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International Dateline

Anthony Watkinson

City University, anthony.watkinson@btinternet.com

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International Dateline

by **Anthony Watkinson** (Visiting Professor in Information Science at City University, London, England) <anthony.watkinson@btinternet.com>

I am very aware that “international” does not mean Europe and Europe cannot be equated with the UK, but it does seem to me that the UK is currently where most developments of interest are happening so it is back there again. The literature is of course also in English, which helps some of us.

The big news in Europe this few months has been the prospect of even greater consolidation among the big publishers, with **Blackwell** threatened by a trade sale, while in the middle of an integration process, and **Kluwer Academic** officially open to offers. It is the sort of news picked up by the financial analysts, but is it of serious importance to information professionals in general? Some pundits suggest that there is an inexorable trend towards only one or two big publishers, and, if so, are we seeing a process speeding up? Many of us hope not.

There has been a lot of speculation about who will buy which company, and, as I have access to no special information, I shall refrain from adding my bit of guesswork. I would however like to draw the attention of *ATG* readers to another development that has not been much commented on. This is the apparent withdrawal of the Dutch from their commanding positions at the top of the operating side of two of the largest players. They may be sitting there in the Netherlands counting the money but they are not on the whole out there in the field, with the very honourable exception of **Derk Haank**, in the way they once were.

I am referring to **Elsevier Science** and **Wolter Kluwer** and specifically to their medical operations. Now that **Elsevier** has absorbed **Harcourt**, these two companies are in a very dominant position in the marketplace with most of the famous imprints under their respective belts, including **Saunders**, **Mosby**, **Williams & Wilkins**, and **Churchill-Livingstone** to name a selection. What is interesting is that **Elsevier Health Sciences** is run out of North America, and headquartered for practical purposes in Philadelphia. The CEO is **Brian Nairn** who is a Scottish-American and whose career in publishing has not been from within the STM sector. **Elsevier** is treating books seriously. Meanwhile the equivalent structure in **Kluwer** is also based in Philadelphia and is headed up by **Christopher Ainsley**, who has brought a fresh look to **Wolters Kluwer** priorities in academic and professional publisher. His background in publishing is not unlike that of **Brian Nairn**. Only time will tell what these changes will mean for the libraries and the end-users; it should certainly mean a greater responsiveness to the main market.

I have mentioned that these new structures seem to accept the book as a valid way of transferring information and communicating knowledge. Not long ago some big publishers lost interest in books rather comprehensively and, although almost every librarian I have met actually likes books and is ambivalent about serials, much of the thinking in our information chain has been about journals. I wrote an article and a larger piece of work over a year ago now, in which I drew attention to the slowness of developments in the eBook area. Publishers were experimenting rather than preparing serious plans and they were not taking seriously the infrastructures necessarily to host their own programmes. What surprised me then was how little notice book publishers were taking of all the experience of online journals, even where they only had to walk a few doors to talk to a colleague. The offerings from intermediaries did not seem to have gained the confidence of many and in any case only **netLibrary** was really out their trading. Many librarians were keen and at least some of their end-users were really interested, but they had little to give their patrons and no clear idea of the sort of developments they wanted.

Within a year a lot has changed. What is fascinating to someone who lived through the slow development of online journals is the speed at which first aggregators began packaging and then publishers started producing their own packages. There is serious thinking and (it would seem) serious investment — particularly among publishers. I was prompted to write this section by various developments in the UK (again), but the trigger event (as we archiving people call it) was a very perceptive article by **Margaret Landesman** in the latest issue of *The Charleston Advisor*. Those subscribers to *ATG* who do not subscribe to *TCA* also are not only foolish but missing out on some really serious think pieces as well as the mandatory reviews — see www.charlestonco.com for subscription information.

Margaret writes persuasively about the need for new models for online books and makes some suggestions. In the UK, where as I explained in the February issue, there is something of a “command economy” in at least part of information provision, some new models are being tried out and it is these models that I want to bring to the attention of *ATG* readers. Basically the UK higher education (academic) and further education (vocational and technical) is funded by central government and **JISC**, a committee of the funding council, is able to do large-scale ex-



periments across libraries. The relevant references are <http://www.jisc.ac.uk/dner/ebooks/> for the **JISC eBooks Working Group** and for **PELICAN** <http://www.lboro.ac.uk/departments/ls/disresearch/pelican/indexpage.html> but the former is somewhat reticent and definitely out of date and the latter is one big report.

