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ATG Interviews David Dekker

Chief Operating Officer, Marcel Dekker, Inc. <ddekker@dekker.com>

by **Katina Strauch** (Editor, *Against the Grain*, MSC 98, The Citadel, Charleston, SC 29409; Phone & Fax: 843-723-3536) <strauchk@earthlink.net> www.against-the-grain.com

ATG: We see that this is your 40th anniversary year. Congratulations! Tell us about Marcel Dekker, Inc. What are the company's beginnings and where are you today?

DD: My father founded Marcel Dekker with one employee — himself. A number of years later, my grandfather, Maurits Dekker, joined him after retiring from Wiley. Maurits was the founder of Interscience, which he sold to Wiley in 1962. Today, Dekker has grown into an international publishing house with offices in Basel, Switzerland and upstate New York, as well as our headquarters in Manhattan. 2003 marks the 40th anniversary of Dekker, and it's incredible to reflect on the company's evolution. We have grown from a one-man show to a global operation. With the Internet and digital media, the past ten years have been particularly exciting. Our content offerings have expanded from a few books to over 4,000 available titles in both print and electronic formats.

ATG: Tell us more about your father. Where did he and his father, Maurits, get their love of publishing and desire to work in the publishing world?

DD: Publishing and the fields of science and technology were common dinner table topics growing up. My grandfather's educational background was in chemistry, but in order to get financially settled and persuade my great grandfather to approve his marrying my grandmother, he started selling books, and eventually started his own business in 1927 in Amsterdam. He later went on to establish Elsevier's American editorial operation, which is what got him and his family out of Holland before the Nazis invaded. In 1940, he and Erik Proskauer founded Interscience Publishers, which merged with Wiley in 1962. My father continued the tradition of independent publishing by starting Marcel Dekker, Inc. in 1963.

ATG: How many people work for Dekker in how many countries?

DD: We have 166 employees in the U.S. and 8 employees in Switzerland. We also have 22 sales representatives. These representatives call on booksellers, libraries, consortia, universities, and corporate and government research institutions. Dekker representatives have contact in virtually every country around the globe.

ATG: You are awfully young to be running a major publishing house.

DD: Luckily for me, I'm not running it alone. My brother, Russell, who is Chief Publishing Officer, is an incredible publisher and shares the leadership. We love working together and make a great team that's proven effective thus far. Our skill sets are very different but complementary; I tend to be financially oriented and a strategic planner which complements Russell's editorial skills.

We also have great management and staff with decades of collective knowledge. I feel privileged to be working with Dekker veterans, who provide insight and experience, and many new members, who offer fresh perspectives and creative approaches. They stay abreast of trends in the industry and changes in customer needs and are constantly pushing the envelope with ways in which we can improve and grow.

ATG: So Dekker is a privately owned company? One of a shrinking number?

DD: Yes. Even though Dekker has grown considerably over the years, we have remained a private, family-owned company. I believe that our independence has enabled us never to lose sight of our primary objectives in serving customers — allowing not only direct relationships with our customers, but also to adapt to their changing needs. Being independent also allows us to make decisions quickly. Public companies take longer to adjust to industry changes, as investors' more conservative interests very often take priority over customers' evolving needs. In contrast, Dekker has always tried to be on the forefront of new trends and scientific discoveries, as well as ventures in electronic content development and customer relationship management.

ATG: Okay. Can you give an example of how Dekker uses customer feedback in its decision-making?

DD: Dekker couldn't have revamped its Encyclopedia Program without information from customers. For instance, we recently released a completely revised version of the *Encyclopedia of Pharmaceutical Technology* using feedback from librarians who informed us that serial publications are no longer effective or affordable. As a result, we condensed the previous 18-volume edition of *EPT* — which took over 15 years to develop — into a 3-volume set, printed at one time. Additionally, the online edition has been simultaneously made available on Dekker.com on a subscription basis.

ATG: You have just appointed an Advisory Board of Librarians, we understand?

