June 2003

Issues in Vendor/Library Relations -- Decisions, Decisions

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Recommended Citation

Nardini, Bob (2003) "Issues in Vendor/Library Relations -- Decisions, Decisions," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 15: Iss. 3, Article 38.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.4137>

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figures, explaining how difficult it is for publishers to prosper and grow these days without the fiscal discipline that all successful businesses must exercise. Meanwhile, within a few days of **Klinkenburg's** mournful wishful thinking, **Godorf** was offered her own imprint at **Penguin**, where, I'm sure, she will be required to achieve her profit goals.

NEW YORKER EDITOR, DESPITE BIG NOSE ACCUSATION, PURSUES OLD WHITE MEN

In an earlier column I discussed the appointment of **Deborah Treisman** to the influential position of fiction editor at the *New Yorker* magazine. Noting that the number of female authors had declined during the tenure of her predecessor, **Treisman** recently said that she is trying hard to achieve a 50/50 gender record, but eight out of ten submissions, whether from established authors or neophytes, are from men.

The appointment of **Treisman** has generated much envy among the local literati, and she says, amusingly, that she stopped reading email gossip about her when someone admitted she was "very jealous" of **Treisman** and accused her of having "a big nose." She went on to describe the publicity surrounding her appointment, which seemed to indicate that "I was only going to publish, like, young Vietnamese women." However, she wants to continue to reassure "older white men.... It's alright, you still have a place." And the envious big-nose-accuser added her comment, stating that "**Treisman** doesn't really (have a big nose), I'm clutching at straws here." Ah, the gentle world of true literary publishing for art's sake.

LOVE STORY

Among the five finalists for Britain's prestigious **Whitbread Prize** were a 69 year old husband and wife. **Claire Tomalin** was honored for her excellent biography (which I've read and thoroughly enjoyed) *Samuel Pepys: The Unequalled Life*. Her husband, **Michael Frayn**, (the playwright famed for *Noises Off* and *Copenhagen*—I fell asleep during this drama about Nazi nuclear bomb intrigue) was honored for his World War II espionage novel, *Spies*. This is the first time in the 33 year history of the **Whitbread** that a married couple has competed for the prize. As the award was announced at a black tie dinner in London, **Mr. Frayn** gallantly rose and kissed his wife as her name was added to the pantheon of past winners. **Ms. Tomalin** thanked the committee and said, "I spent most of the evening praying I would not win so I would not have to get up

here and say anything." Later, her husband told the press that his wife's triumph over him gave him an opportunity to "feel rather noble. It gives me a tremendous moral advantage...." Every time they argued he would have the opportunity to say, "But darling, I behaved so well over the **Whitbread**."

ANOTHER GUN NUT EXPOSED

Readers of this column will remember I have written twice about the since-resigned **Emory University** professor who apparently faked his research "proving" that America's early settlers rarely owned guns. Now a pro-gun "scholar," working for the **American Enterprise Institute** (sometimes referred to as a right wing think tank) has been caught in a triple whammy of fakery and suspicion. **John R Lott, Jr.** has been posing as **Mary Rosh**, writing fawning reviews of his book *More Guns, Less Crime* on various Internet book review sites. Dear sweet "**Mary**" has defended the research in the book, including the assertion that merely brandishing a weapon has prevented crimes in 97% of reported incidents where the potential victim owned a gun. **Amazon** posted a glowing review signed by **maryrosh**, who turned out to be **Lott's** 13 year old son. So not only has **Lott** faked reviews on his own, and with the help of his family, it turns out no one can discover where **Lott** got his 97% foiled robbery figure. **Lott** can't help locate the sources for this assertion either, claiming a bookshelf fell on his computer, destroying the research trail on his hard drive. Another guy named **Lott** getting himself in trouble.

IF YOU WORK IN THE BOOK BUSINESS AND ARE HAPPY, YOU'RE WRONG

Writing his weekly business column in *New York Magazine*, **Michael Wolff** recently asked "Why, for God's sake, would anyone want to work in the book business?" He went on to contend that publishing and other bookish pursuits are a "liberalish, feminist redoubt, but in some kind of retrograde inversion, the economic model requires that women mostly do the job because they have husbands who support them...." Continuing, "Virtually any other business, save for the more bureaucratic and regimented, has more day to day comforts, more joie de vivre and personality than book publishing." **Wolff** acknowledges that he has many friends in the business, who "against all evidence don't agree with me," but "this isn't where a kid with heart and imagination is going to end up. Rather, the book business is logically getting a dimmer bulb." One has to wonder how many friends in publishing he has left after this column. 🐱

Issues in Vendor/Library Relations — Decisions, Decisions

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The classic vendor gripe about libraries is that they take too long to make decisions. Why, vendors ask, must it take weeks, months, years to move on anything? Is there a library in the world, they wonder, without a host of committees and sub-committees, councils, circles, groups, task forces, teams, and who knows what else to study and usually stymie any proposal put to them, small or large? Not in my territory there isn't, every vendor rep has sometimes muttered. Why can't libraries make decisions like we do?

