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How the Other Half Lives: My Experience in Crossing Over to the Vendor Side

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

One part of acquisitions that I really enjoy is working with vendors. I like meeting the company reps, the deal-making, finding out about new companies, and I have sometimes wondered what it would be like to work for a vendor if I ever tire of libraries. (Never hurts to keep one's options open, eh?) Well, I recently got my chance to be a **Vendor for a Day**.

MINITEX, a big library consortium based in Minneapolis and representing Minnesota and the Dakotas, was having a meeting in May about electronic journals management. They had invited **JournalWebCite (JWC)**, **Serials Solutions**, and **TDNet** to give presentations; in addition, they asked each company to bring a client. Now, if you read **ATG** and/or are on **SERIALST**, you know that I'm a vocal and enthusiastic supporter of **Serials Solutions**. However, I was still stunned when **Tim Granquist** called and asked me if I would represent them. I ac-

cepted, and when I mentioned this to **Katina**, she said, "Oh, you're crossing over. Write an article about it."

The basic structure of the meeting was that each vendor would make his presentation in the morning and the librarians would speak in the afternoon. **Angi Faiks**, the coordinator of this meeting, sent all of us a list of questions that she thought could serve as a guideline. The two other librarians were: **Donald Root**, Assistant Chief, Collection Development Office of the **Free Library of Philadelphia** representing **JWC**; and **Gregory Szczyrbak**, Assistant Professor and Reference Librarian, **York College of Pennsylvania** representing **TDNet**. The company reps were **Ben Adams** and **Mark Glynn** of **JWC**, **Chris Pierard** of **Serials Solutions**, and **David Fritsch** of **TDNet**.

MINITEX took all of out to dinner the night before, and told us that about 90 people

were attending, some driving as much as six hours each way THAT DAY. All I could think of was, I hope my talk is good enough to make it worth the trip! The meeting was held at the **University of Minnesota** and it was very well-organized, with handout packets and **PowerPoint** setups ready to roll. Interestingly, the vendors were not allowed to hear each other's presentations; I found that curious since they all know each other and are at countless library meetings together. I'm sure **MINITEX** had their reasons, maybe something about confidentiality. Anyway, the vendors were able to be present when the librarians spoke, and we all sat in a panel-type formation for the Q&A session at the end.

I had struggled with the issue of mentioning anything negative about **Serials Solutions**. One of my co-workers said I was there to sell **Serials Solutions** and should not admit any weaknesses, even if they were only minor; however, in the end I decided that since **MINITEX** was paying my expenses and I had been asked to participate as a client, I

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owed it to **MINITEX** to give my honest opinion. I found it very interesting that both **Don** and **Greg** had apparently made the same decision as they both mentioned minor problems with their respective companies' products.

The group dynamics were interesting. I had not known what to expect in terms of how we would all get along, especially since this was sort of a "dueling vendors" scenario. Between the vendor reps, there was a somewhat stiff cordiality. The librarians quickly hit it off and started comparing notes: "What do you do about this?" "How do you handle that?" "What system do you have?" We talked about past job experiences and I found someone (**Don**) who has changed jobs even more often than I have. We quickly established a rapport and camaraderie, and even though we were doing our best to represent our respective companies, we were not in direct competition with each other, not like the vendors were. Also, I think the fact that librarians are infinitely curious about other libraries and love to share information won out.

The issue of librarians crossing over to the vendor's side was also the topic for a session at the **NASIG** meeting in June; the session was packed, so obviously this is something librarians think about. Another issue is conflict of interest. My library director, **Tom Henderson**, was very supportive of letting me "go on the road," but cautioned me about being a "mouthpiece" for **Serials Solutions**. I justify it in that **MINITEX** wanted me there as a client to give my honest opinion, and they paid my expenses. I have been contacted many times as a reference for **Serials Solutions** because librarians have seen my name on previous articles in **ATG** or on **SERIALST**. All I can say is, I try to be careful. I think we all have our favorite services/vendors, and we're happy to share information about them — again, part of our inquisitiveness. Due to the proliferation of email and listservs, it's very easy to put out a request for information, or to contact someone you see mentioned. The practical side of it is that we don't want to waste our time and money on a service that isn't very good, so we want information; and who better to ask than an existing client?