DD: Any organization that makes its decisions in a vacuum without taking into consideration its customers' needs is doomed. Dekker listens to and analyzes customers' concerns and uses this information in operational decision-making. For instance, Dekker tracks all customer service interactions. Management looks for call patterns and identifies customer pain points with the organization. Through this feedback loop, we have corrected confusing or annoying aspects of dekker.com by simplifying the process of purchasing online articles and decreasing load time of our tables of contents. In a more proactive approach, Dekker recently conducted a survey at conferences it attended in an effort to gain perspective on user prefer-

ences. This information has provided an insight into customer needs that was never before quantified. Dekker also conducted telephone interviews with respected library customers to further understand our customers' perception of us and to determine how we could better serve their content needs in the future. Most recently, Dekker formed an academic library advisory board that held its first meeting at ALA this past January. Composed of prominent librarians from all over the country, the board's purpose is to increase communication between Dekker and the library community in order to identify and implement mutually beneficial services.

ATG: How are online encyclopedias different from print versions? And is it really feasible to update encyclopedias quarterly?

DD: Subscribers to a Dekker online encyclopedia have annual access not only to the content, but also to quarterly updates that will be posted to the content, since encyclopedias must continuously be updated and expanded based on advances. These robust products support many features such as links to bibliographic citations, and enhanced illustrations to mention just a few. Six more Dekker Encyclopedias will be published in 2003, including the *Encyclopedia of Library and Information Science (ELIS)*, and another six are planned for 2004.

ATG: Speaking of ELIS, as the publisher of that landmark work, doesn't that make Dekker more than just a science and medical publisher?

DD: Though Dekker is best known for STM content, we are constantly exploring and evaluating new developments in a variety of fields in order to represent the importance of rapidly emerging subjects and to respond to customers' information needs.

ATG: Can you provide some examples of Dekker's ventures beyond STM?

DD: While Dekker is best known for its science, engineering and medical content, we are also well-known in areas such as Public Administration, with the book series, the *International Journal of Public Administration* and coming in March, *The Encyclopedia of Public Administration and Policy*. In addition to ELIS, Dekker publishes great books in Library Science, such as Manheimer's *Cataloging and Classification*. The journal *Dance Chronicle* is also ours. Dekker is not afraid to pursue publishing opportunities in subjects that are not normally considered in our "areas of expertise" so long as there is a quantitative marketing niche and the quality of the work is of the highest standard.

ATG: Tell us more about Dekker's journal program. What journals are you proudest of?

DD: Dekker publishes almost 80 journals, many of which are essential periodicals in fields of great importance to our customers. Two of

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our oldest and most successful are the *Journal of Liquid Chromatography* and *Synthetic Communications*. Dekker is also proud of the fact that roughly a third of our journals are sponsored by a society or association, which adds credibility that the journal is a key resource in the field. Dekker welcomes society sponsorships, since it is the members of those societies who write and read the articles in those journals. With society support and cooperation, we are better tuned into trends and adjust accordingly.

ATG: You mentioned above that you are publishing eBooks. Are they viable? How would you compare the different approaches by publishers offering eBooks as separate publisher-direct marketing collections like Oxford Online, or in aggregations like ebrary or OCLC's netlibrary?

DD: eBooks are a key part of Dekker's

strategy of giving researchers what they want, when they want it, and how they want it. We have been developing an eBook strategy for our site for some time and are now on the verge of launching the first collection of 360 titles on dekker.com. We have been very active with eBooks and there are presently over 2000 Dekker eBooks available on netLibrary.

ATG: What are/were some of your milestones with digital content initiatives? Where are you today?

DD: Dekker first ventured into digital publishing in 1997, when we offered static PDF for select journals on the first version of our Website, dekker.com. Our new site, which launched in 2000, is light years ahead in terms of content, functionality, and searching. It currently offers customers instant access to all Dekker journals and encyclopedias in both HTML and PDF formats and features a two-minute fulltext preview of online content — not just the abstracts — prior to purchasing. We are confident that

the quality of our products is of the highest standard, and we're not shy about demonstrating it, even prior to purchase.

