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Words... They're Just Words

John Riley

Against the Grain, jdriley@comcast.net

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shortfall in advertising placed our financial contribution to the society in jeopardy. All prospective enhancements required a strong business case to support them.

We had made substantial improvements to our stats since 1998, but anomalies remained. Among them was the fact that roughly one third of our consortia customers had not been broken out into individual institutions, and the usage reports contained long lists of IP addresses, making it laborious for administrators to distinguish where the usage was coming from. One customer, the **Virtual Library of Virginia (VIVA)** wrote their own in-house computer program to sort our stats and shared this information on a list serve. At library meetings, consortia directors from around the world would appear with what amounted to multiple reams of paper and slam them down in front of us. "You try and sort through this," they growled.

The day of the retreat was also the first day of work for our new Chief Information Officer, **Marion Mullauer**. Marion had come to us from **Lippincott-Kluwer**, bringing a wealth of IT experience to our operation. She views an IT project as a collaborative effort between the business units and IT, with advocates from both sides leading the effort. She also took one look at the mountain of statistics for one European customer and shook her head with disgust. We'd found a CIO who shared our customer-focused worldview. A few weeks later, the executive management group approved the **COUNTER** initiative and I was chosen to be the "business owner" of the project.

Changes were happening in our IT department. **Lorin Garson**, a Ph.D. chemist, who had been the founder of the **ACS Web Editions and Journal Archives** in his more than 28 years of service to ACS, retired. A new IT team was established to work on the Web stats, and they had little or no previous experience with usage stats. Marion brought in a consultant to work with us called **Act Like An Owner (ALAO)** based in Columbia, Maryland.

From the beginning, I was skeptical. We employ chemists in every facet of our publishing operation—from the editing of manuscripts to the checking of graphics on the Web to answering customer service questions. This is what sets us apart from other publishers. We didn't have any chemists helping us on this project. What I didn't know at the beginning of the **Web Stats** project was that we needed to manage IT projects according to industry standards and achieve the same level of excellence. Our IT projects needed to match the "High Quality, High Impact" chemistry publications we deliver.

Despite their quirks, our statistics were adequate for our institutional customers but our in-house staff and external journal editors had never been able to access stats for their products. We cobbled together stats on an ad-hoc basis but it wasn't part of the normal routine and drained resources. The ability to track users entering and exiting our Websites, to see what part of the world they came from, and to view their search terms had been non-existent. What was the top ACS article in 2003? What countries led the world in usage? How many users arrived at the full-text from **SciFinder**? We couldn't answer these questions. The consultants interviewed 25 in-house staff about Web stats and received a passionate response that can be summed up in one sentence: "Yeah, we've heard this before." We had tried to improve our stats package three times before this.

ALAO was undaunted by the response, and their leader, **Luke Garwood** conveyed to me in the first meeting, "We cannot fail this time."

The internal study produced an action plan for the first phase of the project. We needed to do three things: a.) become **COUNTER** compliant b.) provide a basic set of stats to internal users and c.) pilot an advanced technique for tagging data. **ALAO** recommended **IBM Surfaid**, a **COUNTER** compliant vendor based in Houston, to manage our data. For the next six months we met once a week to address concerns. I realized early on as "business owner" that I needed my own team to handle various aspects of the project. Recognizing my own limitations was a huge breakthrough. I'm not an expert with data, far from it, and I needed to bring in people who were skilled in these areas. Institutional customers were my main concern, but I also needed to be cognizant of the needs from the **ACS** business units.

The project immediately focused in on historical problems with our fulfillment system, **COSMOS**. We have been running our electronic journals business through a fulfillment system that also services the activities for **ACS** members (including their subscriptions), fulfills institutional print subscriptions, and keeps track of the **ACS Web Editions and Archives**. Our customer service team in Columbus went into the system and separated out approximately 1100 institutions across the 32 remaining consortia in the first two months of 2004. Working closely with IT and **ALAO**, they cleaned up IP addresses, especially the duplicates that had been sprinkled in across our 4,000 sites skewing the statistical data. The **Web Stats** Project enabled us to correct persistent historical problems. **COSMOS** is scheduled for replacement in 2006, and I'm working on that project as well.

