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ATG Interviews Greg Tananbaum

(Berkeley Electronic Press) <greg@bepress.com>

by Katina Strauch (Editor, *Against the Grain*)

ATG: What is The Berkeley Electronic Press, and how and why was the company founded?

GT: The Berkeley Electronic Press – bepress, for short – is an Internet-based electronic publishing company. The Berkeley Electronic Press came together about two years ago as a direct result of the experience of three of our founders. Bob Cooter, Aaron Edlin, and Ben Hermalin are all professors at the University of California, Berkeley, and over the course of their careers they have had vast experience as editors, authors, and reviewers. Over time, they grew frustrated with the limitations of the current scholarly publishing system, the delays from submission to ultimate publication, the high barriers to access, the limited input authors had on their work's final appearance, and they decided to build a better mousetrap. Their idea was that an end-to-end electronic system could be built to handle all of the key steps in bringing scholarly communication to the public, from the intake of submissions, to the management of the peer-review process, to correspondence among editors and authors and reviewers, to revisions, on through to publication.

Bob, Ben, and Aaron are well-established “brand names” within economics, law, and business. They spoke with other professors in their fields, as well as colleagues in the sciences, librarians, and IT people. Basically, they wanted to know two things: did others within the academic community share these frustrations, and would they embrace an Internet-based publishing alternative. The answer to both questions was an emphatic yes, so they decided to proceed with bepress.

ATG: How did the company move from this idea to where you are today?

GT: The professor-founders recruited a team of programmers to translate the scholarly publishing process into a series of automated steps. Basically, they sat in a room and discussed all the permutations that a paper might take from submission to publication. This process began on a yellow legal pad. Very quickly, it filled several thick notebooks! Eventually, out of these discussions came EdiKit, our editorial management software. We deployed the first iteration of EdiKit in December of 2000. Since then, we have released several new versions, with the goal of increasing functionality and improving the user experience.

ATG: How does an article flow through the EdiKit system?

GT: There are several variations that our workflow allows, but a common scenario is something like this: a peer-reviewed journal is being published using the bepress system. An author goes to the Website where the journal is posted, and clicks on a link that says “Submit Paper.” She follows a few simple instructions, like entering in her name, contact information, paper title, keywords, and so forth. Finally, she uploads her abstract and the text of the paper, then clicks “Submit.” At that point, two things happen. The author has an account created for her, basically a page from which she can track the progress of her submission. Simultaneously, an email is generated by EdiKit to the editors of the journal, notifying them that a new submission has been uploaded. The email contains all of the critical information about the paper, including metadata and so forth. The editors can then log into the system to an editorial management page and decide who among them should shepherd the submission through to adjudication. At this page, the editor can identify referees, correspond with the author, read the paper, and manage it as it moves through to publication decision. The system has other wrinkles such as automatically-generated email reminding reviewers that their reports are pending and notifications when revisions have been uploaded that are designed to ease the micro-level oversight with which editors are typically burdened. When referee reports have been submitted, the editor can request revise-and-resubmits, or accept or reject the paper through the editorial management page. If the paper is accepted, the author would give her approval, then the article would be made available on the site immediately.

ATG: How does the process work from the peer reviewer's perspective?

GT: Again, there are a number of variations, as the system is very easily customized. Typically, however, once the editor identifies a potential reviewer, the EdiKit system will automatically send out an email to that person with details about the opportunity. If the potential reviewer is new to the bepress system, the message will contain some context about the technology and the journals. Ultimately, the person is asked to click on a Web link contained within the email. This transports him to a page that provides additional information about the submission. While on that page, the

proposed reviewer would click on a button indicating if he accepted or declined this opportunity. Assuming he chooses the former, the editor is sent an email indicating that a reviewer has signed on. That reviewer will then have a certain number of days to complete his task. He can download the paper in a variety of formats, correspond anonymously with the author if he has need for clarification, and so forth. All of this is done via the same Web page, which is dedicated specifically to the task of this reviewer reviewing this submission. When he is ready to make a recommendation, he returns to this page, fills in a short questionnaire, and uploads his report in a format of his choosing. He then clicks a button, and the report is transmitted to the editor.