ATG: With all of the changes in the industry, would you say Dekker is moving away from traditional book publishing?

DD: The book business is still a core aspect of Dekker's strategy and will continue to be as long as they remain essential to customers. I think if anything, Dekker's book program has matured in a very healthy way over the years. In 2002 Dekker published over 200 new book titles. The majority of our books tend to be professional reference, and they are extremely comprehensive; we pride ourselves on their quality, quantity, and extended-usability. We are especially proud of our book program in the fields of Pulmonary Medicine, Separation Science, and Surface Science.

ATG: Any plans to deliver medical content to hand-held devices?

DD: Dekker has initiated a multi-pronged eBook initiative, which in addition to partnering with key eBook distributors, also includes the launch of a major eBook offering, Dekker Digital, on dekker.com in 2003. Plans to deliver appropriate content to hand-held devices are definitely in the works, but they will be shaped by the success of other Dekker eBook efforts and identifying how well our content suits the PDA market.

ATG: From the publisher's perspective, what is the value of digital content to academic librarians?

DD: I think digital content has enabled libraries to increase the breadth of their collections without concern for space limitations, and it provides a solution to archiving historical works. In this current economic climate of major budget cuts, digital content also provides a less expensive alternative and does not compromise the quality of material offered to patrons. In turn, digital content is proving indispensable to researchers, educators, and students whose needs for cutting-edge information are time-sensitive. As publishers of scholarly material, Dekker has witnessed this demand firsthand, which we have responded to aggressively.

ATG: Do you see search engines like Google as a friend or a foe?

DD: Both. Libraries and users benefit from search engines in that they serve as research tools that allow capacity beyond the confines of a library's holdings. Their navigation abilities in helping users pinpoint exactly what they're looking for are revolutionary. In turn, they are also a friend to Dekker, in that they direct a tremendous number of users to Dekker content and to the Dekker site.

Customization of distribution sites also helps facilitate this process. If a user enters the dekker.com from a computer at, say, UCLA, the site will recognize the user and display "Welcome UCLA member." The greeting notifies the user that their library is affiliated with Dekker and lets them know whether or not they have pre-existing access to a product through their institution. If the user finds that they don't have institutional access to a product, dekker.com gives them the option to view it on a pay-per-view basis.

ATG: And the cons?

DD: Well, despite the undeniable benefits, search engines present some obvious problems. First is whether Google users fit the profile of the typical premium content researcher. Next, out of the thousands

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publisher profiles encouraged

Marcel Dekker, Inc.

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Web address: www.dekker.com

Founded: 1963

Founder: Marcel Dekker

Officers:

Chief Operating Officer: David Dekker

Chief Publishing Officer: Russell Dekker

No. Employees in US: 162

No. Employees in Switzerland: 8

No. Sales Representatives: 22

Mission Statement: Marcel Dekker, Inc. is dedicated to providing the global community of researchers, educators, and professionals with information of the highest quality in science, technology and medicine. Dekker distinguishes itself by striving to be the best, rather than the biggest. Founded and established on family principles and independent publishing tradition, Dekker recognizes the importance on timely scholarship for generating authoritative communication. Together with leading experts, Dekker produces and distributes peer-reviewed books, journals, and encyclopedias on rapidly evolving topics, and makes critical information available to customers in whatever media they choose. 🐘

of “hits” Google may return for a single query, how well it ranks the results can be a problem for a publisher. Surveys tell us many researchers are putting Google near the top of their information finding tools, even ahead of other vehicles that may deliver more specific or relevant results. While Google is challenged to glean the higher quality results, publishers need to optimize their content continuously so that these search engines can accurately find the content and sequentially rank its relevance.

