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ATG Interviews Jim McGinty

President, Cambridge Information Group

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ATG: *Tell us about **Cambridge Scientific Abstracts** - how did it begin and what are they doing today?*

JM: **Cambridge Scientific Abstracts (CSA)** is a bibliographic publishing company that has been around for 35 years. Utilizing technology is its forte. **CSA** had one of the early files up on **Dialog** and was the first to offer **Medline** on CD.

In early '93, we reasoned that the next technology was the Internet. Our URL was obtained in 1973 and was the 3878th issued. There are over 17 million URLs in existence today, so I guess you could say we were early.

Bob Snyder, our Chairman, supported this investment which enabled **CSA** to become the first bibliographic publisher with an offering on the Web. Since the introduction of our **Internet Database Service (IDS)** in 1995, we have more than tripled our revenue and added over 1,500 institutions as subscribers.

Not withstanding, our Web-based success is important to remember we're bibliographic publishers, not an Internet company. We use Internet technology to address the needs of our customers.

From an editorial perspective, we specialize in the physical and life sciences. These are the areas on which we focus: aquatic sciences, environmental, biological and materials science. With the acquisition of **Sociological Abstracts** we're developing a presence in the social sciences.

ATG: *Give us some background on your experience, your new position and how you came to CSA?*

JM: I was recently promoted to be the President of **Cambridge Information Group (CIG)**, having been the President of **Cambridge Scientific Abstracts (CSA)** for the past nine years. I joined **CSA** nine years ago, after spending 21 years with **Dun & Bradstreet (D&B)**. Prior to joining **CSA**, I had a three year tour as Managing Director, **D&B Asia-Pacific** based out of Hong Kong. Before that assignment, I spent ten years in Washington, DC, as **D&B's** VP of Government Services. During my early days at D&B, I had a variety of sales and marketing assignments, ranging from Product Manager to VP of Marketing Management. I've been in the information business for over 30 years.

In my new assignment I will still be responsible for the overall direction of **CSA** but **Matt Dunie**, **CSA's** new President will be running things day to day. In addition to **CSA**, I'll be working with our Chairmen, **Bob Snyder**, on his other investments in Aviation information services and Marketing information services.

ATG: *What is unique about CSA?*

JM: Perhaps our approach to pricing makes **CSA** somewhat unique. **CSA** pioneered the unlimited access flat fee pricing model which was a novel approach when it was introduced. When we introduced our **Internet Database Service (IDS)**, we decided not to use the simultaneous user model as it was a holdover from the old mainframe days. Our goal was to decrease the cost per search by generating high usage and charging a single flat fee, no matter how many users. The more users of an **IDS** subscription, the lower the cost per search to our customers. Because we have an online usage system, our customers can constantly monitor access against any of our databases and calculate their cost per search. Our price strategy seems to be working since we've had over 92% renewal rate for the past three years.

ATG: *What are the important issues for you as a secondary publisher?*

JM: On the positive side, our relationships with publishers have always been good but now we've entered into an era of cooperation with linkages. We've engineered a good part of our system to enable our customers to link from the abstract to the full text of an article in those e-journals to which the customer has access. We currently have links to over 5,000 e-journals. We've gotten tremendous cooperation from all of the publishers and the agent community. We're prepared to use the DOI as it becomes more popular.

On the negative side, we are facing competition from government agencies. Anyone has to feel threatened when government executives make pronouncements about providing free access to ALL scientific databases.

ATG: *Where does that leave the private sector?*

JM: When I was a member of the **Information Industry Board of Directors** in the mid eighties, we faced the same issue. I guess Congress will someday have to decide if it is good public policy to vest all scientific publishing in the hands of various executive agencies.

ATG: *CSA seems to be leading in the area of linking. Do you plan to expand this and are you working with CrossRef?*

JM: I don't know if we are leading but we are moving fast and trying to make it easy for our customers to effect a series of linking initiatives. In addition to linking to the full text of e-journals, **CSA** also links to libraries' holdings so that users can determine which titles are owned by the library. **CSA** had to make arrangements with the ILS vendors and now offers this as part of their general service.

