

September 2001

Company Profile: Serials Solutions, LLC

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Recommended Citation

Mays, Allison P. (2001) "Company Profile: Serials Solutions, LLC," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 13: Iss. 4, Article 17.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.3607>

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Company Profile — Serials Solutions, LLC

Column Editor: **Allison P. Mays** (Acquisitions Librarian, Millsaps College, 1701 N. State Street, Jackson, MS 39210; Phone: 601-974-1083) <maysap@millsaps.edu>

Got E-Journals? Get the Solution – Serials Solutions, That Is!!!

Founded by a reference librarian in Seattle, **Serials Solutions** is a new company which provides “one-stop shopping” for e-journals. They produce an alphabetical list of a libraries’ full-text electronic journals, pulled from all of the databases to which the library subscribes. The list is provided in HTML and print formats; in the HTML format, live links take the user directly to each journal. In this interview, founder **Peter McCracken** answers a few questions for *ATG* about what motivated him to create this company and how it compares to the competition. See the accompanying article for one library’s experience in dealing with **Serials Solutions** and a more detailed description of their product. — **Allison P. Mays**

What does Serials Solutions do, and how did it begin?

Serials Solutions was the first company to track the full-text electronic journals available through database aggregators. The idea came directly from my frustration at the reference desk of not knowing what we were paying for. We didn’t have a good way of tracking this information, and no way of updating what work we had done. **Serials Solutions** does this work inexpensively for everyone, and helps each library know what’s available to its staff and patrons. The company now has over 160 clients, from small community colleges and corporate libraries to major public libraries and **ARL** institutions. We are constantly guided by what librarians want, and we make a point of listening and responding to what people say they need.

The idea came from the reference desk, but the company came from a pitcher of beer. One night my youngest brother tried to get me, my wife, and our other brother to go out for a beer. It was like pulling teeth; I think it took him 45 minutes to get us to agree to go for “just one beer.” Over our first pitcher, I happened to tell them about this idea that I thought someone would implement soon. As it turned out, we closed down the bar while talking about this idea, and we realized that, together, we might have the skills to make it happen.

We thought that it would be pretty simple; we expected that the computer would be spitting out reports while we sat in the **Bahamas** sipping pinã coladas. Of course, it’s much more complex than we ever expected, and at the moment we track over 350 full-text databases, with some 800,000 pieces of discrete data. We have a full-time aggregator contact person, a full-time fulfillment person, and a rapidly growing tech crew, in addition to business development, sales, and customer service teams. It turns out to be an extremely complicated system, but we’ve done an excellent job of figuring it all out.

How do you manage work as a librarian with work as a vendor?

I don’t actually do too much of the **Serials Solutions** work; we’ve got a great group of people working on the **Serials Solutions** product, and I don’t have that much day-to-day contact with it, since I am still working in the library during the day. I work on it in the evenings, doing whatever I can then.

I was careful to discuss and clear the project with my library’s administration first. Scientists do this sort of thing all the time; I think it’s valuable for those of us in the humanities to pursue such mutually beneficial projects, too, when appropriate. This summer I got approval from my supervisor to try balancing my library work schedule in a manner that allows me to work two mornings a week on **Serials Solutions**.

How does your product compare with others out there?


Serials Solutions was the first company to provide libraries with individualized reports of the e-journals they have available, although librarians have had a few options for dealing with this problem.

The most common solution is an in-house database. This works well for li-

braries with very small collections, but rarely for larger ones. More often than not, home-grown solutions are not complete, rarely kept up-to-date, and when considering the staff time involved, very expensive.

The next most common alternative is **jake**, a cooperative project started at **Yale Medical School**. **Jake** is free and is an impressive project in many respects, but the data is not easily customized to individual institutions, and is getting old.

Two companies are also trying to solve this problem, but to our knowledge neither has yet delivered a product. One was founded by the son of one of our first clients. Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, I suppose. The other is a venture capital-funded branch of **Teldan Information Systems**. Several members of our staff have experience in Seattle dot-bombs, so we’re wary of being beholden to VCs and their need for “liquidity events.” We continue to be innovators in this field, and because we place all relevant information about our product and pricing on our Web pages so that librarians can see it, we accept that our competitors can, as well.

In theory, this is a simple project. In fact, we have learned that it’s extremely complicated, and we believe that we are the only company that has proven its ability to accurately track and deliver the information librarians and their patrons need. 

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One Library’s Experience: Getting Organized with Serials Solutions

by **Allison P. Mays** (Acquisitions Librarian, Millsaps College, 1701 N. State Street, Jackson, MS 39210; Phone 601-974-1083) <maysap@millsaps.edu>

Thank heaven for *ATG* and **Katina’s** Rumors column!! I was leafing through my February 2001 issue and saw a blurb in Rumors about **Chuck Hamaker** being impressed

with a new company called **Serials Solutions**. I looked at their Website and knew right away I had stumbled onto something BIG: a way

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