ATG: *How influenced are you as a publisher by the “me too” factor? Do you find yourself taking initiatives that you probably wouldn’t do but since everyone else is doing it, you feel you have to keep up? Examples?*

DD: Dekker is not so much influenced by the “me too” factor as by what its customer base wants and needs. We add services as needed and keep on top of industry trends just as other publishers must do; however, I generally don’t compare Dekker to other publishing companies because we are unique. As an independent STM publisher, we make decisions rather rapidly without committees. We concentrate on adding services to our customers and adding value to the publishing process because that is what we want to do, not because it is what other publishers might be doing.

ATG: *Let’s talk about DOI and Open URLs. What are the benefits to publisher and researcher?*

DD: It’s all about options and exposure. DOI and Open URL provide researchers a new set of tools that will enhance and enrich their Web experience while making their activities more productive. For publishers, especially in the small to mid-sized space, these standards provide a new point of access to our content for users we may never have otherwise reached. Once the technical hurdles are cleared, both DOI and Open URLs could become part of the most powerful search tools available to a researcher, helping Dekker fulfill its desire to give researchers exactly what they want, when they want it.

ATG: *We know that you have recently been appointed to Peter Shepherd’s COUNTER group. As a publisher, what do you think of COUNTER?*

DD: New technology brings with it new opportunities and new challenges. The introduction of electronic journals in libraries has certainly given many patrons the opportunity to access information that was previously unavailable or difficult to locate. However, this new distribution medium has, in many ways, removed the librarian from direct involvement with patrons who are seeking access to scholarly materials, making traditional evaluation of journal usage less relevant.

The introduction of Web usage statistics was an initial attempt on the part of librarians and publishers to adapt to the new metrics of journal usage by providing the library with reports gathered from the publisher’s Websites. Project COUNTER is the next logical step in that process that will eventually set the standards for

reporting to libraries, and thereby simplify the analysis of this critical data.

Dekker will support the efforts of COUNTER and ICOLC vigorously to make the standards both useful and practical for all parties involved.

ATG: *As a publisher, what do you think of CrossRef? Is it beneficial to libraries or is it just another way publishers have designed to get money out of libraries?*

DD: First of all, it is possible to use content that contains CrossRef-enabled links without incurring any cost whatsoever for following a link. The model supports direct navigation from an active reference within an article to a publisher’s Website where, at minimum, the user will be able to see the full bibliographic record and the abstract of the target article free of charge. As a function of our enhanced Web Services, Dekker has implemented free timed access to the article’s fulltext for all users, regardless of their host’s subscription restrictions. To my knowledge, a charge to the library is imposed by CrossRef only in the case of libraries electing to run searches of the CrossRef database directly.

While the business plan initially circulated by the CrossRef organization (now PILA) discusses revenue generating opportunities, it is unclear at this time whether it is realistic to expect any return on the significant investment incurred in Dekker’s ongoing implementation efforts. By making the identification and retrieval of relevant information during the research process easier, it could be expected that there would be some commercial opportunity possible via the sale of individual articles. It will likely take several years before the number of active links and the available content make this significant, however.

Having said that, it is very likely that Dekker would have made this investment anyway, as would most of the other member publishers. CrossRef, even in this first implementation, represents a huge step forward for researchers in the location and access to scholarly information, and researchers represent our primary user base. The efforts on the part of publishers and independent organizations to further develop CrossRef and complementary systems like Open URL should be welcomed by the academic and research communities with the knowledge that these tools have primarily been designed to empower them and improve on their abilities to push their disciplines forward.

ATG: *Recently, there has been much, much discussion of articles that have been removed from electronic aggregations of publishers for one reason or another. Has Dekker ever done this? Will Dekker do this in the future?*

DD: To date, Dekker has never had cause to remove an article from its electronic publications. We capitalize on every quality control measure available to prevent this problem. However, we realize that we may be called upon to remove an article for some legitimate legal reason in the future. We are currently researching the legal ramifications of any actions we might take since this is a very new area of law. We will make every effort to avoid deleting an article. At minimum, if compelled to remove an

article, we would retain the metadata for the article and place a “marker” indicating that the article had been pulled and explaining the reason for removal.

