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Back Talk-Information Enablers & Librarians

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Back Talk
from page 98

select, acquire, catalog, service, and we have not even figured out how to really store it in the very long run. I have likened it to a secret librarian plot to assure our job security. Paper is/was a breeze by comparison. But am I, are we, deluding ourselves? Are we selecting and cataloging the music to be played while our Rome burns?

Since the "we" of librarianship includes so many thousands of people, the answer has to be at least a partial YES. But it doesn't and won't be true of everyone. I am confident in the midst of competing "online enablers," all of whom will come and eventually go, there will still be a need to understand the needs of the faculty and students who are associated with our institutions, and to decide which enablers should be adopted for which purposes. I am confident that there will continue to be too many enablers and too few dollars with which to purchase their services. Each enabler, moreover, will no doubt provide a menu of choices and librarians, or whatever we are called, have experience choosing from such menus. In the midst of multiple enablers, there will also be a need to organize their offerings into a single non-chaotic portal and then to train students and faculty how to use these important resources. And finally, as part of the academy moves on to work on more immediate problems, other parts will continue to assess and value the cultural works of the past. These works will then need to be stored and preserved.

What, then, is the major challenge facing libraries and their directors in the future? I believe it still is to stay relevant to the changing needs and situations encountered by our institutions, faculty, students, communities, and to the people who work in them—but to put a greater emphasis on the word "changing" because the academy is in the midst of a revolution.

International Dateline
from page 95

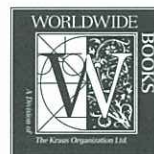
February 2000, p.8) I worked with Gordon at Butterworths from 1982 as I tried to move Reed Publishing into electronic delivery, and I was immensely fortunate to have Gordon as a mentor. Over the next three years, I learned an enormous amount about both the science and art of publishing from Gordon, who always seemed to have the time to take a very ambitious neophyte publisher to one side and suggest how best to refocus his energy. Since his retirement, Gordon has been the editor of *Logos, the Journal of the World Book Community*. Any reader of *ATG* will benefit from the papers that *Logos* publishes, and Gordon's editorials are quite outstanding. The title is published by Whurr Publishers, and the ISSN is 0957-9656. Gordon also published a collection of his essays on the international book business in 1994 entitled *As I Was Saying*. Another essential read.

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Webworthy
from page 96

Information Bridge, a body of full-text R&D grey literature issued since July 1995.

<http://www.osti.gov/preprints>
Zoology

Part of the "Free Resources" section on the BIOSIS Web pages, the Internet Resource Guide to Zoology contains an incredible wealth of links to Web sources covering everything from Sea Anemones to Zoraptera. Here users can instantly link to many zoos and wildlife parks of the world. Links are arranged alphabetically in each list, and general areas like publications, journals, and entomology are listed along with specific species like Psocoptera (book lice).

<http://www.york.biosis.org/zrdocs/zoolinfo/>

ATG Interviews Bob Doran
from page 86

sional, and reference area. Contributed databases will prevail and publishers will license data to add the pedagogical tools for use. The author will have more control of the work. Or in the case of the University professor/researcher the University will have the "rights." There will be tremendous mix/match and intellectual property rights will decide the winner. It is already exciting, and we are just at the starting line.

Consumers are not our core market. Librarians and retailers are. If carefully presented to the market, digital content can be a mainstream kind of medium.

I guarantee that there will be some partnerships announced that will be wild and crazy—look at AOL and Time-Warner.

ADVERTISERS' INDEX

35 ABC CLIO	20 THE CHARLESTON ADVISOR	81 MCFARLAND
44 ABSOLUTE BACKORDER	10 THE CHARLESTON REPORT	43 MCGRAW-HILL
39 ACM	93 CHOICE	100 MIDWEST LIBRARY SERVICE
95 ACS	87 COUTTS	22 NEDBOOK
2 ALFRED JAEGER	91 EASTERN BOOK COMPANY	7 NETLIBRARY
11 ALIBRIS	23 EBSCO INFORMATION SERV.	77 NETLIBRARY
59 AM. INSTITUTE OF PHYSICS	29, 31 ELSEVIER SCIENCE	79 MARTINUS NIJHOFF INTL.
27 ANNUAL REVIEWS	33 ELSEVIER SCIENCE	18 NISO
63 ASME INTERNATIONAL	75 ELSEVIER SCIENCE	61 PROJECT MUSE
5 ATG	67 EMERY PRATT	69 RITTENHOUSE
14 AUX AMATEURS DE LIVRES	85 ERASMUS	71 SAGE PUBLICATIONS
12 BASCH SUBSCRIPTIONS, INC.	9 FAXON	16 SCHOENHOF FOREIGN BOOKS
13 BELL & HOWELL	41 IEEE	25 M. E. SHARPE
3 BLACKWELL'S BOOK SERVICES	19 INSTITUTE OF PHYSICS	24 SWETS BLACKWELL
65 BOOK HOUSE	99 KLUWER ACADEMIC	56 WILEY
15 BOWKER	83 LIBRARY TECH ALLIANCE	57 WILEY
73 CASALINI LIBRI	89 MAJORS	97 WORLDWIDE BOOKS
17 CATCHWORD	21 MCB UNIV. PRESS LTD.	37 YBP

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Back Talk — Information Enablers & Librarians

by **Anthony W. Ferguson** (Associate University Librarian, Columbia University) <ferguson@columbia.edu>

I was recently asked to speak on what I viewed to be the major challenges facing large research libraries and their directors. To answer this question, while acknowledging that technology, resources, and copyright were critical problems, I said that I felt that the number-one challenge for libraries was to stay RELEVANT to each of its major constituencies: the university, the faculty, the students, the local community, and its own staff. I then spent the rest of my time elaborating why staying relevant to each of these groups was critical.

