, during the five years I worked at OUP, four Supplement volumes were published to update the original 13-volume *Oxford English Dictionary* -- but work had already begun to make the entire OED available in electronic format -- a boon to researchers everywhere when it was offered as a CD-ROM product in 1985.

ATG: And then after leaving Oxford University Press, you went to H.W. Wilson?

ES: Yes, that's right. A personal interest in electronic publishing led me to my next job at **H.W. Wilson** in 1983, which at that time was beginning to offer online access to its venerable indexes. Wilson, which had dominated the indexing market for so many years, was suddenly faced with a host of formidable electronic competitors. The concept of the "keyword search" represented an affordable alternative to the expertise of the trained indexers Wilson has always used to produce its products; and the growth of such information ven-

dors as **IAC**, **Dialog**, and **BRS** posed a significant challenge to Wilson's market share.

During my five years at Wilson, I worked on the marketing of online database subscriptions and software packages, and then on the introduction of CD-ROM format -- then heralded as a convenient, patron accessible, fixed-cost alternative to online database searching.

I went back to traditional reference book publishing when I joined **Garland** in 1988, at the time when Garland was shifting its focus away from the bibliographies that had been its mainstay, and redirecting its resources into publishing one- and two-volume encyclopedias developed to meet rigorous academic library reference standards. In the early 1990's, Garland -- one of the few remaining independent reference publishers -- had begun to feel the pinch on the library reference book budget. Garland was acquired by the **Taylor & Francis Group** in 1997, and I left to join **Grove's Dictionaries** in the Spring of 1998.

ATG: That is a pretty recent move. How are things going so far?

ES: Great! **Grove's Dictionaries** represents the best in reference publishing -- an impeccable reputation for content, savvy management, and the resources for effective distribution. When the **Von Holtzbrinck Publishing Group** acquired **Macmillan Publishers Ltd.** in the UK and **Grove's Dictionaries**, we became part of the distinguished publishing family that also contains **St. Martin's Press**, **Nature Publishing**, **Scientific American**, **Henry Holt**, and **Farrar Straus**, among others. At Grove's, I have the good fortune to be the Marketing & Sales Director for the prestigious 34-volume *Dictionary of Art* -- which is about to be launched in electronic form.

ATG: What are the biggest changes you have seen? For example, has the process of publishing reference materials changed over the years? Are there differences in the way they are promoted? Has the library market changed?

ES: There have been tremendous changes in the content, format, and promotion of reference materials and also in publishers' approaches to the library market since I started in this business. The rapid development of user-friendly electronic products and the ability of the Web to make these resources widely available, combined with the proliferation of home computers have pushed the concept of reference out of the confines of a building called "the library" and into homes, offices, and dorm rooms. Even the library, with its growing emphasis on remote access, no longer confines its services to four walls and a time schedule.

These developments have created a huge demand for informed help in identifying reliable reference sources and finding authoritative information. Public perception of the librarian's role has been redefined and enhanced in the process -- the librarian is now regarded as an Information Specialist. The high cost of electronic resources -- both hardware and software -- has also "upgraded" the librarian's role vis a vis the publisher's. Since the development of an online reference source can cost hundreds of thousands of dollars and will succeed only if it receives a welcome in the library, publishers are paying more attention than ever before to what librarians -- the gatekeepers of the Information Age -- and their patrons want.

ATG: So there has been a change in perception regarding librarians and the library market?

ES: Definitely, and these changes are reflected in publishers' attitudes: Fifteen to 20 years ago, the income a publisher -- even a scholarly one -- could generate from the library market was "taken for granted" and the main effort and creativity in promotion was devoted to the more glamorous trade or textbook side of the business. Evidence of this mind set could be seen at **ABA**. The booths were big and glitzy, celebrity authors abounded, and booksellers' bags would be stuffed with give-aways, special offers, galleys, and invitations to receptions and parties. A month later at **ALA**, the party was over. Many major publishers would show only their children's books, and the glitzy booths were nowhere in evidence. Not so today: publishers realize that they have to compete not only with each other for every precious library dollar, but also with the vendors of the hardware, equipment and services that are an integral part of the Information Age.

ATG: This change in perception must have altered the relationship between librarians and reference publishers. In what ways?

ES: Publishers today are eager to include librarians in the planning stages of major reference projects, and certainly in the development of online resources. At **Grove's Dictionaries**, for example, the first meeting of our **Grove's Library Advisory Council** was held this Spring. We invited a diverse group of librarians from across the country to help us shape our future publications and services in ways that will best meet the needs of our customers. We are seeking their advice on a number of issues, including the identification of subject areas where there is a need for new

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reference resources, pricing thresholds, avoiding pitfalls in constructing our licensing agreements, and even planning marketing strategies that make our sales calls useful and welcome rather than burdensome to our library customers. The information we have gained from our inaugural meeting and from our ongoing listserv called the **GLAD (Grove's Library Advisory Discussion) Group** has already proven to be enormously useful, and we're grateful for their generosity in sharing their time and ideas.

