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Ken Dzugan-Chairman & Founder, 21 North Main

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ATG Interviews Ken Dzugan

Chairman & Founder 21 North Main <kdzugan@21northmain.com>

by Katina Strauch (Editor, Against the Grain) <strauchk@earthlink.net>

ATG: Tell us about 21 North Main. How long have you been around?

KD: We began commercial operation on March 29, 2000.

ATG: Why did you start 21 North Main?

KD: It all started because of a book and here’s how it happened. I have been a voracious reader all my life. My first bike was a passport from the library in my elementary school to a real library. In this case a branch library in Cleveland. Suddenly my world expanded. But just as quickly limits were introduced. They had all these wonderful books, but I could only take out four at a time. Worse yet I was only allowed access to the children’s room. I was so interested in astronomy. I quickly outgrew the few books in the children’s room. I knew they had many wonderful books in the science section, but that was in the adult room. Again a librarian came to the rescue and arranged to get me an adult library card.

Sometime later I graduated from a bike to public transportation and was introduced to the central public library in Cleveland and then to university libraries. Years after, and early in my professional career, I had the opportunity to visit Washington D.C. with some degree of regularity. In my greatest library access achievement, I was able to regularly get a stack pass at the Library of Congress. Throughout every step I have been helped and guided by knowledgeable and compassionate librarians.

In 1990 I heard of a book called “How to Read a Book” by Mortimer Adler. With all the reading I had done, I didn’t think I needed to know anything more about reading. But I was intrigued by the title so I bought the book and read it. Then I read it again and again and several more times. Putting into practice what Adler taught me dramatically changed what I read, how I read, and why I read. I used to read to be entertained and now I read to learn. Also putting into practice what Adler taught me, I now get an order of magnitude more out of books than I did in the past.

I decided I wanted to learn more from books. I decided I would assemble my own personal collection of the 1,200 greatest works in the western tradition. My list was assembled from knowledgeable readers like Mortimer Adler and Clifton Fadiman and public and college and university libraries.

In assembling the books, I decided to focus on used books, because many I was seeking were out of print, and because a used copy was less expensive than a new. I got to know the better book dealers in my area. These dealers and local librarians frequented directed me as to what translations or editions I should seek.

Local dealers could not supply everything I was seeking. I began to fax my list to dealers around the country. When the Internet developed, hundreds of dealers began putting up sites that would list books they had for sale. I would read through these sites and occasionally find a book I wanted. When I contacted the dealer I would most often find that the desired book was no longer available, having been sold one to two months ago.

I began to talk to some of the dealers about whether it would be possible to automate the entire process. Although I am not a programmer, I know quite a bit about what computers are capable of doing. I spent time designing a method which would allow the entire process to be automated. I had no idea what the used book market was like. Research at an excellent local business reference library, J. J. Hill, showed that the market was billions of dollars in size, far beyond what I would have guessed. Calls to a number of college and university libraries demonstrated that they were having just as hard a time finding OP materials as I was.

I put together a business plan and demonstrated that this could be a viable business. I showed it to my wife and she thought it was the best idea that either of us had ever had. We decided that we would take the equity out of our home and use it to develop a prototype of the system. My wife and I have been told that this is not exactly typical behavior for couples in their mid-fifties. The prototype worked, we attracted other people and other money and the business started. And yes, the house is still at risk.

ATG: Where does the name come from?

KD: Part of what we wanted to do was to portray our concern and support for independent used book sellers, the kind you might find on Main Street in a small town. We decided to use a name that sounded like an address. My wife is a specialist in Internet marketing. She knew that many search engines produce results in alphabetical order and those that do bring up numbers before letters, giving us good search engine placement. The reason for 21 is that it is a lucky number, a mature number, an easy to remember number, and 21 is the number of the century we have just entered.

ATG: How many employees do you have?

KD: We have 25 employees.

ATG: Do you have offices in other countries?

KD: Our offices are wherever our client dealers are. 21 North Main represents 3,500 dealers across the US, the UK, and Canada. The number and the geography continue to expand every week.

ATG: Is your market largely libraries or individuals? What is your core market?

KD: 21 North Main’s exclusive marketing focus is to the university and college library market. Our inordinate fondness for Mr. Garrison Keillor led us to become the national sponsor for his “Writer’s Almanac.” We have been gratified that this sponsorship has brought us individual consumers. We also get increasing consumer traffic from search engines. Although their numbers are small, they seem to be avid book collectors.

ATG: Who are your competitors? I recently saw the comparative review in The Charleston Advisor. Do you have any comments on this review?

KD: I think that that comparative review was made much earlier in our history when we had only a few million volumes on our database. Even so, I thought we came out reasonably well, against some much older and established companies. As you may know, 21 North Main just past the 15 million volume mark. We have some hope that The Advisor makes the comparison an annual event. We feel that we will come out well if they do.