ATG: How was the business developing as EdiKit was being built?

GT: Concurrent to our technical development efforts, we were working to launch a slate of peer-reviewed journals. We were meeting with various professors from around the world to better understand their feelings toward the current publishing model. Many of these people shared the frustrations of our founders,

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THE BERKELEY ELECTRONIC PRESS

BEPRESS: THE NEW STANDARD IN SCHOLARLY PUBLISHING

and were frustrated that no viable alternatives existed. Eventually, we recruited several prestigious academics to found our inaugural journals, in economics and law. We are now publishing twelve economics titles, five legal titles, several working paper and monograph series, and have a number of other publications in the pipeline.

ATG: Was it difficult to recruit editors to use your new technology?

GT: Not really. Because the system was designed with direct and daily input from our professor-founders, **EdiKit** is, in my humble opinion, a very user-friendly system. There was clearly a learning curve, as we were asking our editors to approach their tasks in an entirely new manner. What we found, however, was that once they began playing around with the system, they were really enjoying themselves. For example, there is a component within **EdiKit** that allows editors to identify potential referees in a very straightforward manner, and to lodge review requests with them. If the proposed referee fails to respond within a few days, though, the editor is automatically sent an email by the system saying in effect, "Hey, this guy hasn't gotten back to you yet. Do you want to send him another request, or should we find someone else?" Our inaugural editors got a great kick out of this; they loved that we had automated a "nagging" component and built it into the software!

Our editors are co-owners of the journals they edit, which is atypical in the academic publishing world. We truly view the development of these journals as a collaborative effort, and this shared equity helps cement that vision. To date, our journals have attracted editors from a range of top notch institutions, including **Harvard**, **Stanford**, **Princeton**, **Columbia**, and, of course, **Berkeley**. Our editors, in turn, have pulled in strong editorial boards, referees, and contributors.

ATG: Besides **EdiKit**, are there other elements that distinguish your journals?

GT: We have a range of what we call "process innovations" to complement our technology. For example, we have created an **Authors & Reviewers' Bank** to more formally track the reciprocity among various actors. When an author submits a paper, he expects to receive a certain number of thoughtful peer evaluations of his work, let's say two. In our system, this author will have an account created for him automatically at the time of submission. This account will receive two debits, corresponding to the peer reviews his paper will get. At some point in the future, he will be asked to work off this debt by providing diligent peer reviews for two other papers. Similarly, if an editor asks me to serve as the referee for a given paper, I will have an account created and that account will receive one credit. This credit will be applied to any future paper I submit to this journal. Neither authors nor reviewers are paid in any currency

save for these credits and debits.

We also have embraced what we call the "journal family" concept. We publish multiple unique journals concentrating on a single subject area. These journals share editorial boards and peer evaluation mechanisms, meaning they can adjudicate submissions very quickly. A practical example of this would be **The B.E. Journals in Macroeconomics**. This journal family consists of four unique titles, *Frontiers of Macroeconomics*, *Advances in Macroeconomics*, *Contributions to Macroeconomics*, and *Topics in Macroeconomics*.

The *Frontiers* journal represents the very upper echelon of economics research, the *Topics* journal is akin to a good field journal, and the other two split the distance between. In the old world, an economist would submit his paper to a top journal, wait several months to hear back, most likely receive a rejection, then would submit the paper to a lower-level journal and repeat the process. What we are doing is replacing this sequential submission model with a more efficient parallel one. We guarantee a decision within 10 weeks, which in many fields—the social sciences, for example—is unprecedented.

ATG: How many journals are you currently publishing now?

GT: I believe we have seventeen in production as we speak, congregated in economics and law. We will shortly be launching several additional titles, in the social sciences and beyond. In founding new journals, we tend to rely on a rule of thumb that **SPARC** has developed. If a field's journal of record is excessively priced and both researchers and libraries alike are balking at supporting it, this represents an opportunity to create a low-cost alternative. Also, in fields that are emerging at the intersection of existing disciplines, there may not be a suitable outlet for original research. This again represents an opportunity to create journals that make a difference to their community.