Of course, this griping is highly selective, always focused on un-made vendor decisions where the rep's company has something to gain. And on made decisions going the wrong way. Clear opportunity, these instances, to cite flawed

process. When they gain or hold business, on the other hand, reps are always forgiving on process, no matter how long a library took to decide. Likewise, quick library decisions that went badly are immediately forgotten. It's the hangers, instead, that haunt the minds of reps.

Librarians might forgive reps their impatience here, because a long-hanging decision is a truly painful experience. For those old enough to remember a past era in social behavior, it's not unlike asking for a date ... and then waiting, and waiting some more, and then longer again, for the word yes or no and maybe a little reciprocal interest from someone who held every card. "I'm not sure I'll be here that day." "My cousin might be visiting." You know how it was. "The task force just scheduled its first

meeting,"
feels about
the same.

Naturally, it's none of a rep's business how long a library takes to make a decision. The task force has every right to hold whatever meetings it wants, whenever it wants, for as long as it wants. Anyone who needs to get an A on every test should find another line of work than selling to libraries. In this course they give out only two grades—A and F. Strictly pass-fail. Even a very good library sales rep, used to straight As on the other report cards of life, will see some Fs on this one, and even harder to bear, some incompletes.

Reps always believe that a library's decision

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ought to be easy. "They should choose me. Why wouldn't they?" is the way it looks to any rep worth anything. Despite whatever degree of corporate effort went into an offer, a proposal, or a presentation, the rep's name is the one attached to it. When a rep asks for business, the moment may well have been preceded by a cycle of personal relationship-building, emails and calls, lunches, dinners, gossip, find out where they went to school, find out what kinds of books or films or sports the customer likes. This is not strictly mercenary. Reps enjoy all this. It's what appeals to them about their job. When they succeed in infusing a business relationship with an element of the personal, as a good rep will, implicitly they've opened the question of a new or larger business relationship. And in the bargain they've also, a predictable percentage of the time, lined themselves up for a disappointment.

Meanwhile, aside from any personal investment by the rep in a library's decision, there's always the business side of the question. The rep's job is to hold business and bring in new business. There's not much else they need to think about, beyond this pair of clauses in the job description. The company's future depends upon reps who will nudge or push enough library decisions in the right direction. Companies pour resources into written proposals and formal presentations. A price tag in

the thousands of dollars for time, travel, and materials is entirely typical. Orally and in writing, rep and company step up to assert and explain why they're the best. If a formal onsite presentation is called, it's time for butterflies in the stomach, cold palms, take a deep breath, comb your hair a third time, walk in like you own the place. It's the SATs, Game 7, sudden death overtime, audition for the play, bottom of the ninth, driver's test, job interview, Final Jeopardy, Academy Awards, Christmas Eve, Election Night, all at once.

Then it's over. And why can't they make up their minds?

Reps forget that the decision they have their eye on isn't the only one on the table at the library. Even if the committee hasn't met as yet, the members possibly have, but convened as some other committee. No movement on the RFP for Serials? Maybe that's because the committees looking after the four vacant positions have their own problems. Or maybe the group working with the architect for a new wing is in a phase of deep study of drawings and models and coffee bar concepts. Then there's the tenure committee, almost done with reading through its own pile of letters and *vitae* and articles and forms. And isn't it great that the Head of Public Services was just named to the Athletic committee? Gathering a quorum might be the hardest part of the Serials decision.

Or, maybe not. When the committee does at last meet, the decision before them is probably not as simple as the rep would like to think it is. First

of all, even if areas of responsibility within a library are clearly defined, today, when there's less hierarchy in libraries than ever before, it's rare to find a decision of any consequence that fits cleanly within those boundaries. Does the Head of Serials lean toward the company with a rep who's worked well with the library for years? Well, the Head of Public Services isn't thrilled with that company's search interface for its e-journals. The Head of Collections has some questions about that company's discounts and service fees. And don't forget that the Director worked for years on an ALA committee with that Vice President from the other company.

Other than the carpeting committee, it's hard to find a decision that doesn't require a look at some new hardware platform, or file structure, or Web interface, or data transfer method. And then to consider all of the implications that any of those changes would have on several library departments. Not to forget to ask, what will the Systems office say? These questions were easier, in a way, in the early days of our technological age when barely anyone understood any of this. Find someone who did, either on or off staff, and do what they said. Today, now that most staff members have at least some idea of what's going on, and now that most libraries have developed some genuine in-house experts, the committee hears everyone. Maybe all the experts agree. Maybe they don't agree. Either way, bad news here for reps, since it will take time to sort through all the nearby advice.

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But decisions are harder today, most of all, because decisions are bigger. Most give one firm all or nearly all of a library's business in an area. There's real money on the table. And the library has little choice on where to spend it, because there are few companies left to choose from. With fewer companies to look at, all of them look pretty good. In fact, they are pretty good—they were the ones, after all, who put the weaker companies out of business. And in the process of doing that, each of the survivors developed the services libraries wanted—the reason they survived—and in the process of doing *that*, began to resemble one another. Are the proposals awfully similar? Better have the committee members read them again, and meet some more. This decision will be it for years. Let's get it right. No second chance. (Who would want one?)