Universities have teaching and research missions. To succeed at both, they need to recruit and retain the best possible faculty and student body and to create an environment in which both can achieve their goals. Libraries are a part of what attracts, repels, or retains new students and faculty and libraries are, therefore, critical to the success of universities. The faculty has teaching and the students have learning missions. For them to succeed, they need ready access to information in order to turn the information or wisdom of the past into understanding. The library needs to provide each with the information and services they need, when they need them. Students want a place to study and to interact with other students, a reserves area for library materials, and research materials to use. Libraries can respond to each of these needs. While the role played by the faculty in the educational enterprise is different, they each want their own versions of these same elements.

The local political and cultural communities also have their own missions. Universities attract and fuel local businesses, and the information that libraries provide is like gasoline for combustion engines: without the correct or sufficient fuel, the whole enterprise will chug along irregularly before it dies completely. Cultural organizations believe that music, art, literature, history, etc., all inform and liberate the human spirit, and libraries are an important archive for all of this. Libraries help both achieve their missions.

Finally, the people working in libraries have their own life missions. At the most basic level, they have bills to pay and employment as librarians enables them to survive. But they also want meaningful work: they want a voice in determining what they are asked or told to do each day, and they want the value of their contributions recognized.

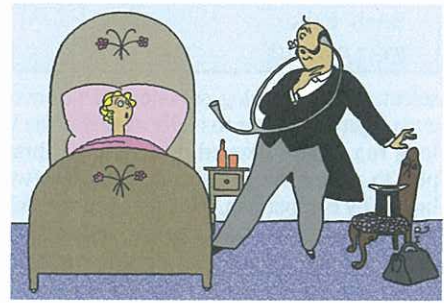
My point was if libraries are relevant

to the individual missions, goals, and objectives of each of these groups, libraries will receive the support that they need, that a symbiotic relationship existed. Further, that unless this relationship was recognized, libraries would be seen as peripheral to the needs of their institutions and they would gradually become marginalized and cease to exist. The job of the library director is to figure out how to stay relevant to each group.

While I believe the words I said that day were true and were themselves relevant to the plight of research libraries, 24 hours later I read an article in *Educause* that made me fear I had missed the boat. My presentation conveyed a sort of static situation where each group has a well-established mission and the job of the library and its director is to decide how to help them achieve success. What the *Educause* article made clear was the educational enterprise that libraries are pledged to support is in the midst of a revolution, that the participants in the revolution are changing, and that for libraries to survive, let alone thrive, they need to adapt to their new surroundings. This, then, is the major challenge for libraries and their directors: to actively adapt to the new circumstances.

The article I refer to is entitled “Re-making the academy: 21st-century challenges of higher education in the age of information” by **Jorge Klor de Alva**, the **President of the University of Phoenix**. I believe all librarians who might be wondering why their institutions are rushing toward distance education with such fury should read it. Even without this sort of hype, I think the sort of information that comes with this article can help each of us put in perspective what we need to do to stay relevant to the needs of our constituencies.

The author begins with a number of facts and figures designed to illustrate the reasons why higher education must change to survive. It indicated that the need for unskilled workers is shrinking and the need for skilled workers is growing at almost exponential rates. Internet e-commerce now accounts for 2.3 million jobs and 500 billion dollars in revenue, etc. The author points to the results of surveys of the nation’s governors and university presidents to illustrate how higher education is changing: governors want more life-long learning delivered anywhere, any time; they want their universities to work directly with business and industry to make the curriculum more relevant to their needs; and they want students involved in practicum experiences. On the other hand, they have little tolerance for continuing to allow the faculty



to determine what is taught and who is qualified to teach it; they don’t want to maintain the “present balance of faculty research, teaching load, and community service” (p. 34); they expect most students will have a campus-based education; and they do not support tenure. College presidents’ responses to a different survey suggest they have gotten the message: they expect to be held to be more accountable to regulatory agencies for what goes on in their institutions; they will have to expand the use of distance education; they will have to be more concerned with the quality of the teaching and learning; and the uses of the Internet will be expanded.

While Jorge Klor de Alva does provide a lot of interesting information about his own university with its 69,000 full-time and 24,000 part-time students as proof of what can be done to make education more responsive to the changing needs of today’s society, he points to a statement made by **Harvey Fineberg**, the **Provost of Harvard University**, to prove why things must change: “No institution remains at the forefront of its field if it does the same things in 20 years that it does today” (p. 36). What does that say for libraries? Can we afford to be doing the same things 20 years from now that we are doing today? The answer is an obvious NO. Yet, we have so much invested in the past; our infrastructure and mindset are archive-based. We too often forget we are in the information business, not the selection, acquisitions, cataloging, shelving, reference, or preservation businesses.

Perhaps the most threatening part of this *Educause* article to libraries, is de Alva’s references to “online enablers” whose online information portals can provide remote proprietary and nonproprietary educational content and, more importantly, can integrate into the brick-and-mortar campus information systems, providing the connectivity, functionality, and database management necessary to make available to the institution all the academic, administrative, financial and student services, and possibly the content necessary for operation (p. 38).

As old-time “information enablers,” librarians have to feel at least a little bit nervous about all of this. I, for one, have always remained confident in that libraries would continue to be needed, based upon the experiences of the past 15 years. Electronic information takes more time to

continued on page 97