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was owned by the Faxon Corp., a large company with 100 years of experience providing subscriptions to libraries worldwide. There were actually two components to the system: BookQuest for monographs, and SerialsQuest for journals. When the Faxon leadership discovered that their investment was going nowhere, they told BookQuest management to find someone who could help them fix it. I was called in as a consultant and later hired as a VP, but my insistence that they needed to re-write their software and change their business plan, including their methods of charging users, fell on deaf ears. Faxon closed BookQuest in May of 1993.

After BookQuest failed, I pulled out the old Interloc business plan and began to work on reviving the idea. Several booksellers and some librarians who were using BookQuest to buy and sell called to encourage me to start a listing service. It would be a kind of automated AB Bookman’s Weekly that booksellers could use to find books for customers by listing “Wants” and to sell books to other dealers for their customers or for stock. In those days, publishing was the natural business revenue model. That was because AB Bookman’s Weekly was a mostly dealer-to-dealer environment, even though a few collectors and libraries subscribed. The idea of a listing service collecting a commission for an online sale was as foreign as AB Bookman’s Weekly trying to collect a commission on a sale generated by its Want ads.

Past failures made it clear that Interloc had to be better technically and much easier and more comfortable if it was going to be successful. Before I decided to do the project, I called Tom Sawyer, a software developer who had worked with booksellers in the past and asked him if he could work with me to design an online dealer-to-dealer system for buying and selling books. After several long telephone conversations, he told me he could do the job but that we would need a computer network and systems expert to set up and run the data center. For that job, he recommended Brad Councilman, a computer consultant who had been supporting dealers for years in the Connecticut River Valley area of Western Massachusetts, which has one of the highest concentrations of antiquarian booksellers in this country.

From talking with these two gentlemen, I realized that this would take money (several tens of thousands of dollars) and, most important, would put me in the position of running a company from a distance, dealing with two people I had never met. I would have to be willing to trust them with my money and that of investors, with my vision as it was modified by their experience and knowledge, and with my reputation, such as it was, in the book trade.

Furthermore, we would have to design and code software for both the back-end system and for the booksellers to use, software that had never been conceptually written. We would have to create a hardware architecture that supported the flow of information we envisioned. It would have to be totally secure and reliable and yet be capable of working through existing telephone lines on most computers. We would have to make the whole thing work on a fully automated basis, controlled by the very booksellers who would make use of it. And we would have to do it with three people in six months.

The whole idea was, frankly, crazy. But I had learned in working in the book business for about a dozen years that honesty and trust are essential to the working of the book trade. Would it be different working with programmers and technical consultants? It might, I believed, so we formed a corporation, issued the stock, raised some money from friends and a few booksellers, and launched what was actually the second iteration of Interloc in mid-1993.

For anyone interested, the name “Interloc” was one I derived from the term “interlocutor,” meaning a person who facilitates a communication between two other parties. For me, at the time, it defined the nature of the listing service model for books. Interloc customers were the booksellers. We were like a newspaper classified advertising service. We derived income from booksellers, but we did not participate in the transaction between the booksellers who subscribed to the service and their customers. Our advertising campaign was directed toward getting more dealers to subscribe. We held workshops all over the US and even in London, England, to help train booksellers on the use of the system and our software, the Interloc Record Manager. We also advertised in bookseller magazines, like Firsts, Book Source, Monthly, and others.

During its first two years, from 1993 to 1995, Interloc created many of the features we took for granted today, but it did so in a pre-Internet world. For example, we developed a very sophisticated and successful Want matching service, and we created “Best Seller” and “Most Wanted” lists.

The Internet Begins —
In 1995 the Internet went commercial. Within a year, two Interloc customers, Michael Selzer of Farshaws Books in Mass., and Rick and Vivian Purvis of Timelinen Books in Victoria, BC, launched listing services similar to Interloc, namely Bibliofind and The Advanced Book Exchange. The Internet made the investment in such services relatively small; while the companies needed to develop software to search and display books online, they did not need to develop any software for their bookseller clients (Interloc already had... continued on page 30).