Our journals are exclusively electronic, with no print component. I was a bit wary that this would be met with skepticism within the academic community, but I have been pleasantly surprised. The **HighWires** and **BioOnes** and **Project Muses** have done a wonderful job of demonstrating the virtues of electronic publications, the increased access without sacrificing intellectual quality.

ATG: You mentioned **SPARC**. Have you worked with members of the library community to hone your offering?

GT: One of the things I am most proud of is our deep and continuing reliance on a network of librarians to guide us as our company grows. From the start, one of the things we wanted to do was work with the library community to better understand their frustrations with the academic publishing model. The biggest complaints we heard in speaking with dozens of librarians from different universities concerned price and availability. On the former, we have made sure to offer a pricing pledge—our journals will be at least 25% below the discipline's average. On the latter, we have tried to enact a series of policies that ensure availability today and in the future. For example, we don't restrict the number of users who can simultaneously access a given journal. Another example— if the title in question is a law journal, our subscription covers the entire university community, not just the law school. Over the long-term, we offer perpetual access. If a school subscribes to one of our journals for three years and then doesn't renew, that institution will still have access to that three years worth of content.

We have been very fortunate in being able to call on an informal group of librarians, at **Berkeley**, the greater **University of California** system, and beyond to help us on licensing, pricing, and other issues.

ATG: Tell us about your recently-announced Partnership with the University of California's California Digital Library (CDL)?

GT: In developing our technology, we grew very excited by its possible extensions.

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It became clear to us that **EdiKit** was both powerful and nimble enough to handle a variety of scholarly publications, including working papers, monographs, and so forth. At the same time, we were hearing from our editors that the system was easy, even fun, to use. If we could empower academics to manage the dissemination of their own work, it would fundamentally change the nature of academic communication. Researchers could easily start their own electronic journals, incorporating sound and video files and other interactive technology. Professors could maintain electronic mailing lists and notify interested parties of new papers at the click of a button. Whereas before academics had to choose between either ceding control over their work by entering into the existing academic publishing system, or investing time and money in creating an alternative mechanism, now there was a third way.

We took this vision to **CDL** and they were very receptive. Their **eScholarship** arm is charged with exploring innovations in scholarly communication, so this was a great fit. And the more we talked, the greater the confluence of interest seemed. They were looking for tools that would help **University of California** professors share their work - whether it was in the form of peer-reviewed articles, working papers, monographs, or something else - in a streamlined manner. We, of course, were honored by their interest in our technology, and are immensely grateful and excited to be working with **CDL** and the **UC** community.

ATG: What will the tangible elements of the CDL partnership be?

GT: We are working with the **eScholarship** team to coordinate the deployment of our technology within the **University of California**. Very shortly a journal called *eNvironment* will be launched out of **UCLA**. The types of things their editorial board wants to do, including integrating multimedia files, would have been very difficult for them to accomplish without the **bepress** tools.

Concurrently, we are working to develop an archive to store preprints developed under the University's auspices. The idea is that research units, labs, institutes, and departments that are generating preprints would use the **bepress** technology to create unique online publication sites. These papers would feed into a searchable archive that included a current awareness component, user profiles, and the like. The archive is currently being mapped out with significant input from the **UC** research community.

This is just the beginning of what we expect to be many rollouts. One of the great things about **CDL** and **eScholarship** is that they really have their finger on the pulse of their constituents. They have several cutting-edge projects, across a variety of disciplines and publication types, in which we will be participating.

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Robert D. Cooter, Interim CEO, President, & Director: Overall responsibility for the direction and management of the company. Building a group of professors ("university associates") to serve as journal editors and recruiters of editors. As a university professor, pioneered the development of the economic analysis of law (applying formal economic theory to legal problems). Founder of the American Law and Economics Association and one of its first presidents. It has grown into a major scholarly society. Founder & current director of the law and economics program at the University of California at Berkeley. Founder of the Comparative Law and Economics Forum (CLEF). — B.A., Oxford University; Ph.D., Harvard University.

