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Devil's Advocate -- Publishers/Vendor Meetings at ALA

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Book Reviews

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is a passionate book lover and a man of strong opinions, making clear exactly where he stands on any issue he touches. He presents a well-organized, sensible, clear guide to the joys and pitfalls of buying books online, fearlessly and with considerable detail critiquing specific Internet bookselling sites.

Windwalker leads one through the process of finding an online seller of the book (new, used or antiquarian) one wants in the most efficient manner possible, recommending specific steps, search engines and sites. Wisely, Google is the last resort. He notes the blurring of lines between new and used at online sites that offer both and counsels that "almost new" books can save one a great deal of money. He offers a paeon to the neighborhood book store as "something worth saving" (and encourages specific actions that will help do just that), lists professional and regional bookseller associations as well as 18 pages of "Great Independent Bookstores," some well known, some not, widely scattered around the U.S. from Maine to Alaska. Here one learns that "Booksense Stores" are those aligned with the **American Booksellers Association** program that provides a Web presence for member bookstores. His advice for evaluating online booksellers can prevent a fair amount of misery and help buyers avoid ordering and paying for a book that never arrives and about which there will never be any further communication.

Some chapters will be less widely relevant for the acquisitions librarian (on the job, at least), including "Buying Books for College, Graduate or Professional School," and one on ridding oneself of books no longer wanted. Nevertheless, all contain excellent advice (such as how to identify first editions) and references to further reading and online sites. Chapters such as these also add to the usefulness of this book in a library's reference or circulating collection where it should see much use. Students in particular can benefit from the author's sensible guidance through the pitfalls to the money-saving opportunities in the online book buying world.

Solid advice abounds — on understanding condition descriptions, how to evaluate online sellers and know which ones to avoid, clues to look for that are evidence of professionalism, and positive tips on one's own behavior such as not sending abrupt email messages, being a repeat customer, providing positive feedback and communicating with sellers about problems.

The appendices are of great value. They include a directory of some "great online booksellers" which supplements the list in Chapter III. Be forewarned, these are the author's lists and you may not find your favorites here. For instance, **Powell's of Portland**, Oregon is not listed. Virtually everyone will want to add to these store lists sooner or later. Let the content of *Windwalker's* entries be your guide — he provides the name of the store and its owner, full mailing address, professional memberships, telephone, email, and Website addresses, type of payment accepted, specialties and in many cases a narrative description highlighting the

store's strengths.

There is a good glossary, a list of standard abbreviations, "A Book Buyer's Bill of Rights" (from the **Independent Online Booksellers Association**), and perhaps best of all, an "Online Book Buyers' Transaction Checklist." Photocopy it and keep it handy!

Humor abounds in the last chapter, "A 'Test' for 'Bibliogeeks.'" Many of us will be forced to answer in the affirmative to such questions as "Have you ever left skid marks stopping at a bookstore you hadn't seen before?"

All of this is written in a down to earth, readable style in which Windwalker's zeal for books is matched by his depth of knowledge about buying them online. His emphasis on professionalism and ethical behavior among both buyers and sellers as well as his conservative, careful approach to both buying and selling is refreshing in an arena noted for its Wild West ambiance. *Windwalker* also maintains a Website (www.OnlineBookselling.net) which is quirkier and less well organized than his book, but worth a look.

Librarians using this as a guide for purchasing books for library collections will have some issues not dealt with here, namely, limitations due to the lack of a credit card, staff time needed to seek out the lowest prices and sort out those sources that accurately describe and properly supply needed books, the fact that libraries may prefer new to almost new or used books and will forgo the absolutely lowest price for that

reason, constraints placed on libraries by the bureaucracies of which they are a part, and the fact that they may have already developed the kind of ongoing relationship Windwalker advocates, but with a bookseller who is not online and need not forego that in order to build a new relationship with an online source of similar materials. He admonishes librarians for seeking to buy his previous book from him at full price when it was obtainable at a discount online without acknowledging the exigencies noted above.