At 15 million books, we have the largest e-commerce book database in the world. Because we never handle the books, our overhead is lower that our competition’s which makes our prices lower. Because we have no warehouse and the books are shipped directly to the library, books arrive more quickly without additional postage. Bigger. Cheaper. Faster. It’s not the end of the story, but it’s a pretty good beginning.

ATG: Tell us about your ad campaign and your postcards and signs. How did you come up with that idea and can you tell if it has been successful? How frequently do you send out new material?

KD: The signs are just another marketing trick to make potential customers like us. We wanted to convey the idea that we were creative, thoughtful, and a little different. We are told that there are a number continued on page 46
of libraries that have one or more up on
their walls. So I guess that they have been
reasonably successful. On the other hand,
we have had just a few libraries that have
called to say that they were happy to con-
tinue ordering from us but could not send
any more signs. Of course, we took
them off of the marketing mailing list.

**ATG:** Tell us about yourself and what
your training and background is? Do you
have family? Hobbies? What do you like
to read for fun and pleasure? Other interests?

**KD:** I have a bachelor’s degree in
Physics from MIT. I did graduate work in
Physics at the University of Minnesota, and
left with an ABID, (all but dissertation). I later
went back to the University of Minnesota
and got my MBA. I’ve worked in both
government and the private sector. I was
involved in the planning and development
of St. Paul Energy Park, a $250,000,000 commercial,
residential and industrial energy-efficient
development. I’ve been the Chief Financial
Officer of a real estate development firm
and did financial systems consulting.

My wife and I have taken a number of
unusual vacations, in which we have volun-
teered to help with various research programs.
We have been on archaeological digs in Italy,
Peru, and Wales. We have been involved in a
dolphin language project in Hawaii and a wild
dolphin monitoring program in Florida.

Naturally I love to read. I believe that
reading is any person’s most important
skill, and that learning from books is the
world’s most important form of learning.
For that reason I have also supported li-
teracy programs. Currently my serious
reading is Thucydides’ “The History of the
Peloponnesian War,” and my lighter reading
is Holbrook Jackson’s “The Anatomy of
Bibliomaniacal,” Italo Calvino’s “If on a
winter’s night a traveler,” and Mark
Twin’s “The Diaries of Adam and Eve.”

**ATG:** If a library has existing rela-
tionships with OP dealers can they use 21
North Main?

**KD:** Yes. This question came up when
we were in the testing phase of our develop-
ment. Several institutions suggested this and
we developed our “Preferred Dealer Pro-
gram.” A library can give us a list of their
preferred dealers. Then when a library is
searching for books we have books held by
their preferred dealers show first in the
search results. The dealer holding the book
is identified in every search result.

**ATG:** What would you tell libraries who
are considering trying 21 North Main?

**KD:** 21 North Main is an Internet door
to used, rare, and out-of-print books. Clearly
we recognize that the libraries we seek as customers have been acquiring
books for a very long time and have established paths that they follow. 21 North
Main, on the other hand is only seven months old. We have no right to ask for all
of their book orders. We must earn their confidence and trust. All we really ask
of any institution is that they give us an order for five or ten books and see how
we perform. If we fail to serve them well, then we don’t deserve their business. We
obviously have great confidence in our system and we will serve them very well.

**ATG:** Does 21 North Main take pur-
chase orders?

**KD:** Yes, we do!!

**ATG:** Are any libraries using your ser-
vices in ways you didn’t expect?

**KD:** Yes, a number of libraries have
discovered the rich variety of material we have
that is still available new. These libraries have found that they can frequently buy used books
to a significant cost saving compared to new.
We have some institutions that come to 21
North Main first to search without regard as
to whether the material is still available new.

**ATG:** Booksellers generally have open
shops. How often do they sell the books
in the shop and then not have the book to
fulfill an online order?

**KD:** Our dealers are able to supply 90%
of the requested volumes. In those case where
the individual copy selected is not available,
we generally have additional copies available
available to select from. Our customer service staff
watches orders and when a selected volume
is not available we can notify the customer
of other available copies.

There are times when the desired book is
not available. In these instances the library
can leave the book as a want. We then match
the wants against new books entered into the
system each day and automatically notify the
library when a match is made.

**ATG:** What are the advantages of us-
ing 21 North Main?

**KD:** If you’re a librarian building a col-
lected on page 48

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**ATG Interviews Rolf Janke**

**President, Sage Reference**

by Katina Strauch (Editor, *Against the Grain*) <strauchk@earthlink.net>

**ATG:** Tell us about the new Sage Refer-
ence imprint. How many titles will you pub-
lish? In what areas?

**RJ:** Sage Reference has been created in
response to Sage Publications’ focus on build-
ing a wider marketplace for their books pro-
gram. Sage has published academic books
for over 35 years but has never focused on
publishing reference titles specifically de-
signated for library markets. Sage Reference
will be a dedicated publishing effort which
will continue Sage’s brand in the academic
library but create a new one in the public li-
brary market as well. Sage Reference will
publish encyclopedias, dictionaries and hand-
books in the social sciences including soci-
ology, psychology, social history, criminal
justice and of course research methods, Sage’s
flagship list. The official product launch year
will be 2002 with 3 to 5 major works, 10 in 2003
and expect 20 to 25 titles a year from there.