Aaron S. Edlin, Chairman of the Board & Director: Recruiter of journal editors. Cultivates and organizes university associates to recruit journal editors and contributors. Professor of economics at UC Berkeley since 1993 (tenured since 1997). Senior economist in charge of industrial organization, regulation, and antitrust on the President's Council of Economic Advisers, 1997-1998. Returning to UC Berkeley in 1998, he joined the Faculty of UC Berkeley's School of Law and became a full professor in both the law — A.B., *summa cum laude*, Princeton University; J.D., Stanford University; Ph.D., Stanford University.

Benjamin E. Hermalin, Corporate Secretary, Treasurer & Director: Liaison with editors of **bepress.com** journals. Works on the development of manuals and guides for using the **bepress.com** system and its editorial toolkit, **EdiKit**. Ben assists in the writing of HTML code and is currently **bepress.com**'s resident expert on PDF. Currently the Willis H. Booth Professor of Banking and Finance at the University of California, Berkeley and Associate Dean of the Walter A. Haas School of Business. In addition to Berkeley, Ben has been on the faculty at Cornell University and he has visited or taught at Yale University, M.I.T., and the *Ecole Nationale des Ponts et Chaussées* in Paris. — A.B., *summa cum laude*, Princeton University; Ph.D., M.I.T.

David M. Sharnoff, Chief Technology Officer & Director: Chief system designer and programmer. A computer programmer and entrepreneur. David was an early employee of **Inktomi, Inc.**; he analyzed traffic for its Web search engine and designed and built one of the modules in their proxy cache (Traffic Server). He founded and continues to own an Internet service provider (**idiom.com**), known for its high level of customer service and its ability to provide technically-difficult services like inexpensive redundant connectivity and fault-tolerant Web hosting. David is a prolific contributor to **CPAN**—an archive of open source modules for the Perl programming language. He has been using the Internet since 1984; programming professionally since 1986; and involved with startups since 1987. — B.A., University of California, Berkeley.

Paul Zimmer, Chief Operating Officer: In charge of operations. Network and telecommunications manager. In charge of purchasing, including software and hardware. Human Resources Manager. Oversees office management, vendor relations, finances, and book-keeping. In addition, programming and debugging of the **bepress.com** Website, including coding in Perl, Unix and shell scripts. Prior to joining **bepress.com**, Paul served as Partner and COO of **Minidisco.com**, an online retailer of electronics and digital media. In this capacity, he oversaw all aspects of running the company, including customer support, purchasing, negotiation, network operations, Website management, vendor relations, and outsource fulfillment. At **Scripps Institution of Oceanography**, Paul managed multimillion-dollar ocean-going seismic surveys, including all logistics and technical management. — B.S., *cum laude*, University of California, San Diego.

Greg Tananbaum, VP of Marketing: In charge of marketing, design, and liaison with libraries. Prior to joining **bepress.com**, Greg served as Director of Product Marketing for **ISI ResearchSoft**. In this capacity, he oversaw the outreach efforts, branding, positioning, and advertising of **EndNote** bibliographic software. Greg served as the company's point person in the academic arena, demonstrating its software, meeting with librarians and researchers, and gathering feedback for future releases. Greg has also worked in the high-tech world as a product manager at **Wink Communications**, an interactive television company. — B.A., Yale University; M.Sc., London School of Economics.

Anne Stringer, VP of Product Development: Works on the continual improvement and evolution of the site based on company goals and customer feedback. Plays a key role in defining new functionality to ensure that **EdiKit** and the **bepress.com** site provide innovative offerings as well as a high quality user experience for editors contributors, and readers alike. Her role in managing the project begins with the creation of a clear feature specification, and she works closely with Development and Testing to ensure that the specification is implemented accurately and on schedule. Anne migrated from a career in psychological research to studies in the field of education, with a focus on educational technologies. That interest translated to a position working with the **EndNote** team for nine years (**EndNote** is the leading bibliographic management program). She began as a technical support analyst, and soon advanced to managing the technical support group and writing the documentation for the product. By 1997, Anne had advanced to the role of Vice President, Product Development, and was responsible for defining new releases of **EndNote**, and delivering the product on schedule and on budget. — B.A., *magna cum laude*, Brown University.