We've had conversations with **CrossRef** and will be participating in their program as it grows.

ATG: *How would you describe your customer base?*

JM: Our customers are 80% academic and 20% corporate. You'll find our databases in large ARL institutions and we bring economical database packages to small to midsize schools as well. We've also been rather successful in serving national and regional consortia.

ATG: *How do you learn what customers want? Do you meet with reference or collection development librarians?*

JM: We have twelve sales executives who constantly meet with librarians. Personally, my goal is to spend 25% of my time in front of our customers. I try to get our editors out in front of customers as well. That's the only way we find out what they like or don't like about our service. This is one of my passions - I don't care about the size of the company. If you're not spending 25% of your time meeting with your customers, you're not doing your job. I'm far more effective as a president as a result. A lot of problems with big companies is that senior executives don't spend time listening to customers.

Decisions in libraries are more consensus driven with technical questions addressed by systems staff, content issues by reference librarians and pricing issues by acquisitions. We have to touch a lot of bases. I'm amazed at how librarians handle so many issues that have to be addressed. It's amazing what a librarian has to do to make an informed decision.

ATG: *What conferences do you attend?*

JM: Basically all of them: **ALA, SLA, IFLA, NFAIS, CNI, Charleston**. Attending the sessions is great, but I spend a good deal of time manning our booth and demonstrating our services. It's a terrific way for me to meet and understand both customers and prospects.

ATG: *How are your sales distributed geographically?*

JM: About 60% of our Internet sales are in North America and 40% are abroad divided between 20% in Asia (Republic of China, Korea, Taiwan) and 20% in Europe (Sweden, Finland, Denmark) and the rest of the world.

These sales have prompted us to develop

interfaces in Japanese, Korean, Spanish and French, including the thesauri which are kind of unique.

ATG: What are your current goals/ challenges?

JM: We want **CSA** to be the primary bibliographic source that someone turns to who is seeking information in a specific area. If you want something in environmental science, I want **CSA** to be the leading source with a lowest cost per search.

We need to be prepared for a constantly changing environment. **CrossRef** is a good example in that it allows us to serve our customers better. We must constantly challenge ourselves to add value to our basic service while keeping our cost and hence our prices under control. I believe we have done this effectively by adding **Recent References** and **Web Resources** to **IDS**.

We've also added more than 20 thesauri in the past 18 months. We've been able to provide our customers with an entire acquisition module enabling e-journal linkage without increasing basic cost of our service.

ATG: Where do you see the future business models in relation to individual subscriptions or article level sales?

JM: That depends to a great degree on primary publishers and we'll have to wait to see how that plays out. If primaries want to provide access to their material at the article level, we'll be there to support it. Intuitively I think that will happen. It is definitely in the cards.

ATG: What is the role of CSA's subject specialists in developing the various databases?

JM: We have editors in every area and their role is to select journals and abstracts. More and more they are focusing on the Web. They are responsible for indexing Websites germane to their subject specialties. We know what terms are being searched which also serves as input for building the database.

We index 40,000 Websites linking to 100,000 records each with its own URL. We're adding about 60,000 sites per year. Properly selected and indexed Websites are part of an individual's work which is becoming more complex. To insure current links, we run link checker and find that less than one tenth of one percent of the links are dead. We attribute this success to good up front selection and editing.

ATG: Is there any plan to work with the producing agencies to provide electronic, full-text of the grey literature that is indexed by some of the CSA databases?

JM: The Web is a good example of the fastest growing area of grey literature. One of the biggest sources is NTIS and I'm concerned about what is going to happen there.

ATG: Are you thinking of expanding your existing databases or adding new ones?

JM: Yes, very definitely. Our goal is to expand in our areas of concentration. Within the last three months, we've have acquired **Aqualine** (a UK database), which will enhance our Environmental offering; and, the **Aerospace Database** which is a perfect complement to our **METADEX/Materials Sciences**.