**ATG:** Why didn’t you do this as part of
Sage? Why roll out a new imprint?

**RJ:** I started building and integrating the
reference program when I was VP and Edi-
torial Director for Sage Publication’s book
program. However, it became obvious that
in order to make it successful, there needed
to be a dedicated and focused effort behind
it. The idea of a new imprint would enhance
and enforce this dedication as well as create
a stronger brand in the library market.

**ATG:** Where do you see the imprint 5
years from now?

**RJ:** First, I see Sage Reference as a sig-
nificant revenue center for Sage. Secondly, I
am sure the demand for digital products will
be very high so we will probably have a
greater percentage of sales revenue from the
digital line. The real challenge is to predict
how the digital world will affect both librar-
ians and publishers 5 years from now. Thirdly,
I expect Sage Reference to be a global brand
having successfully integrated our program
into our London and New Delhi offices. Demand for English language reference is
very high right now, especially since e books
make delivery much easier. With Sage’s
strong global reach, I expect the Sage Refer-
ence line to reach all corners of the globe.

**ATG:** More and more electronic refer-
ce title are being published. Will you pub-
lis in print and in electronic formats? How
will you decide which format is appro-
riate?

**RJ:** Sage Reference will publish print and
continued on page 48

<http://www.against-the-grain.com>
From the Reference Desk

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

The much anticipated 5-volume *Encyclopedia of the American Civil War: A Political, Social, and Military History* (2000, 1576070662, $425) has just been released by ABC-CLIO. In terms of content and scope, this encyclopedia generally lives up to the pre-publication hype. It offers the reader a comprehensive and informed view of the complicated events, issues and people that make the Civil War such a seminal part of American History.

There is a lot of information within the covers of these 5 volumes. Naturally the military side is given full treatment. There are entries on the great armies, the major and minor battles, the weapons and ordnances used to create the carnage, the successful strategies and costly blunders of both sides and the competent and inept generals. The political part is also given thorough coverage. There are individual articles on each presidential election leading to and during the war, as well as coverage of the leading politicians. In addition, there are articles on the political parties and movements, laws and policies, as well as formative issues like abolition and secession. The *Encyclopedia* also lives up to the "social" part if its subtitle. There are articles on the role of women, peace movements, class conflict within the armies, the influence of religion, and protest riots, both north and south. Specific entries also attest to the influence of popular songs like the *Battle Hymn of the Republic* and * Dixie*, books like *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and newspapers like the *Richmond Examiner* and the *New York Tribune*. In addition, each state, and its unique role, has a separate article. However, there is at least one surprising lack of clarity. Finding information on the issue of States' Rights is more difficult than it needs to be. There is no specific article about the topic and the index makes no cross-reference to the article on Secession that discussed the concept. But even there, one senses a reluctance to emphasize the term States' Rights.

Production quality is a definite plus. The print is clear and easy to read, and the set is strikingly illustrated with black and white drawings and photos, as well as numerous battle maps. There are also some added features that increase the value of this encyclopedia. Volume V includes 273 pages of original documents arranged by broad category, lists of officers and government officials, maps of battlefield sites by state, a chronology, bibliography and a fairly thorough index. However, the index can be a bit cumbersome. The set is continuously paged throughout the volumes and while the index refers to specific page numbers, it contains no key telling which pages are in each volume.

Despite these criticisms the *Encyclopedia of the American Civil War: A Political, Social, and Military History* is a quality production. It will delight scholars and civil war buffs alike. Comprehensive but accessible, this encyclopedia gives the reader a thorough and inclusive source of information that will answer specific questions, as well as serve as a foundation for further research. With this multi-volume set, the American Civil War has a worthy subject encyclopedia, and that is no small accomplishment. Academic, public and some high school libraries will want it in their collections.

_Academic Press has just published another timely and important set. The *Encyclopedia of Biodiversity* (2001, 0122686652, $695) is evidence of the growing concern for conservation and the enhanced appreciation of ecological diversity. This is one of those areas of study where science has mixed with social science to the betterment of both, and the *Encyclopedia of Biodiversity* reflects, and benefits from the mix._

The articles offer in-depth treatment of the topics covered. Each is introduced by an outline and includes its own glossary of terms and a useful bibliography. Graphics in the form of tables, charts, maps continued on page 49

<http://www.against-the-grain.com>