ATG: *You spoke earlier about Pay Per View? What do you think of Print on Demand or Pay Per View? Will either of these models work for the publisher’s revenue stream?*

DD: Nothing speaks to our commitment to give our customers exactly the information they want, when they want it, and how they want it more than POD and PPV. POD allows us to lengthen a product’s availability while still controlling production costs. Dekker serves a very specific readership, and POD enabled us to address these needs without having to make costly assumptions. Plans are underway to utilize our POD relationships to also expedite article reprints, giving our customers multiple copies of an article with high quality paper and binding. We are confident the many applications of POD solutions will have a continuing positive effect on revenue.

PPV is yet another means of meeting the needs of a customer we may have previously been unable to address. All Dekker articles are available individually on dekker.com. Users on the site can preview the ENTIRE article in HTML before purchasing and downloading the PDF. While it is still too early to gauge its overall effect on revenue, we have seen a significant increase in PPV activity as users discover this timely option in their research.

ATG: *Can you comment on some of the portal technology that was being touted at ALA Midwinter?*

DD: It’s early in the game to really have a solid idea of how useful and successful portal technology will be at Dekker, if we decide to make that move. Any new technology takes time to be completely understood and implemented, and it seems as if there are still a lot of questions in regard to exactly what portal technology can do.

ATG: *In a world of large multi-national publishers, what does the future hold for Dekker?*

DD: Dekker’s focus has always been on being the best, not the biggest. Our customers are highly sophisticated and educated, and their needs are dictated by quality and timeliness of the information offered. Irrespective of the goings-on of other publishing houses, this emphasis to our customers and our business is what has made Dekker successful over the past forty years and what I believe will drive Dekker’s future success.

ATG: *Do you believe that businesses have a responsibility in the future to the community that extends beyond their corporate objectives?*

DD: Absolutely. In fact, I believe it’s impossible to separate one’s business from the larger community, and that if a company starts working in a mindset that divorces its corporate goals from the “outside world,” then it will ultimately fail. As an independent, customer-oriented company, Dekker is particularly attuned to the fact that we are a part of the larger community. We realize that being a positive part of

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ATG Interviews Sara Randal and Harry Samuels

Sara Randall (Manager, Digital Library Product Management, Endeavor Information Systems)

Harry Samuels (Digital Library Projects Coordinator, Endeavor Information Systems)

by Rick Lugg and Ruth Fischer (R2 Consulting, 63 Woodwell's Garrison, Contoocook, NH 03229;
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TOPIC: Open URL Linking for Collections and Technical Services

In our series of articles on the Virtual Approval Plan concept, which appeared in the June 2002 issue of *ATG*, we explored in general terms tools that might be used to create links from a library selector's integrated library system (ILS), or other source, to a range of extended metadata and services—allowing a library selector or acquisitions staff member to access additional data and services.

In past issues, we've looked more closely at specific tools, including *WebBridge* (designed and built by *Innovative Interfaces*) and *SFX* (owned by *Ex Libris*). In this interview, we'll look at *LinkFinderPlus*, the link resolver offered by *Endeavor Information Systems*.

A link resolver such as *LinkFinderPlus* accepts a query from an OpenURL-enabled source, and, using a library-maintained database of links, presents the user with a list of available resources [targets]. Once the user selects a target, the link resolver directs the user to the target, retaining the metadata captured from the source. Configuring and maintaining target resources in the link resolver are among the most important tasks in making this sort of resource linking effective. In the conversation that follows, we'll focus on options for populating and maintaining those links. First, some background:

ATG: *LinkFinderPlus* is one component of the *ENCompass* system. Could you briefly

describe *ENCompass* and how the components relate to one another?