Windwalker provides information of use to libraries, noting for instance that a site will accept purchase orders. Nevertheless, he does not deal at all with the existence of traditional library book suppliers and their Internet ordering mechanisms which generally offer services directly tailored to the needs of libraries and may offer better prices than Internet bookstores geared to a general market, at least for new books. This is a guide to booksellers who serve the world at large. Librarians who need or want to do business with some of them will find it reliable. The lack of an index and occasional typos do not seriously detract from the usefulness of this a very personal book filled with the experiences, opinions, common sense, enthusiasm, advice and choices of its author. This is a good thing because those of us who are passionate about buying books do not need a dry, factual tome, but rather a conversation with someone equally passionate. 🐼

Devil's Advocate — Publishers/Vendor Meeting at ALA

by **Robert Molyneux** (Director, Statistics and Surveys, U.S. National Commission on Libraries and Information Science; Phone: 202-606-9181) <bmolyneux@nclis.gov>

Katina asked me to attend the **Publisher/Vendor Library Relations Committee** session at **ALA** and report on it for *Against the Grain*. It was an excellent session. Not many people attended but that fact may have contributed to the lively discussion.

First, the bottom line. I made a prediction the last time I wrote here about serials usage data (see *ATG* v.15#1, p.92-94) that it would take years before the quality of data on the usage of electronic materials would make the "fastidious" happy. I was wrong, it is going to happen quicker.

Now to the details of the meeting and subsequent developments.

There were three speakers: **Denise M. Davis** of the Oregon State Library discussed the **National Information Standards Organization's (NISO) Z39.7** draft standard, **Tom Sanville** of **OhioLINK** reported on the work of the **International Coalition of Library Consortia (ICOLC)** (<http://www.library.yale.edu/consortia/>), and **Richard Gedye** who is Chair of the **COUNTER Steering Group** (<http://www.projectcounter.org/>) discussed the recently released **Code of Practice**.

Ms. Davis is Chair of Standards Committee AY of **NISO**. This committee is responsible for revising the 1995 Z39.7 standard and she reviewed the state of the work of this committee. I reported on this work in the November, 2002 (volume 14 #5) issue of *ATG* on page 85. As I indicated, I am impressed with the work of the committee and I think its work will be the anchor around which future work with our data will build. The **PowerPoint** slides for this talk are linked to at the Committee AY Web page: (http://www.niso.org/committees/committee_ay.html). I defer to my earlier discussion for details on this committee's work.

The next two speakers dealt with the problem of how to measure use of online materials. **ICOLC** published its revised **Guidelines For Statistical Measures of Usage of Web-based Information Resources** in December 2001. The original was published in 1998. (<http://www.projectcounter.org/>)

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www.library.yale.edu/consortia/2001webstats.htm). Mr. Sanville discussed these in light of Release 1 of the Project COUNTER Code of Practice. He said it was unlikely that there would be another revision of this guideline given the work of COUNTER.

The ICOLC Guidelines are certainly easier to read than the Project COUNTER Code of Practice but I think this fact reflects their different purposes. The Guidelines are a strategic direction and a request for data on a host of things related to serials usage from, primarily, folks from the library community. The Code of Practice reads more like a legal document and given the auditing requirement discussed below, such precision seems appropriate while making the document require close attention.

Let me mention one point that Sanville brought up that rather interested me. The Guidelines say as one of the "minimum requirements" that each "data element" can be "delineated" by time period. That is, you would be able to look at your usage data by any time period you chose. Last quarter, last week, last 138 days. Whatever. That certainly would be a useful thing for any reporting system as would being able to look at data by others of those minima such as vendor and so on.

I met a publisher during the conference who talked to me about this specific requirement for data by time period. This person was unambiguous that it was impossible for them to do and, I infer, thought it unreasonable. I don't want to put words in this

person's mouth but the strength of the words chosen to make the point was clear. I bet it could be done but at great expense and time. Too much of each in this person's estimation. I will return to this point after discussing Richard Gedye's talk.

