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People Profile: Camille McCutcheon

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velopment of the company means that I often feel like I'm on a roller coaster: the exciting times are exhilarating, and the frustrations can be felt in a dangerously personal way. Conferences are a lot of fun, and it's great to hear fellow librarians comment on how much they enjoy our product. Seeing patrons actually use our product in the New York Public Library's great reading room and periodicals room on 42nd Street was an incredible thrill. But there's not a lot of competition in librarianship, and in the business world you need to accept that others may repackage your ideas and sell them.

The process of developing new products has been particularly demanding. We started with an idea that came from my experience at the reference desk, and that met with very positive response from the library community. We still sign up five to ten new clients per week for our A-to-Z title list service, and the feedback I receive from clients is incredibly meaningful to me: it's a great thrill to have people be so positive, and appreciative, of the product we've created to sell to them. But if we don't move forward, we'll be falling behind. So we moved to what we believed was the next natural extension of our product, and combined our bibliographic data with CONSER MARC records, to create a completely new way to easily incorporate a library's electronic journal holdings into its catalog.

While we make sure that it's easy for the library, it was anything but easy for us as we developed the product. We spent more time, energy, and money putting together our MARC record service than I care to contemplate. It was a huge and complex problem, requiring the management of numerous sources of data and following rules that were designed to be done by humans, on a case-by-case basis, rather than programmati-

cally by a computer. Trying to teach a computer when to put a period at the end of a subfield, for example — except when certain punctuation appears, or when it's followed by a different subfield, and only then on days that are cloudy, it seems — took a great deal of programming time and energy. And as cataloging rules change, so must our programming.

While the impetus for creating this particular product came from the original goals of the company, the need for other products has been pushed by clients and by new developments in the marketplace. The obvious next development for our product was further linking technologies, so we started by perfecting a journal-level linking service that takes patrons from many abstracting resources to all of a library's full-text resources. Because we already maintained much of the needed information, our primary challenges involved ensuring sufficient server support to manage hundreds of thousands more searches than we had been previously supporting.

The next clear project, then, was a complete article-level OpenURL link server. This took on a life of its own; it forced us to reconsider which are the most important things we're currently doing, and identify what we could drop so that we could continue to develop the new OpenURL server. We had to figure out how to convince our current and prospective clients that our full-featured product is every bit as good as those that cost five to ten times more: we're sometimes surprised how some feel that they need to buy the most expensive product on the market, regardless of how it compares with other products.

Being on both sides of the booth has been quite an eye-opener. I have learned, for example, that librarians tend to take vendors for granted. For many librarians, part of ALA is attending great parties. While we may complain about the way some vendors operate, or gripe about the deficiencies in their products, we're only too happy to drink their booze and eat their fancy desserts. Can you imagine what any ALA conference would be like if Gale weren't supporting the daily shuttle service? How many of us (all vendors included) actually thank them for providing that service? Some vendors have told me that conferences are not a site for any sales for them, but they need to go, just to be seen by librarians and other vendors.

As the idea for *Serials Solutions* was developing in our heads, I talked with one publisher representative, who was responsible for organizing and paying for everything associated with their booth at ALA. I couldn't believe the prices she was quoting me for their booth and the regular wine and cheese receptions they held in the conference hall. Now I believe: several weeks ago I paid \$157 just for the chair I used for fifteen hours during a small conference in Chicago. I probably should have spent more time sitting in it, just to be sure I got my money's worth. At our first ALA conference, we were back in the table section, which only a few of the attendees managed to find. This winter, we'll have a double booth and Internet access for the first time. Despite the incredible cost, this will allow us to solve customer problems on the spot and demonstrate our products more effectively. So even though the skinflint in me cringes at the cost of flying eight people across the country, putting them in hotels and paying per diems for several days, spending a small fortune on carpeting, electricity, tables, chairs, signage, and Internet access, the librarian in me knows that our current and potential clients are going to appreciate the improved service.

Though we are glad to be out of the tables section, I encourage all conference attendees to go back there and see what vendors have to share. As librarians, we love the free espresso, and the free bags, and the impressive mega-booths, but the cutting-edge stuff is often in the tables, where people are spending all their time and money on their ideas, not on marketing gimmicks.

Vendor-to-vendor relations has been a completely new experience for me. Sometimes we're competing with a company at the same time we're working with them, or working and competing with a company that's quietly (but not secretly; we have ways of learning these things!) working with a third company that's also competing and working with us. It gets confusing. As a young company, one of our most exciting experiences came when we learned one large conglomerate was interested in acquiring us. Initially, dreams of the return of Seattle's dot-com

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people profiles encouraged

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Name: Camille McCutcheon

Born & lived: Columbia, SC. Lived in Columbia until I moved to Spartanburg in 1996.

Education: B. A. from Columbia College, Columbia, SC, in English and Public Affairs

Joint Master's Degree in English and Library and Information Science from USC

Professional career and activities: I worked as a librarian in the Converse College Library from 1996 - March 1998. I have been employed as a librarian at USC Spartanburg Library since March 1998.

In my spare time I like to: Garden and watch old films and read books pertaining to Hollywood's Golden Age.

How/Where do I see the industry in five years: As a librarian, I think that there will be growing emphasis placed on electronic resources. However, I still would like to see a balance maintained between print and electronic resources. 