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Profiles Encouraged — One Library's Experience: Our Serials Solutions List

Company Profile — Serials Solutions, LLC

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

Editor's Note: In the September issue of *ATG*, I wrote an article about getting our electronic and print journals organized with the company, *Serials Solutions*. They produce an alphabetical listing of a library's full-text electronic journals; we included our print titles as well. We did receive our report in HTML format and it's now on our library's Webpage <http://library.millsaps.edu/library/Journals%20and%20Periodicals/default.shtml>. We also got a copy of the report in print and we will make a couple of copies to have in the library. Almost immediately the list proved to be very useful and we're pleased with it. —AM

There are a few bugs to work out, mostly with our print titles. I checked all of our print titles that were in the original Excel spreadsheet against the printed and HTML reports and found a few typos that we had made. We had decided to use the journal title as the access point, rather than the ISSN, but when I checked some of the links to our OPAC, I found that too many other titles are being pulled up in the search results. For instance, the journal title "Delta" pulls up a total of 19 titles. Either we need to try to limit the search by material type in the URL — serial/periodical — or we need to use the ISSN as the access point. We'll probably end up using some combination of the two since our very old journal titles do not

have ISSNs in the catalog records.

The other thing we do not like is the way the OCLC *FirstSearch* titles just dump you into the big general database. We much prefer the way *JSTOR* and *Project Muse* links take the user directly to the specific journal. Another issue is that since the *FirstSearch* database has a "per search" charge, we're afraid we'll get hit with a massive bill. Because of these factors, we've decided to pull the *FirstSearch* titles out of the list. (Users still have access to the *FirstSearch* databases; we're just pulling those titles out of the *Serials Solutions* list.) I was able to make the change myself because *Serials Solutions* has just created an online client interface; I can call up our list of databases and either add or remove databases from my list. It's very well-organized and easy to use.

I have to admit that adding our print titles to the list has been a hassle; however, in the long run it will be worth it. It forced us to clean up our existing list and we discovered some mistakes and problems that we will correct. I still need to add the "freebie" e-journals that come with our print subscriptions, and I will get that report from *EBSCO*. Then I can go into the online client interface, call up the list from "*EBSCO Online*" and add each title to our list.

As for more changes and features, I spoke

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ATG: Will you be working with other universities?

GT: It is our sincere hope that other universities follow the University of California's lead and work to provide their faculty with tools to manage and disseminate their research. Many universities, through groups like *SPARC*, have expressed real concern over the state of scholarly communication. We believe that one way to proactively address these concerns is to provide researchers with easy-to-

use tools to produce viable alternatives. Combined with the efforts of undertakings such as *BioOne* and *Project Euclid*, we believe we can help restore some sanity to the world of scholarly publishing.

ATG: Tell us about you. How did you get interested in this? What do you do for fun? What do you like to read? Do you have a family? Any anecdotes?

GT: I have been at *The Berkeley Electronic Press* since nearly the beginning, having come on board after working with the *EndNote* bibliographic software team. I am glad that I get to come to work every day in an

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with **Tim Granquist** at *Serials Solutions* and he said they're working on a title-based searching feature and a subject breakdown of the journal titles. This company is very user-friendly: their customer service is excellent, they're open to ideas and suggestions, and they respond immediately. There is a good article on **Peter McCracken** in the August 2001 issue of *Library Journal*; in fact, **Peter** is on the cover.

If you have questions about *Serials Solutions* or about including your library's print journal titles, feel free to contact me: **Allison P. Mays**, Acquisitions Librarian, Millsaps College, 1701 N. State Street, Jackson, MS 39210; Ph. 601-974-1083; <maysap@millsaps.edu>.

environment that is both fun and challenging. Ultimately, if *bepress* succeeds in its mission, we will have greatly improved the flow of scholarly communication. I think that is an honorable goal.

Free time? I'll let you know the next time I have some! Seriously, though, most of my free time is spent with my wife **Melanie** and our bulldog **Tess**. **Melanie** works at *Berkeley*, and actually is the one who put me in touch with the *bepress* folks. Hopefully, that will go down as an auspicious introduction for all parties!