The **eBook Working Group (EBWG)** is taking stock of what it has learnt and is planning its development for the next year or so. It has done deals with a number of players including **Wiley Reference Works**, but it is now concentrating on portfolios. For example the key demand coming up from the libraries seems to be for reference in e-form. **EBWG** is designing a core electronic reference collection from the offerings of leading reference publishers plus the aggregator **X-Refer**. If and when a reasonable portfolio is put together it will be made available across the whole system, to each individual library in the sectors concerned. Payment will be according to charging models elaborated by **JISC** and there will even be subsidy (for portfolios only) to encourage take-up. Experience to date is that aggregators are unable to offer high levels of discount for access to their material, but the positive value of a broad ranging collection with a single interface may counterbalance this.

EBWG is also taking a proactive approach to the publication of e-monographs, particularly textbooks or books used as texts. Librarians have ranked heavy demand items, particularly core texts, as the highest of their e-priorities. What business models are available and what are acceptable to the academic community? In the early days of journals online, publishers and librarians did not usually talk about models. In this new context publishers are coming to **EBWG** for advice and/or feedback on models. **Oxford Scholarship Online**, presented at **Charleston 2001** as a work in progress is an example of a difficult offer being worked out with full library input. **EBWG** research indicates that textbook pricing is being increasingly based on a combination of user accesses and time. For example, an institution may buy a certain number of user licenses (e.g., based on the number of students on a course) for a block of time (e.g., one week).

The second **JISC** enterprise I want to bring to *ATG* readers reported earlier in the spring. This is **PELICAN**. Words do fit the initials but the ever-inventive **Charles Oppenheim** chose the name because of the

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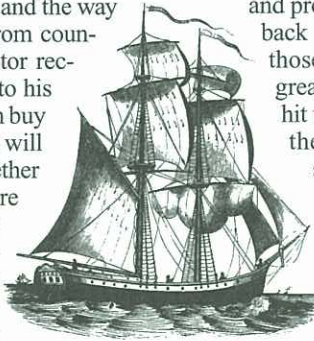
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project's association with **HERON** (<http://www.heron.ac.uk>). These are projects concerned with the demand for digitised coursepacks as part of student instruction. **HERON** is an ongoing operation, which has now built up a copyright cleared corpus, and has moved into the private sector following purchase by the acquisitive **ingenta**: for details of the acquisition see the press releases on <http://www.ingenta.com>.

PELICAN homed in on a problem, which will be familiar to readers world-wide, although the terminology used and the way the system operates varies from country to country. If an instructor recommends a (print) textbook to his or her students, not all of them buy it and the number purchasing will depend to some extent on whether or not it is advocated as a core text for essential reading or as a text recommended for additional reading. The library may buy multiple copies for a short-loan collection but essentially the problem of accessing this text is one for the students. If an instructor, through his or her library, clears a digital coursepack through **HERON** the coursepack is characteristically provided for all the students. The library, which takes responsibility



for such provision in the UK, pays for this provision at a fee per page multiplied by the number of enrolled students. The end-result is that the library cannot afford this fee and there is an unsatisfied patron.

How does **PELICAN** deal with this central problem? Coming from Europe a centralised agency, perhaps **HERON** again, is recommended for the administration of a system. It would do much of what the **CCC** is now doing but it would have to be trusted by all parties. Like all sensible researchers, the **PELICAN** team call for further research, but on the way to what is a central conclusion they throw up some fascinating models and provide a record of a lot of feedback from all relevant sectors. For those who like models these are great, but to my mind they do not hit the spot. My own view is that the future researchers, whom surely **JISC** will fund, should read **TCA** and **Landesman** and look seriously at the apparent possibility of micropayments being manageable and not prohibitively expensive. If micropayments are possible usage can be the key and some aspects of the problem set out above will disappear. But of course success will depend on publisher pricing, library funding, an understanding of what end-users want, and of course co-operation. 

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And, speaking of **INTERVIEWS**, is there someone **YOU** would like to interview? Maybe a colleague? It's great fun and very stimulating. If you want to interview someone or if you want us to interview someone specific, write and tell me! <strauchk@earthlink.net>.



Sad news. **Judy Luther's** longtime mate — **Dick North** — passed away recently with cancer. We send her our condolences, sympathy and love.

An apology! To the fabulous, splendid, wonderful, handsome, eloquent **Don Jaeger** — We called him **Alfred Jaeger** in the February issue (v.14#1), not once but twice! In the Table of Contents (p.5) and in his actual **On the Road** article (p.36). Excuse me, **Don!** Mea culpa, culpa, culpa! Oops!

Please note: **Bob Molyneux** — the great — sent in a **Devil's Advocate** for this issue. We were not able to include it. See it online at <http://www.against-the-grain.com>.

Well, I have to go. We are having **Tony Ferguson's** son, **Matt**, over for supper tonight. **Matt** is in Charleston training for the **INS!** We are looking forward to meeting him! Happy summer and see you in Atlanta and Charleston! 