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Something About Books-Identity Theft

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Bestsellers
from page 75

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Something About Books — Identity Theft

by Jack Walsdorf (Library Relations, Alibris)
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What would you do if someone stole your identity? The thought came to me as I was watching one of those nighttime television news shows. They were telling the story of a New York doctor who had her identity stolen. The thief went the full route, using credit cards, opening accounts and even taking money out of accounts. What a frightening story it was.

I wondered what books were out there on the subject and a quick check of the Alibris site, under the heading "identity theft" brought up three titles. Still more searching by subject brought me to the heading "plagiarism" and an interesting title popped up: *Words for the Taking* by Neal Bowers. I ordered this book and the telling of his tale, of the hunt for a plagiarist, is a sad story on many levels.

I first became acquainted with literary plagiarism in the early 1960s as an undergraduate at the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh. I was then the editor of the student newspaper, and often wrote poetry and short stories for the university literary magazine. My dream was to be a professional writer, and I thought I was fairly good, until I was stopped in my tracks by the reading of

one of my classmate's short stories in my English composition class. It was so good, that to this day, nearly forty years later, I can still retell most of the story. At the time, I sat stunned, thinking I could never write a story that well. The trouble was, as we found out a few months later, when another student began showing around the "original" story as published in *Redbook* magazine, it was not our student's story. The next day, in bold letters at the top of the blackboard, we found the word "PLAGIARISM" and we all heard a stern lecture on fair use.

Which brings me to the story written by Neal Bowers. Bowers is a much published poet both in book and magazine form, and among his prizes are a National Endowment for the Arts Poetry Fellowship and the Union League Civic and Arts Poetry Prize. He is on the English faculty at Iowa State University, Ames, and is also the author of the recently published novel *Loose Ends* (2001 - Random House) which he calls an "academic, literary mystery" novel.

Words for the Taking: The Hunt for a Plagiarist (W.W. Norton, 1997) begins simply enough. Bowers picks up his voice-mail messages in January 1992 and finds the

continued on page 78

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Issues in Vendor/Library Relations from page 77

mostly academic libraries using one of a small group of systems, we can limit our development efforts, mainly seeking to create interfaces with **DRA**, **Epixtech's Horizon** and **NOTIS** systems, **Endeavor**, **Ex Libris**, **Geac**, **Innovative Interfaces**, **Sirsi**, and **VTLS**. Our development priorities are driven by the size and number of customers we have using a particular system, the existing capabilities of that ILS and how well they mesh with **YBP's** capabilities, the amount of new development required, the demand we anticipate from our customer base, and pressures from numerous other internal development efforts.

As we've worked with various ILS providers, we've learned lessons from each experience. Our earliest partnership with **Innovative Interfaces** showed us the multiple uses of a "loaded" **MARC** record. Once the book vendor could output customized data in prescribed local fields, the **MARC** record was far more than a holder of bibliographic information. It became a transport mechanism and a trigger for the automatic creation of order records and electronic invoicing. The enormous influx of bibliographic and acquisitions piecework created with the arrival of weekly shipments could now be executed with a minimum of time, keystrokes, and staff. Furthermore, **Innovative Interfaces** set an early gold standard for clear, complete documentation of their book and serial vendor interfaces.

NOTIS was an aging mainframe system not designed to support processes like electronic ordering. With further development of **GOBI**, **YBP's** Web-based system, plus an ancient **YBP** pipe-delimited electronic order format, customers like the **University of Florida** and **LSU**, with the help of a talented consultant in the person of **Gary Strawn** from **Northwestern**, devised a way to graft

an electronic ordering capability onto **NOTIS**, and thus decrease time spent per order to a matter of seconds. **Sirsi's** willingness to allow customers to edit its source code offered pioneers like **Alan Hagyard** of the **Connecticut-Trinity-Wesleyan Consortium**, **Chris Hoebeke** of the **University of Virginia**, and **Ranny Lacanienta** of **Brigham Young University** the ability to write code that imports book vendor-supplied **MARC** records into **Sirsi** to create bibliographic records, order records, and electronic invoicing, all with minimal keystrokes.