I now have a new appreciation for what vendors do, especially the ones who travel and have to give presentations over and over. I enjoyed talking about **Serials Solutions** and felt honored to be representing them, but it was some work. This one little weekend trip was exhausting, not only from the traveling (I won't get into what happened to my flights up there) but from the stress of giving my presentation. So the next time a company rep travels to visit you, pour 'em a strong cup of coffee, because odds are they need it. 

Issues in Vendor/Library Relations — Reading the Map

by **Bob Nardini** (Senior Vice President & Head Bibliographer, YBP Library Services, 999 Maple Street, Contoocook, NH 03229; Phone: 800-258-3774x3251; Fax: 603-746-5628) <rnardini@YBP.com>

Column Editor's Note: This column is based on an "interview" with Peter Briscoe. Last year he wrote a pamphlet excoriating librarians, some librarians anyway, for not reading enough. Peter Briscoe is Associate University Librarian for Collection Development, University of California, Riverside.

BN: Peter, your *Reading the Map of Knowledge: The Art of Being a Librarian* has created a little buzz. I understand that even **Larry McMurtry** has had something to say about it. I have my own copy, and I must say, that I read it several times—all 27 pages—I enjoyed it so well.

PB: Bob, I wrote the pamphlet because I was alarmed by the growing number of illiterate librarians. The term is an oxymoron, but the phenomenon is widespread. It denotes librarians who no longer bother to read...especially books. I find them everywhere, from recent library school graduates to library directors. But the alarm bell went off when I noticed the phenomenon among my own colleagues—collection development officers of research libraries—formerly a highly literate group. When I was a young CDO twenty years ago, I was very impressed by the level of culture of my colleagues, nearly all of them older than I. Dinner table conversation was sparkling. They were well read, well traveled, often knew one or two foreign languages, and loved the arts. A number of them were amateur musicians. It goes without saying that they knew the book trade intimately and enjoyed the company of booksellers. What a change has taken place! Today, at the dinner table, I almost never hear my colleagues discuss exciting books or plays they've seen or even good movies. Instead, they're apt to pass around pictures of their dogs.

The other thing I tried to do in the pamphlet was impart some strategies for discerning quality amidst the overwhelming quantity of a library collection. This is the real art of librarianship—essential for intelligent personal reading, preparing bibliographies, selecting books, and doing advanced reference. As for **Larry McMurtry**, I sent him a copy of the pamphlet because of my admiration for his recent book, **Walter Benjamin at the**

Dairy Queen, which has wonderful essays on reading, book scouting, and bookselling. He read it right away, and shot me back a nice letter saying that he liked it a lot.

BN: I'm not surprised to hear that. You have a clean, elegant style of writing that I'm sure he noticed. Your style, in fact, was almost an argument in itself, in support of your argument about librarianship today; or, at least, an example in support of your argument, showing what one gains, or earns, from a lifetime's worth of reading. You've proven yourself quite a pamphleteer. And in that tradition — speaking of your argument — I'll bet that congratulation and praise is not the only reaction you've seen from your own readers.

PB: I have found that readers either really like the pamphlet or consider it "weird" — nothing in between. There is a gulf forming between librarians. One — from the other side — told me that she is tired of reading, and looks forward to the day when a black box will tell her what a book says. Is that psychosis or science fiction?

BN: I don't imagine your purpose in writing the pamphlet was to get "in between" responses from anyone, so it sounds like you did your job. I'm not sure whether it would be psychosis or science fiction. Maybe both. Or maybe neither. She had a point, in a way. It's certainly possible today to make a good career as a librarian without reading a great many books. And even if you do want to read, it's certainly easy to get discouraged at the always-increasing number of books that you want to read, or ought to read, but will never crack. Not to mention those you'll never even hear of. That black box might come in handy for us all. A new kind of abstracting service. You addressed this question in the pamphlet: How to find the time to read?

PB: I agree with the late **Frances Clarke Sayers** (professor of library service at **UCLA** and author of *Summoned by Books*) that a librarian who doesn't read is fundamentally no good. The problem of quantity, of there being too many books to read, has always been with us. The *Book of Ecclesiastes* registers the first known complaint. And since then things have only gotten worse—a lot worse—which is precisely why the world needs

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