Other publishers sponsor similar advisory groups, and focus groups constructed with librarians' participation are common. Ten or fifteen years ago, a publisher might have viewed the advice of a library group as useful-but-not-essential, and have regarded half the benefit of participation in such a group as a marketing handle. Now, the seriousness with which librarians' advice is sought and considered reflects the new economic power wielded by library decision makers and the increased professional respect publishers are paying to their library customers.

ATG: In a recent article in *ATG*, one of our contributors referred to this as being "a golden age in reference publishing." (See **John Schmitt**, "The Art of Collection Development: Reference Style, *ATG*, April 1988, pp.28-31.) He was referring to the quality of a number of recent reference sets. Comments?

ES: I agree, he must have been referring to the publication of *Grove's Dictionary of Art*! As a newcomer to **Grove's Dictionaries**, I hope you'll bear with me when I tell you how impressed I am with the breadth and scope of this enormous project — 34 volumes, 30 million words, 41,000 articles, 6,800 contributors from 120 countries, half-a-million bibliographic citations, 1,500 illustrations-standing 5 feet high when stacked, and weighing in at 168 pounds! It took 14 years for *The Dictionary of Art* to be developed, written, and published, and I wonder if a reference project of this magnitude would be undertaken today. And now, Web technology is making it possible for Grove's to offer electronic access to the *Dictionary*, something that was not judged to be practical or economically feasible just a few years ago when the *Dictionary* was in development.

Other examples of excellent multi-volume reference collections are the new *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* and *Oxford University Press's Encyclopedia of Dance*. And some interesting new reference offerings come in smaller packages as well. The first of Garland's many fine single-volume encyclopedias (and the first project I marketed there) was *The Encyclopedia of Human Evolution and Prehistory*, published in 1988 and edited by a team of scholars at the American Museum of Natural History. An award-winner that was highly praised by library and scientific review media alike, the second edition of this work is scheduled for publication in 1999, and

was the last campaign worked on before I left Garland earlier this year.

ATG: From what you have observed, what have been the effects of electronic publishing on the print publishing of reference materials?

ES: The possibility of an electronic version of a reference product in addition to a printed version is a good way to spread out the high cost of developing a first-rate reference source. *The Dictionary of Art* is a good example of this — not every library can afford the 34-volume printed set, but the electronic version will be affordable to a whole new tier of libraries, particularly public libraries and schools.

The options afforded by electronic publishing also offer publishers the opportunity to repurpose existing content, and make it available in affordable ways to new customers. A good example of this is *H.W. Wilson Biographies* Web product. It offers convenient access to many of Wilson's classic biographical references, plus all of *Current Biography* from 1940 to the present — in a single database. Smaller publishers, like Garland, that cannot afford to develop electronic products of their own, are licensing their data for inclusion in *Wilson's Biographies* database, increasing access to their information to a broad market, and garnering some additional revenues that are necessary to keep themselves financially healthy.

Every reference publisher is well aware of the student's strong (and growing) preference for electronic reference resources over traditional print, so the downside of this situation can be the inability of publishers to keep generating single or multi-volume reference works that are not broad enough to justify the additional development money it would take to mount them electronically. Many librarians and researchers may not realize just how expensive it is to develop a high quality refer-

ence work, particularly one with many scholarly contributors: the more specialized and scholarly the book, the smaller the potential market, yet the development costs remain high.

ATG: Mergers and acquisitions in the publishing business seem to be a common occurrence. What impact has this had on reference publishing? Are publishers willing to take the risks they may have taken now that many are subsidiaries of larger companies?

ES: Some of the consolidation in publishing is a good thing — larger companies have the deep pockets needed to develop high quality reference products, particularly electronic ones. But bigger is not always better, and a commitment to scholarship does not always dovetail with the bottom line. There is another downside to the trend of acquisitions and mergers which doesn't show up in the profit and loss statement — the toll on the people involved. Speaking from experience, it isn't easy or pleasant whether you are the one trying to keep business moving forward once your company is up for sale, bringing the bad news to people who lose their jobs as a result, or hearing the bad news yourself. I've taken part in all of these experiences, and have listened to similar stories from far too many of my publishing colleagues. While change is necessary and can be unavoidably painful, it seems that a new incivility toward the very people whose hard work has made a company attractive to investors is now the norm and not the exception. Fondly invoking the favorite Garland phrase while we were enduring the process of being sold: "Don't go there!", I'll avoid the temptation to discuss the opportunities mergers and acquisitions have given new owners to promote the lower-salaried young and eager, while showing the door to the forty-somethings.

ATG: Looking into your crystal ball, what
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- Government and International Organization Publications
- Association Publications
- International Scholarly and Professional Books
- Australia, Canada, New Zealand and other Pacific Rim Countries –

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profiles of musicians in that genre. Again, portraits and other black and white photos of the musicians accompany most entries.

Information presented in this series is quite elaborate, and should help individuals to get a clear picture of who and what the artist or group is about, including their goals, achievements and philosophical leanings. Such detailed information as is presented in these volumes is rarely available to the general consumer, and is noteworthy.

