February 1999

Back Talk-Out of the Box and/or Off the Wall

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Recommended Citation

Ferguson, Anthony W. (1999) "Back Talk-Out of the Box and/or Off the Wall," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 11: Iss. 1, Article 17.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.3723>

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If you are interested in leading a discussion, acting as a moderator, coordinating the lively lunches or simulation rooms, or would like to make sure we discuss a particular topic, please let us know. The **Charleston Conference** prides itself on creativity, innovation, flexibility, and informality. If there is something you are interested in doing, please try it out on us. We'll probably like it...

The planning Directors for the **1999 Charleston Conference** include — **Barbara Dean** (Arlington County Public Library), **Robin Lent** (U. of New Hampshire), **Heather Miller** (SUNY-Albany), **Katina Strauch** (College of Charleston) and **Jack Montgomery** (Western Kentucky University).

Send ideas by **June 30, 1999**, to:

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ers in the brave new worlds that they describe. The lesson, in my mind, is that we must do a better job of appearing necessary to the future of libraries. In the minds of most leaders of consortia and many directors, we provide books and services, but our destinies are not joined.

I believe, by contrast, that our futures are tied, that libraries and booksellers are in the midst of an evolutionary event, and that we are co-evolving. Ultimately, consortia will achieve their real potential when vendors are brought in as partners to assist in envisioning the broad strategies that will give consortia far more value than when discount or even cooperative collection development are the driving forces.

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So, what are we to do? We need to cultivate within ourselves and with our organizations a tolerance for off-the-wall thinking so that out-of-the-box solutions can be aired and adopted when appropriate. The alternative is more of the same old, same old solutions with which we are all too familiar.

Rumors from page 14

too much needed information in the hopes of cutting out distasteful information. **RuleSpace's WebChaperone** software is based on an "artificial-intelligence engine called the Intelligent Content Recognition Technology, and is designed to differentiate between legitimate content and pornography." See **TechWeb** 26 Jan 99.

According to **Jim Nichols**, *Plain Dealer* reporter, **The American Civil Liberties Union** says it will file a barrage of lawsuits in 1999 to ensure that adults can use libraries' Internet-connected computers to look at pornography and other materials that may be deemed offensive. <http://www.cleveland.com/news/pdnews/metro/calibe.phtml>

Here's a publisher that archives the product! **Against the Grain!** **Lea Fraser** <leaf@pop.ucr.edu> sends word that the **University of California at Riverside** has an **ATG** subscription but needed a replacement volume! Here we are at **ATG** ready to help!

Speaking of which, your full-service publisher, value-added librarian recently heard from **Margaret A. Rioux** <mrioux@whoi.edu> who needed help with an **ATG** article citation. Do you remember the article by **Tony Ferguson** called "Interesting Problems Encountered on My Way to Writing an Electronic Collection Development Statement." Well **Maggie** and **Steve Oberg** are doing a seminar on digital resources in libraries for the **IX Transborder Library Forum** in Mexicali in March and they wanted to cite this article by Tony. Pretty exciting that **Maggie** and **Steve's** article is going to be translated into Spanish.

Bill Schenck (Library Services, Library of Congress) <wsch@loc.gov>, reported to **Collection Development Officers of Large**

Research Libraries Discussion Group during **ALA Midwinter** (and to **Coldv-l**) that the Library had received an increase of 5.2% (\$454,000 in its materials budget) for FY99. This increase permits additional spending for subscriptions for electronic materials, increased support to acquire current publications from the People's Republic of China and Taiwan, replace missing and lost books, and increased support for Special Collections. The **Library of Congress** lifted the moratorium on all but high-priority subscriptions at the beginning of FY98 but continues to exercise restraint in initiating new subscriptions. I was remembering when I first met the wonderful **Bill**, when he was Head of Acquisitions at **UNC-Chapel Hill**. **Bill** attended the first **Charleston Conference** in 1980 and was one of the movers and shakers behind the Memorial Service which we held for **Judy Webster** in Philadelphia just last month. Additional information about activities at the Library of Congress can be found on the **ALA Briefing Update**, accessible through the Library's homepage (www.loc.gov).

This is off the **Law-lib** listserv which last month was featuring an article on Internet use policies, and it includes a sample policy. Take a look at **Internet Usage Policies in the Workplace**, by **Todd Wulffson** at <http://www.llrx.com/features/wulffson1.htm>.

Gary Herald <gary@absbook.com> sends word that **Ambassador Books & Media** has been contracted to distribute the publications of the **Summer Institute of Linguistics** located at 7500 W. Camp Wisdom Road, Dallas, TX 75236.

Nat Bodian sends word that **John Kremer**, the publisher of **Open Horizons**, has dropped the price of **Nat Bodian's The Joy of Publishing** to \$19.95 (plus \$4.50 shipping and handling). Lets all buy a copy!

Okay. That's all (for now) folks!

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Back Talk — Out of the Box and/or Off the Wall

by **Anthony W. Ferguson** (Associate University Librarian, Columbia University)
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Katina, described as “far out,” “out of sight,” and at times endearingly described as a bit “off the wall” asked me to write about Out of the Box Thinking. Now, given the supposed conservative nature of collection development librarians like me, Katina’s thought that I could write about this topic is either an out-of-the-box idea, or a bit off the wall.