Easy enough for paralysis to set in, since there's always a constituency to do nothing, to leave things quite the way they are. The always extendable work of decisionmaking can be a way of putting off the work that would follow a decision, especially one to change vendors. Do we really want to take on all the work of that, what with everything else going on here? Change processes, review procedures, build new accounts, learn a new jargon, that all takes time. Is it really worth it? Let's take another look. The vendor status quo is like a Congressional incumbent. It's tough to move them out of that seat, whether a good or a bad job they're doing. Maybe term limits would be a good idea in this business too, a rep might daydream.

This is a deadlock so easy to forecast, in fact, that the road not taken usually is this one. Why launch a process that's bound to make some people unhappy? Why invite disagreement out into the open? Why test the organizational structure by trying to coax a decision out of it? Why risk a bad decision? Why put pleasant personal relationships on hold while all this business gets sorted out? Why raise questions that don't need to be raised?

For better or for worse, a good rep might find a way to help raise them, or certainly to help things along once they have been raised by others, and so, deserves no sympathy at all if there's a long wait in store. Why can't they make up their minds? reps might say to themselves, but their only job, once presentations are over, goodbyes said, proposals submitted, questions answered, is to sit down. If it's going to be awhile, that's the business and the right of the library.

And if it doesn't seem clear how the decision is being made, when it will be made, who'll be making it, and under what criteria, the rep will just need to learn some patience. Which they do, having little choice in the matter ... although it can be hard for some reps to get past the suspicion that what's taking all the time isn't the decision itself, but a library deciding how to decide in the first place. 🐘

Bet You Missed It

Press Clippings — In the News — Carefully Selected by Your Crack Staff of News Sleuths

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La Vida Springer by Bruce Strauch (The Citadel)

As American cultural imperialism is eagerly embraced around the world, a Spanish language **Jerry Springer** appeared in the form of Peru's **Laura Bozzo**. A specialist in unmasking adultery and provoking on-camera fist fights, she's syndicated in nine countries and has a million viewers in the U.S. This fifty-something bottle blonde has got it all: face-lift, tummy-tuck, breast implants and a 27-year old boy toy.

Slavishly worshipful of corrupt President **Alberto Fujimoro**, she used her power to smear his opposition going into the 2000 election. Unfortunately, the other side won. And the new Prez didn't appreciate the special show on his illegitimate child. Now she's off the air in Peru and taping her show under cop surveillance while her former political pals have fled or are in prison for running death squads. But her ratings are still up.

See — **Eduardo Porter**, "Peru's 'Jerry Springer' Is Doing Her Show Under House Arrest," *The Wall Street Journal*, Jan. 16, 2003, p. A1.

TO PIRATE OR NOT TO PIRATE, THAT IS THE QUESTION by Bruce Strauch (The Citadel)

Peter Givler, executive director of the **American Association of University Presses** writes a nice article on the value of copyright in which he offers a choice historical tidbit on times of yore. In **Shakespeare's** day the performance of a play threw it into the public domain. So the dramatist would keep the script locked up. Thus a traffic grew up of actors selling their memory work and scribes in the audience jotting down notes. Now Shakespearean scholars go mad trying to figure out which is the authorized **Hamlet**.

See — "Copyright: It's for the Public Good" by **Peter Givler** in *The Chronicle Review*, May 9, 2003, p. B20.

TEMPEST IN THE TEXTBOOKS by Bruce Strauch (The Citadel)

With all the fifty states slashing spending, the nation's textbook industry is filled with gloom and doom. Texas, California and Florida account for more than thirty percent of the nation's \$4 billion public school book sales.

See — "Budget woes worry textbook publishers" by **Associated Press** in *The Post & Courier*, April 26, 2003, p. 4A.

DATA ON THE BRAIN by Pamela M. Rose (University at Buffalo)

The huge quantities of data captured by neuroscience researchers have, up until now, been available only to the labs originating the studies. However, recognizing the potential, some neuroscientists have begun to store, organize and share their brain-image data in easily accessible archives. One journal caused a stir 3 years ago by requiring authors of accepted papers to deposit their raw data in the public **fMRI Data Center at Dartmouth**; however, some authors refuse to publish under those conditions. **Peter Fox**, for example, is not about to share his raw data, instead creating a repository called **BrainMap** which summarizes papers using a code to describe each experiment and the brain activations which may inspire authors to collaborate and then share raw data. Another approach at the University of Pennsylvania is creating specialized databases for clinical teams; **BRAID (Brain Image Database)** recently uncovered an association between injury to a particular brain area and the development of attention deficit disorder. And in July the **Probabilistic Atlas of the Human Brain**, a more realistic and flexible map than the previous "average" brain model, will be opened to the public, and possibly will eventually tie into other repositories.

See — "Still Debated, Brain Image Archives are Catching On" by **Marcia Barinaga** in *Science*, Apr. 4, 2003, p.43-45.