To date, the most comprehensive development and testing in which I have been involved has been with **Endeavor**. For the rest of this article, I'll concentrate on that experience as a sample of the work involved in testing new functionality. When I inherited my position, **YBP** had a large number of customers eagerly awaiting the new acquisitions capabilities in the 2000 version of **Voyager**. We wanted to be sure that those capabilities were thoroughly discussed and vetted before extending them throughout the **YBP/Voyager** customer base. The **University of Rochester** agreed to become **Endeavor** and **YBP's** test partner in the summer of 2000.

Stanley Wilder, **Rochester's** Assistant Dean for Information Management Services, explains, "The way I remember it, we were plugging away on various aspects of our acquisitions function when suddenly we realized that we'd stumbled on a golden opportunity to re-make Acquisitions from scratch. Part of it was the imminence of **Voyager's** embedded order functionality, part was our new relationship with **YBP**, but there were lots of local factors that came together as well. Working with **YBP** and **Endeavor** on embedded order seemed the obvious next step, and

while the process was longer and more demanding than we'd anticipated, we never regretted that decision."

For both book and system vendors, testing is a many-to-many process. **YBP** has tested capabilities with many ILS vendors. **Endeavor** had to test their new acquisitions capabilities with numerous book vendors (not to mention serial vendors), all with different record creation and acceptance capabilities. **Kathryn Harnish**, **Endeavor's Voyager** Product Manager, explains, "One of the things that we heard a lot of was, 'Every vendor does it differently for every customer!' While the mapping of data from **MARC** records to the **Voyager** order record was certainly different, the issues and concerns that needed to be resolved were almost exactly the same for all vendors."

Representatives from **YBP** and **Endeavor** spent a day at the **University of Rochester** discussing approval and firm order workflows, creating a testing process, and previewing the coming **Voyager** functionality. It was both an exhausting and energizing meeting, as each of the three test partners began to see glimmers of the payoff to come,

as well as the mountain of work involved in getting there. **YBP** was interested in testing all options that a library might select when designing a workflow, so as testing began, we faced a list that included a **MARC**-based approval workflow, two **GOBI** and **MARC**-based ordering workflows, **EDIFACT** ordering, and **EDIFACT** invoicing. We knew that we would need to allocate development resources for

EDIFACT ordering and invoicing. Acquisitions experts, **EDI** staff, analysts, and pro-

continued on page 79

Something About Books from page 76

"voice of **Carrie Etter**, a poet unknown to me then living in Santa Monica. She said she knew my poems well enough to recognize my voice and style and felt certain she was in possession of a published poem that belonged to me but had someone else's name on it." Thus began **Neal Bowers** modern day quest for Corvo, only his Corvo is named **David Sumner** - a.k.a. **David Jones** of Aloha, Oregon. The bottom line was that between 1992 and 1994, "a person calling himself **David Sumner** had two of my poems accepted as his own 20 times at 19 different literary magazines." **Sumner** also stole poems of **Mark Strand**, **Sharon Olds**, **Marcia Hurlow**, and **Robert Gibb**. "The quarterlies are already littered with his primary pseudonym - 57 poems attributed to **David Sumner** in 46

periodicals, perhaps all of them other people's work."

If this were the only story, solve the mystery of who, what and why, it would still be a very good mystery story indeed. But, this is also a story of professional indifference — the unsympathetic colleagues who were mostly indifferent to the plight of **Neil Bowers**. As he says: "Why he doesn't tell his tale is a complicated matter, but it begins with the disparity between his own astonishment and outrage at having been robbed and the indifference with which many regard his plight. 'Lighten up,' they say, 'no big deal.'" And finally: "Relax, you can always write another poem."

The second sadness lies in the editors of all those poetry magazines who accepted works by **Bowers** and others as the original work of **David Sumner** and then offered little if any help in running him down. For his part, **David Sumner**

was clever. He made sure that each poem he used had a new and different title and that at least the first line of the text would be changed.

But in the end, through the hard work and persistence of **Neal Bowers**, assisted by his wife, **Nancy**, some fellow poets, and a private investigator in Portland, Oregon, the plagiarism of **David Sumner** stopped. As **Bowers** puts it: "It seems I have stopped **Jones [Sumner]** from taking my work, as far as I know."

Read as a book of fiction, **Bowers's** tale would be interesting and believable, and in the words of the blurb writer, "a real first-class page-turner." Read as fact, based on real-life doubt and disillusionment, this is a first-rate book based on a sad fact of life. People steal both property and words and in **Neal Bowers's** case, the words are his property.