Out-of-the-box thinking is, I suppose, a form of creative thinking that is based upon a new and novel way of looking at all the same old evidence or data that produces the traditional solutions that abound in librarianship. For example, we know (a) that researchers want to know about the most recent literature published in their field; (b) that journal articles provide fairly timely treatments of interesting topics; (c) that what is needed is an indexing or abstracting reference tool to help connect the researcher with the published article; (d) that such tools are produced by publishers who charge subscribers money with which they hire indexers, editors, printers, etc. So when we as librarians want to connect users with the journal literature, we go in search of a published index or abstract (A/I). In the past we looked for print version A/I services, now we look for a digital versions. In the past we bought the print journals referred to in the index or abstract, now we are beginning to look for digital versions, perhaps even a combination index and fulltext electronic package. All of this is in-the-box thinking. We progress from need to A/I service to publisher like clockwork.

But what happens if there is no appropriate A/I service. Two groups of area studies librarians when confronted with this problem followed innovative but still in-the-box solutions. The Latin Americanists interested in publications not covered in even specialist A/I tools, with the help of foundation support, divided up the responsibility and to create an online table of contents service. Some South Asianists also obtained grant funds so they could hire indexers to produce an A/I tool. Both groups showed considerable initiative, but both progressed from an understanding of the need, to developing their own A/I service with grant funds as the solution.

I asked **David Magier**, someone capable of out-of-the-box thinking, what could he come up with as a different solution to the same problem: No appropriate A/I service to meet a specific set of needs. He suggested that perhaps he could post a list of all the jour-

nals that needed indexing and a template for indexing individual issues of these journals on the Web and invite individuals, publishers, and libraries to adopt a title. This way, the work could get done without the need for outside funding. Now, is this an example of out-of-the-box thinking, or an off the wall suggestion? The answer is of course, depends upon your outlook, which in turn depends upon your set of past experiences. If you are experienced with the Web, and if you believe humans are capable of rational and altruistic contributions to meet their own and other’s needs, you might say, “why didn’t I think of that?” Otherwise, you might say, “what a dumb off-the-wall idea!”

One of the best books about out-of-the-box thinking and creative organizations is Peter M. Senge’s *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* (Currency Doubleday, 1990). Senge deals with the problem of how an organization can encourage innovative—that is, out-of-the-box solutions to its problems. He suggests that such organizations are ones that stop looking at “snapshots” or isolated parts of the systems of which they are a part, but comprehend how they fit within the larger system; that they are committed to fully developing each employee’s capabilities; that they are

“Most of us have never met a library problem that could not be solved by a committee, subcommittee, or task force.”

willing to hold up to scrutiny the old solutions that trap them within a self-limiting web of old solutions; that work to develop a shared vision held by all employees, instead of a top-down “vision statement;” and that they are willing to “suspend assumptions and enter into a complete ‘thinking together’” process (p. 10).

For me, this translates into, university libraries that want to encourage innovative, or out-of-the-box thinking, are the ones that stop thinking about library problems and start thinking about university or even higher education problems; that work with each employee to figure out how to enable them to develop their capabilities; that encourage open dialogue even if it takes time and patience for the best solution to emerge instead of cultivating proficient “yes” men and women; and which recognize the value of each employee, and the importance of working together, to develop a shared vision which motivates employees to seek excellence, instead of medio-

cre obedience to the official vision of the organization. Most of our libraries experience such high points, but that is a difficult norm to maintain.

Senge also talks about organizational learning disabilities. He identifies the major disabilities that most organizations possess: Members of organizations focus on their own job instead of the job their organization is supposed to be doing, and consequently, see change as threatening instead of a new opportunity; they also, when things go wrong, perceive there is some force “out there” that is the problem, instead of looking to see what they might be doing wrong as the source of the difficulty; they fail to recognize subtle and perhaps slowly developing conditions; they organize themselves so bureaucratically that they are ill-prepared to comprehend, let alone solve, the problems which cross functional boundaries; and finally, organizations tend to develop teams of managers to control everything, but these team members too often are more intent on protecting their own turf, than working together to solve the organization’s challenges.

Again, it is easy to see the weaknesses of our own libraries. Many collection development librarians worry that unless they continue to build print collections, they will become valueless when they should be focusing on how to meet user needs—even if that does not result in a collection development solution. This is collection development librarian’s version of the old saw (sorry) about carpenters, to a carpenter with a hammer, everything is a nail. For us, all problems must be solved with more books and journals, more reference tools, and of course this means, more money. Librarians are also good at blaming everything on the “evil empire,” that is, commercial publishers. But we are weak on determining what we should do to influence publishers act in a different way. They are quite capable of thinking more pages and higher prices are the only solutions to a growing academic community and the need to maintain corporate profits. Most libraries today in America are besieged with “committee-itus.” Like the carpenter with a hammer who sees everything as a nail, most of us have never met a library problem that could not be solved by a committee, subcommittee, or task force. The problem is, such an approach bleeds us of the energy and ability to think creatively or do the actual work at hand. We can spend months on problems, taking care to protect each other’s turf, instead of really working together to find new solutions to old problems.

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