Mr. Gedye, as I have mentioned, reported on Project COUNTER. COUNTER is made up of vendors, publishers, and librarians. As I mentioned in the February 2003 ATG article (15 #1) that discussed Project COUNTER, the problem of getting data on the question of online serials usage was going to be difficult. However, the approach of COUNTER was, I thought—and think—is reasonable. That approach is to start small and build on workable and working data elements. Gedye made that case in his talk. But, the data infrastructure necessary to supply readers of ATG with data they will be happy with will not be built in a day, for reasons I discussed last issue.

One of the more interesting aspects of this initiative is that COUNTER will certify auditors who will audit those vendors supplying online publications and the figures on their use to libraries to ensure that the reported numbers are correct. Given that these vendors are accustomed to auditing, the COUNTER folks think this aspect of their Code will not be a stumbling block.

What about vendors agreeing to make their data COUNTER compliant at all? Given that librarians often are forced to sign contracts saying they cannot share their use data with others, why would vendors agree to something like

COUNTER? Gedye said, in fact, some already had and that he thought that vendors would be under pressure to supply the information. Suppose librarians demanded COUNTER compliant data on use? What would vendors be seen to be hiding if they did not supply the data? And the auditors would keep the process honest.

At the conference, he discussed two vendors (HighWire and Ingenta) who are planning on releasing usage data that comply with the COUNTER Code of Practice. I have since learned more through Mr. Gedye's good offices resulting in emails to me from people at other publishers. Here is the situation as of this writing. There are commitments from these publishers:

- **HighWire** (<http://www.highwire.org/>) intends on having COUNTER compliant reports by the fall so they may be used in renewal decisions. They will also make reports available in the current format because there is more information than in the COUNTER reports.
- **Ingenta** (<http://www.ingenta.com/>) has reported it will be issuing COUNTER compliant reports.
- **The Institute of Physics Publishing** (<http://www.iop.org>) intends on having COUNTER compliant reports by the end of the year and, perhaps as soon as two months. They will have a service that allows the data to be fetched from their Website.
- **Nature Publishing Group** will be

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Joe Lee, Author, *On The Record*

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Editor's Note: Watch for our interview with Joe in the June issue of ATG. Coming Soon! — KS

Born and raised, family, etc: I was born in Jackson, MS in 1965. I'm the oldest of two children. We moved from Jackson to Morristown, NJ, in 1970. We returned to Jackson in 1973. We were there three years before moving for a year to Leake County, MS. From there to Starkville, MS, in 1977. I went to high school and college in Starkville, graduating in 1987. I lived in Tuscaloosa, AL, for six months in 1987 before returning to Starkville late that year. I left for Jackson, MS, in 1991. I've been in the Jackson area since, except for an eight-month period in 1996-1997 when we were in Meridian, MS, (long story).

Education: I'm a 1983 graduate of Starkville High School. I'm a 1987 graduate of Mississippi State University with a degree in Communication (Radio/TV emphasis).

First job: I worked part-time for a couple of months at a small record store in Starkville called The Turntable. I did no serious damage to the store or customer base, although a Rubik's Cube was stolen while I worked there. It was there for decoration, and the manager was quite upset—he wondered what else was taken, since the cube sat one foot from the cash register. The store closed that summer, unfortunately. The manager told me later that the stolen Rubik's Cube had nothing to do with it.

Professional career and activities: I wanted to be the next Casey Kasem when I was in high school. I begged the area radio stations to hire me and landed a position with the locally owned and operated Starkville station in 1982. I made a career of radio into my mid-twenties, then moved into cable television as a commercial writer/producer in Jackson in 1991. I moved into broadcast television several years later, working as a promotions writer/producer, and eventually, as a weatherman. I'm a fill-in weather anchor at WAPT-16 in Jackson (ABC). I got back into radio in Jackson in 1997 and worked part-time at a Jackson station until late 2002. I've also written free-lance articles for several Jackson area newspapers and other publications, and I write free lance brochure copy as well.

My novel, *On The Record* began in 1997. Since I was still working full-time in television, it wasn't until 2000 before I devoted full-time work to it. I started my own publishing company, Dogwood Press, in 2002, and released the novel in August, 2002. Marketing the book is my full-time job. I'm at work on a second novel, and I'm hopeful that it will be released sometime in 2004.