SR & HS: We usually talk about three components. First, there's *ENCompass for Resource Access*, which a lot of people refer to as a federated search engine. The user sends a single search to multiple databases, which brings back all results in a single display in *ENCompass*. It supports multi-protocol searches, including Z39.50, XML Gateway, and http. Second, *ENCompass for Digital Collections*, which allows libraries to provide their own digital content over the Web. It also integrates searches across those digital collections, the library's OPAC, and Z39.50 resources. The third piece is *LinkFinderPlus*, which is an OpenURL resolver. It can take input from OpenURL source, and link the user to a designated target resource or service.

ATG: How many customers do you have at present?

SR & HS: There are 96 *LinkFinderPlus* sites, 75 of which are part of *ENCompass* installations, and the rest of which are standalone sites.

ATG: *LinkFinderPlus*, like its competitors, relies on receiving requests in OpenURL format. That NISO standard is still under development from version 0.1 to 1.0 — can you update us briefly on where that stands?

SR & HS: [Harry Samuels] is a member of the NISO committee working on this. The committee does have a timeline, which projects going to testing of version 1.0 of the OpenURL standard this Spring.

ATG: In the meantime, though, 0.1 serves the purpose?

SR & HS: Yes, 0.1 really is a de facto standard.

ATG: Can *LinkFinderPlus* accept an OpenURL request from any "valid" source? Your literature specifically mentions *FirstSearch*, *ProQuest*, *EBSCOhost*, *Gale*, and *Engineering Village* as "proven" — but I assume there are many more?

SR & HS: Yes, in fact we've tested with more sites than appear in our literature right now. It's difficult to keep up with the number of sites that want to provide this kind of interoperability. We've yet to find a resource that sends out OpenURLs where we can't process it.

ATG: So there's a specific testing process *Endeavor* goes through with each source?

SR & HS: No, actually there isn't. We'll do it if it's been requested by the content provider or if there's a mutual customer that wants testing. But we got to a point where it was just too difficult to try to keep up with everyone who was announcing that they were OpenURL-compliant. We're really getting to a stage where it's more like the Z39.50 model, where someone says they communicate OpenURL (whether on sending or receiving end) and interoperability is assumed.

ATG: Hmm, sort of like a standard! And if it doesn't work out, there's some problem solving after the fact...

SR & HS: Yes. What we have run into is that a user can optimize the OpenURL to the different link resolvers out there, so that a content provider may find that with *LinkFinderPlus*, we can do this instead of that, but it's all within the standard.

ATG: What advantages do you think *LinkFinderPlus* has that sets it apart from other link resolvers? Are there things you think it does especially well?

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Interview — Dekker from page 57

the educational and research communities will benefit ourselves as well.

ATG: So what has Dekker done to be proactive in the larger community?

DD: In 1997, we established the *Dekker Foundation* with the goal of extending financial support for educational and research purposes. Because today's struggling undergrad may be tomorrow's Nobel Prize-winning physicist, we've established a number of scholarships and fellowships in conjunction with well-respected associations.

In addition to our larger awards, the Foundation also makes annual donations to causes

such as Freedom of Speech, combating homelessness, medical relief, literacy, and environmental preservation. Even though these issues may seem unrelated to Dekker's objectives as an STM publisher, as members of a global community, we believe they are in fact all very interrelated.

ATG: Tell us about David Dekker himself. Do you have a family? What do you do for fun?

DD: I live in Weston, CT with my wife Jen, a schoolteacher, and two great kids, a girl and a boy. I try to introduce my kids to different activities, so hiking and skiing are things we like to do as a family. I strongly believe in having a well-rounded and balanced life.

ATG: With your busy schedule, do you find time for some pleasure reading?

DD: I'm currently reading *Two for the Summit*, by Geoffrey Norman, which is a memoir that reflects on the author's relationship with his daughter through their shared experiences and love of climbing. It's well-written and touches on things which are important to me, such as spending time with my kids, conservation, and getting out into nature.

ATG: Any final thoughts for our readers?

DD: I hope that I have provided some insights on Dekker's business process and philosophy and that libraries will continue to avidly work with good independent publishers and not just the mega-conglomerates. We are always interested in discussing Dekker as a publishing choice for them.