We have plans to add two more databases in the social sciences before the end of the year. We're investing in more data in those areas adjacent to our subject strengths. This enables us to create database packages with proprietary content which provides us with a real competitive advantage.

ATG: Have you worked with the portal concept?

JM: If you mean developing a single accesss point for a specific area - yes, we have and didn't feel it was successful. We're experimenting again with social science as a portal, with bibliographic data, news and best practices. Because we are focusing on the researcher rather than the casual user, I am not certain the portal concept will amount to very much.

ATG: Do you plan to work with aggregators like OCLC FirstSearch?

JM: We have worked with **SilverPlatter**, **Ovid**, and **EBSCO**. Originally, these relationships came about as CD distribution arrangements. These third party arrangements worked extremely well before the advent of the Internet. Now, virtually all third parties provide our data through various Internet services and we sometimes find ourselves competing with our distributors.

Relative to **FirstSearch/PerSearch**, we provide an abridged version of our **Sociological** database (coverage of 225 of our 1,500 journals), and a citations only **Environmental** database. Again, we try to differentiate our offerings so we are not in competition with ourselves.

Our newest and perhaps the most exciting partnership is our relationship with **E-Psych**. We are now offering **E-Psych** as a part of our Internet Database Service and currently have several dozen institutions evaluating this new social science offering.

ATG: Tell us about your interests. What are your favorite books and hobbies.

JM: **Pat** and I have been married for 33 years and have three sons: one is an attorney in Atlanta, another is a sales manager in LA and the third one is in high school. I was born, bred and educated in Brooklyn, NY. I entered the Marine Corps after graduating from St. Johns with an MBA in 1966. After three years in the Marine Corps, I joined **Dun & Bradstreet** and I've been in the information business ever since. For professional reading, I'm partial to anything written by **Peter Drucker**. For pure pleasure I enjoy reading 20th century history. **David Kennedy's** *"Freedom from Fear"* is my current read. 🌿

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ture that there is not room for two journals in this niche and I would be amazed if either **SPARC** or **Rosenzweig** think otherwise. It is not an alternative but a replacement or rather (in practice) the transfer of a journal from one publisher to another. The original editorial (now removed from the site) began "And now for something not completely different." Very true.

I concluded my contribution with some questioning of the rationale of **SPARC** investment in **BioOne**. **BioOne** is in an "active development stage" and my comments made in November would need to be expanded if I covered here all the points I covered then. **BioOne** represents an "alternative" but it is primarily an alternative to **HighWire**, which offers much the same range of services. Certainly **Allen Press Inc.**,

a commercial organisation, seems to get an excellent deal and one capable of infinite expansion with the sort of backing that **SPARC** is giving them.[6] As far as one can tell (**HighWire** does not disclose their charging) **HighWire** offers hosting services which are significantly more expensive than those offered by its commercial competitors such as **CatchWord** and **ingenta** which are up front. The main difference between **BioOne** plus **Allen Press** and **HighWire** lies in the library subsidies (already mentioned) being offered to the former. My publisher's questions would be: is this the way patrons want money intended for serial purchasing used in this way, and are these journals (and the ones to come) the journals they want?

To summarise: is **SPARC** an integral part of a new structure which will become the dominant force in scientific communication or is it fatally flawed because it is too busy fighting imagined enemies? In the end the answer lies in the hands of the scholars, the patrons -- they will vote with their papers. 🌿

Endnotes

1. Rusbridge, Chris, "Towards the Hybrid Library." D-Lib Magazine (July/August 1998). http://www.dlib.org/dlib/july98/rusbridge/07rusbridge.html.

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3. Watkinson, Anthony, "What the scientist really wants from electronic journals." Against the Grain v. 10 # 6 (December 1998/January 1999) pp. 26-29.

4. http://www.arl.org/sparc/bainton.html.

5. Rosenzweig, Mike, "On taking back control of commercially published academic journals". http://www.evolutionary-ecology.com/citizebn/citizen.html.

6. "How can societies and publishers participate?" www.bioone.org/special2.shtml.