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ATG Interviews Daryl Rayner

Director of Marketing, xrefer

by Tom Gilson (Head, Reference Services, College of Charleston) <gilson@cofc.edu>

self and your experience in the publishing/information world.

DR: My entire working life has been spent working for or alongside publishers. My first job was at **Macmillan Publishers** where I worked in the advertising department of *Nature*, the international journal of science. After that I went to work as the marketing manager at the **Current Science Group**. I worked for **Vitek Tracz** who is a serial entrepreneur. In 1995 we launched **BioMedNet** and later **ChemWeb**. It was the start of my addiction to the digital world! **BioMedNet** and **ChemWeb** were acquired by **Elsevier Science** in 1997. In 1998 I went back to work at **Macmillan Publishers**, this time as an associate director of **Electronic Publishing** and with **Richard Charkin** at the helm. I arrived just as the full text of *Nature* was being put online. In the summer of 1999 I met **Adam Hodgkin** who outlined his vision for **xrefer**, the central premise being that collections of reference works were more useful when put online and infinitely more powerful if linked in an intelligent yet automated way. I immediately wanted to be part of it.

ATG: Tell us a little about your-

ATG: What exactly is xrefer? How long have you been in operation? How big is your staff?

DR: Let me think a minute. Right now we have 13 permanent employees and we began operation about a year and a half ago, in January of 2000. As a company, **xrefer** is involved with supplying reference content to other sites, services and institutions. At the heart of everything we do is our xreferencing technology. This adds value to reference works by creating links across publications. **xrefer.com** is our destination site; here you can search across an extensive database of titles from publishers such as **Bloomsbury, Oxford, Macmillan, Penguin** and **Houghton Mifflin**. You can also see our xreferencing technology in action in that **xrefer** has been actively syndicating reference content to other sites and platforms.

ATG: What do you mean other sites and platforms?

DR: By other sites and platforms I mean other Websites, and platforms such as digital TV and mobile.

ATG: That sounds exciting. We also understand that you will be introducing a new product.

DR: Yes, this autumn we are launching **xreferplus** which is a subscription product for libraries. It will consist of eighty titles from existing and new publishing partners. At least half of **xreferplus** will consist of new titles and most of these will have never appeared online before. It will also support an advanced search function, thematic search and browse. We are currently inviting librarians to sign up for trials.

ATG: If a librarian is interested in a trial how do they sign up?

DR: By the time your readers see this interview they should be able to sign up directly from www.xrefer.com. Right now, librarians have to sign up for a trial as part of a librarian questionnaire. So you can see we are trying to make it easier. The actual trials will start in late August or early September. But as you know, anyone can search **xrefer.com** now, and that is also a good way to get a feel for our technology and content. Of course, **xreferplus** will have new content, new functionality and a different look.

ATG: The current free database is useful for finding definitions, quotations, etc. In the subscription product will you expand

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no way impeded by the type of toy either. My little nephews were each issued a **McDonald's** happy meal complete with accompanying plastic toy. To my horror I realized that the **Disney** character toy they received was – gasp – a molded plastic version of a – gasp “girl.” I cringed and waited for them to begin a plastic-induced hysteria and scream for something more appropriate like a molded version of a multi-wheeled all terrain vehicle.

To my amazement they accepted the toy girl readily. Then they immediately begin bashing each other's toy in a simulated fight, all the while yelling, “my gurl can beat up your gurl! Nu uh, MY gurl can beat up YOUR gurl!”

The differences do not stop there. The X chromosome dearth also apparently affects early communication skills. My little niece babbles on constantly about all manner of things all the time. Although she can hardly be understood, she is determined to “tell” you about it. My wee lad – as do all little boys – cares not much for simple communication. What he does care about is recreating the sounds created by combustion

engines – trucks, cars, airplanes, and heavy equipment. He does this very well, thank you very much. Just don't get too close or he will spray you.

But, for the male, the differences get worse from here. The differences manifested by these obvious behavioral X's are X's at the genetic level. Males are shortchanged. It's that darn X chromosome, I tell you.

According to **Dr. Kenneth R. Miller**, a biologist at **Brown University**, “it's the X, not the Y, that is loaded with important genes.” In fact the X is where all THE important genetic stuff is. And the fact that males have only one X chromosome makes them susceptible to all manner of maladies including color-blindness, hemophilia, muscular dystrophy, and a host of other genetic disorders in much greater numbers than females suffer.¹ Even at birth, males have a much greater incidence of malfunction than do females. As a pediatrician recently told me, “compared to female babies, male babies are just biological wimps.” Females have more stamina, less health problems, and live longer. “Imagine me – a bio wimp. Gee, what a cross to bear.

So, not only has fatherhood made me keenly aware of the male/female differences, but now I have to deal with the fact that my

child has inherited his father's inferior biology. Golly, what am I to do? How do I break the news to him? Will he blame me? Will he need therapy?

He's out there now pushing his plastic versions of heavy construction equipment and spitting out enslobbered engine sounds completely oblivious to his plight – having absolutely no idea that his babbling female baby colleagues are...well...better X endowed. How shall he manage?

Hopefully, he will follow in the wise footsteps of his father. I managed to compensate for my own inherent biological inferiority by becoming a librarian. It was only among the acronyms of **LC, OCLC** and **BI** did I find inner peace for my X shortcomings. We can only hope that my son will be able to overcome his own X chromosome deficit in a similar way.

Of course, he could just rely on the whole patriarchal, male-dominated society thing.

Nah. That would be too easy.