In my spare time: I work from home and take my five-year-old son John to and from school. My wife Leslie is a prosecutor with the Mississippi Attorney General's office. Spending time with them is my top priority and favorite use of spare time. I also read a lot, and I'm a diehard Atlanta Braves baseball fan. I listen to a lot of music, and I play racquetball a couple of times a week and occasionally play in tournaments.

Favorite books: *The Quiet Game* from Greg Iles; *The Prince of Tides* from Pat Conroy; *The Bonfire of the Vanities* and *A Man in Full* from Tom Wolfe; *Presumed Innocent* and *Personal Injuries* from Scott Turow—those are some of my favorite novels from the last two decades. But *Ball Four* by Jim Bouton had a profound impact on my writing. This was a major best-seller in 1970—it's a diary of a year spent playing baseball in Seattle and Houston by a washed-up major leaguer who was at the end of his career. It's candid, humorous, descriptive and an amazing history lesson and time capsule. I've read it many times and learned more about writing from the approach than one might imagine.

Pet peeves: Houseguests who pull half a dozen condiments from the refrigerator while making a sandwich in my kitchen and fail to put them away when the sandwich is complete. People who circle parking lots endlessly instead of cutting the engine and walking an additional twenty-five feet.

Philosophy: Never forget your humble beginnings.

Most meaningful career achievement: 1) Being a good husband and father. 2) Being a published author.

Quirks: I enjoy being photographed with mascots (i.e., Chick-Fil-A cow).

The book industry in five years: The number of books bought online will skyrocket. More and more authors will self-publish.

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COUNTER compliant by the end of the year. (<http://www.nature.com/>).

- **Gedye**, who is Journals Sales and Marketing Director of Oxford University Press, also assures me that they will be COUNTER compliant in "four weeks time."

And he tells me that there are informal commitments from Elsevier and the American Chemical Society.

After the meeting, I had asked Gedye about the requirement for data by time. He said, of course, it is reasonable but complicated to do. They felt it better to get started with solid data and build on a firm foundation. In time, as the investment on gathering statistics proved itself, vendors would continue to develop their reporting and, eventually, include information on use by time periods. Makes sense to me.

I talked to him about XML and he pointed out a site where work on developing an infrastructure on exchanging information on publishing, in this case, serials specifically, was taking place. **Editeur.org's** project ONIX is of particular interest. (<http://www.editeur.org/>). Gedye has told me news that is critical: that COUNTER intends on developing an XML DTD for their reports this year.

In a subsequent email, he brought up a question: where would "delineation" by time (or, I infer, any other variable) best be done? On the vendors' servers? Locally by the librarians? Through some Web interface? Good question and it brings up a deeper point when combined with the XML news.

When we organize data, we have historically tended to do several things. One is we organize data by what are termed sometimes "stovepipes" or "silos" where the data are organized by, say, organization or field. So, we have public library data, academic library data, data from this or that vendor. Everyone does different things and reports in different ways—ways created for the uses those data are put by each of those organizations.

Secondly, we organize information by what use we think we will need. Those guesses are based on the way we have answered questions in the past but capabilities influence intentions. If someone wants to ask a question that the data are not organized to answer, things become difficult.

What happens if I want to know how much was spent on electronic materials in a given state? Or how many library volumes are in a given congressional district? Or how much use there was of electronic materials in the last 138 days? Good luck.

Data, ideally, should be organized generally and organized for use, not provenance. That is easier said than done but XML is a step in that direction. What will happen from here on with this area is that it will get very complicated for a while and then simpler. There will be the infrastructure of the data that will not look like anything most of us are used to. Then, programs will be written that will allow you to select what data you want from the data that exist, to take those data and put them in whatever format you want (Excel, Access, ASCII) and to use these data to answer whatever question tickles your fancy.

I want to repeat what I said at the beginning of this report. In my last article, I predicted that it would be years before we would see data that would make the most fastidious happy. I was wrong. It will happen much quicker. This is the real deal.