Science & Technology Breakthroughs — *From the Wheel to the World Wide Web* (1998: 0-7876-1927-2; \$63) Leonard C. Bruno. (2 volumes)

Science and Technology Breakthroughs, a two-volume reference series, presents an elaborate account of the milestones in the history of science and technology. It provides about 1,300 paragraph-length entries. Entries are arranged chronologically, from ancient times to the present, according to twelve separate fields of study, including agriculture, astronomy, biology, chemistry, communications, earth sciences, energy, power systems and weaponry, medicine, mathematics, physics and transportation. Both volumes also include additional features such as basic vocabulary, entitled "Words to Know," clearly identified sidebars with guiding notes, cross references, 150 photos and a section for further reading references and resources.

The information presented is adequate for reference purposes for students in middle school/high school. Arranged in chronological order by subject, each volume has a paragraph "Readers guide," which is a summary of the content.

The scientific and technological entries listed in **Science and Technology Breakthroughs** are well-written and informative. Adequate information is provided to the needs of typical teen-aged students. Additionally, students are provided with further references which can be sought for additional details. The series encourages browsing as well as helping students with their homework. The "Words to Know" section contains a helpful list of definitions, and it is suggested that such a series would likely be valuable to the middle or high-school teacher of science, math, and/or other related subjects.

Science Fact Finder (1998, 0-7876-1727-X; \$79.95) Phillis Englebert, editor. (3 volumes)

A three-volume series of well-organized and non-technical information on science,

these books are probably among the best of the U*X*L offerings covered here. While probably more geared for younger learners (possibly late elementary, but probably more for middle and early high school-aged students), the series is divided into three categories, each volume covering one area. These areas include the Natural World (Volume One), the Physical World (Volume Two) and the Technological World (Volume Three). The facts that are offered in this series are fun and interesting, the kind of book that children and youths would look to not only for basic information on a skill or subject area, but also for leisure reading of interesting content.

Somewhat regrettably, the organization of these texts is, again, slightly confusing at first. Set up similarly to the *Courtroom Drama* series, **Science Fact Finder** contains 19 subject-arranged chapters, such as "Chemistry & Physics," "Cars, Boats, Planes & Trains," "Mathematics, Numbers & Computers," and "Time, Weights & Measures."

The "Further Readings" section (found in the early part of each of these volumes) is extensive and impressive. Students will find valuable cross-references and resources to guide them in further studies. Additionally, each volume has a cumulative index. Illustrations and photos are not numerous, but again, what ones there are can be described as useful and complementary to the text. There is a helpful index that can guide the reader to the exact information desired.

Texts are hardbound with larger font

print for younger eyes. Teachers might find this series a useful addition to the classroom, and librarians, particularly in the middle and high schools, would find it useful in the library collection.

Women's Firsts: Milestones in Women's History (1998, 0-7876-0653-7; \$63) Peggy Saari & Tim & Susan Gall, editors (2 volumes)

Women's Firsts: Milestones in Women's History provides information on over 1,000 milestones involving women around the world, from early-recorded history to the present. Each volume has five chapters, focusing on specific themes, such as Activism, the Arts, Business, Education, Government, Media, Professions, Religion, Science and Technology, and Sports. There are over 140 illustrations, a timeline of events, a "words to know" section and a cumulative index in each volume.

While each biography is only about a paragraph long, at the end of each entry the authors give the source of the information for details, thus allowing further research for those who desire such. Middle school and high school teachers can use these volumes as reference material. Again, the pub-

lishers/the authors do not specify the intended audience. However, if the audience are middle school or high school students, the publishers have succeeded in meeting their needs.

The themes for each volume are arranged in alphabetical order. Each volume, hardbound and well printed, has a paragraph entitled "Reader's guide," which gives the reader a summary of the content.

The strength of the **Women's Firsts** series is found in the different women whose contributions are documented here. As stated, the source/reference for each description is provided just after each description, helpful for the reader who wants more indepth information on particular women.

The editors note that they dealt with sources critically and honestly, in an effort to present the most representative and accurate list of firsts by women possible. Once again, however, the background evidence had to be written. While clearly written information is important, it may also serve to exclude women from other cultures whose most significant achievements are not recorded in writing. These volumes appear to largely reflect the achievements of white women from North America, and may indicate a cultural blindness that should not exist in academia. One simple remedy for this situation might include a brief statement in the forward of the text that indicates cultural limitations reflected in these volumes. Another might be to include editors who have a wider or broader experience in various cultural backgrounds.

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does the future of publishing hold? What changes or new developments would you like to see?

ES: I believe in the renaissance of the book — still inexpensive to buy, portable, never requires an 800 number for technical assistance, smells good, and still works even if you drop it. For many kinds of reference questions, electronic resources can't be beat, but for reading anything longer than a paragraph, please pass me the printed volume.

I also foresee a rosy future for electronic publishing. The Web has made dramatic changes in what can be affordably offered to a wide audience, and once Internet 2 technology is up and running, the possibilities will increase exponentially. With the number of competitive electronic reference products now being offered, some of which seem more focused on entertainment than on education, I think the role of the librarian as a qualified judge of the good vs. the merely showy will ensure that the cream will rise. There are excellent electronic resources out there, and certainly many more to come — just wait until you see the online version of *The Dictionary of Art*!