Endnotes

1. You can read **Miller's** article as it appeared in *Discover Magazine* at (<http://biomed.brown.edu/Faculty/M/Miller/Discover/Y.html>)

the content? The reference titles currently available are primarily British publications. Will more U.S. publications be included in the subscription database?

DR: Yes, **xreferplus** will have an expanded selection of titles covering a vast range of subject areas: it will deliver general encyclopedias, dictionaries and thesauri as well as specialist works spanning science, literature, business, health and foreign languages. We are in the midst of signing all the contracts with publishers, so I'm afraid I can't release specifics. But suffice it to say that some of our existing partners are putting content into the subscription offering and we have a host of new reference publishers working with us. **xreferplus** will consist of "high-value" reference content from well respected brands. We are launching the core service this October and will subsequently offer specialty datasets covering areas such as people and places, business and management, social sciences and so on. It will be possible to bolt the specialty datasets onto the core service and have an extended reference library, all fully searchable and cross-referenced. More U.S. titles will be added as we progress. There are reference publishers who specialize or who are particularly strong in some areas. These are the ones we'll be working with for the specialty datasets. The North American market is an important one for us and we are in the process of consulting with U.S. librarians. As I mentioned before, there is an online questionnaire that is available at <http://www.xrefer.com/survey/library/library.jsp>.

ATG: How do you select the titles that are included in XREFER? What criteria are used?

DR: Initially, we are guided through the selection process by our publisher partners. They know their titles best and have a thorough understanding of which ones are most appropriate for different markets. We add to the selection process by analysing the content of individual titles and making a decision about which ones we can add most value to.

ATG: Will there be librarian involvement?

DR: Definitely. We plan to set up a librarian advisory board for **xreferplus**. To date, we have consulted librarians via our online questionnaire and through meetings. We will be running trials for **xreferplus** at

the end of August and will listen very carefully to what librarians tell us.

ATG: Should a library want to link to individual titles in the database from their OPAC, will you provide that capability? Will you provide the individual cataloging records? Will they be the full MARC records?

DR: Linking to **OPAC** catalogs is certainly an area we are considering. It makes sense when the **OPAC** is delivered through a Web browser. Currently, all of the titles on **xrefer** have individual "About" pages. The user gets to these pages whenever he/she clicks on the title of the work at the bottom of each entry. We feel that it is terribly important that the user knows where the information they are using is coming from. It would be natural to add **MARC** records as a part of our service to the library market and these pages would be a natural "anchor" for this information. In general, we are keen to see that our service meshes well with the evolving standards in the information business, whether this is **XML**, **Dublin Core** or systems such as **SFX**, **DOI** and **CrossRef**.

ATG: What type of pricing model will you use? Will you sell to both libraries and individuals that want subscriptions?

DR: Currently we do not have any plans to offer **xreferplus** to individuals. **xreferplus** is intended as a digital reference library for institutions. As far as pricing goes, in the academic market we will use a pricing model based on the number of Full Time Equivalents in a given institution.

ATG: Can you give us an example? What are you projecting as the annual subscription for a medium size college of 10,000 FTEs?

DR: We see the pricing band for small right up to large institutions as being between \$1500 and \$5800.

ATG: The initial database is geared to public libraries. Any plans for an academic library version?

DR: Actually, **xrefer.com** has a strong following within the academic library community and **xreferplus** is definitely intended to appeal to public and academic librarians. We anticipate that the specialty datasets will be especially appealing to subject librarians in academic institutions.

ATG: How will you handle problematic issues like up-dating and archiving?

DR: Archiving is clearly a different issue when applied to reference material. It applies to content that changes more rapidly such as journal databases. Regarding updating, I

guess it has always been an issue with reference publishers, particularly when the majority publish their titles on an annual basis. People die and are born and country borders all change in the interim! We are taking the publisher's works and putting them online. We are faithful to the original content.

ATG: But, timeliness can be a major advantage for electronic sources. Have you discussed updating with your publishing partners as a way to add value to xreferplus?

DR: Updating is something we are interested in. The issue is how up-to-date do you want to be. It will always be important to have authenticated content.

ATG: Some databases restrict printing to one page at a time. Do you plan any such restrictions?

DR: No. We will not be restricting printing to one page at a time, but to protect our publishing partners we will need to stipulate fair usage in our agreements.

ATG: The definition of fair use in the electronic environment is unclear. How are you defining it?

DR: I agree that "fair usage" has become a rather nebulous term. We will include a full definition in our licence and I can assure you that the emphasis will be on "fair" -to users, librarians and publishers! We will include standard terms covering sub-licensing for commercial purposes, alterations to content and downloading onto wide-area networks.

ATG: If you could look into a crystal ball and see the future, where would you see xrefer and xreferplus in five years?

DR: In five years it should be possible for the user, when encountering any document (by then all documents will all be on the Web, or more likely the Web will be everywhere) to look for supporting xreferences which either take her to a high level (PostDoc standard) or bring her explanations at the level of a beginning student. By then it will be possible for users to customize or personalise the xreference service so that they get "related info" which is suited to their needs and the system will have an idea about this. The point is that **xrefer** will become a network of supporting information sources that help users whether they are at the frontiers of research or just starting out. It could become the "help" you look for in any knowledge system.

ATG: It sounds like you are envisioning an all-purpose reference tool that can be customized for individual need. Are we on target?

DR: Yes, that's right.

ATG: We wish you the best of luck. Thank you for taking the time to talk to us.

DR: My pleasure.

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

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