In early March, we contacted **COUNTER** and stated our intention to be **COUNTER** compliant.

In our enthusiasm to share this news, we conveyed a message that was received by **COUNTER** as a statement of compliancy. Suddenly, we were listed as a **COUNTER** compliant publisher when in fact we were not. **COUNTER** met in May and their steering committee pointed this out. We were sixty days ahead of ourselves.

We worked closely with selected members of our **Library Advisory Group** and a few customers such as **Glaxo Smithkline** to beta test the early versions of our new stats. **COUNTER** forced us to view statistics, especially the counting methods, differently. Initially, our usage numbers have dropped by approximately 20%. We believe that stats will increase to pre-**COUNTER** levels once we tag all of our journal content so that usage from servers caching content can be tracked. We followed the **COUNTER** code of practice as closely as we could. On July 15th, we launched our new stats system. The next releases will be based on customer feedback. Our new **Web Stats** resource page can be found here: <http://pubs.acs.org/4librarians/usage/index.html>.

Feedback from institutional customers has been positive. "This is a tremendous accomplishment for the division," **Bob Bovenschulte**, President of **ACS Publications** announced at a recent meeting. We had never completed a project in such a short time with the potential to impact its internal and external users more than **Web Stats**. **ACS Web Editions and Archives** took years to develop. We finished **Web Stats** in seven months. We are now sorting through an avalanche of data at our fingertips and will need the next several months to digest this information. We have delayed the internal release because we need to agree on standards for the distribution of the information among the business units within **ACS**. We are developing our own internal standards for compliancy!

Words... They're Just Words

by John Riley <jdriley@comcast.net>

a little fiction

Times-Picayune Want Ads

Books for sale. Over 400k old books stored in
3 warehouses. Best offer takes them all.
15 Tchoupitoulas St. 555-0199

As a used book dealer I read the want ads every day looking for tag sales, church bazaars, charity book sales, private book sales, anywhere I can shake loose some fresh stock for my store, but I had never seen anything quite like this ad. Four hundred thousand books? It had to be a typo, but it did mention 3 warehouses, so it could be true. I picked up the phone prepared to be told that the ad should have read four thousand books, or four hundred. Still, it was a lot of books. I waited anxiously as the phone rang 10, 12, 15 times and just before I hung up a winded voice answered.

"Prunier's residence."

"Do you have an ad in today's paper for some books for sale?"

"Yep. You're the first guy to call."

"Do you really have four hundred thousand books or is that a typo?"

"I really don't know how many books are here. I just took the number of shelves and figured maybe

50 books per. There's way over eight thousand shelves and another couple of rooms of about three thousand unsorted boxes. It's really quite insane. You interested?"

"Well it does sound a little crazy. Is this a library shutting down?"

"No they're all from my dad's collection. He has been collecting for over 50 years. **Anatole Prunier**. You must have heard of him if you're in the used book biz in New Orleans."

"Sure. I've seen him at some book sales. Can I come over now and look around?"

"Absolutely. I'll meet you in an hour at the door to the warehouse on Terpsichore. 15 Terpsichore."

Sure, I knew who **Anatole Prunier** was. Only the biggest bibliomaniac that ever lived. The guy was first in line at every book sale and he was the last to leave, usually buying whatever was left at the end. I had seen him at the Salvation Army leaving with shop-

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ping carts full of books. He came into my store nearly everyday and left with at least twenty books. He nearly paid my rent for 15 years. But he was like a plague. When a tag sale was advertised in the paper he would call the homes and beg to come early. He had usually cleaned things out the night before I pulled up at 6 a.m. He was always trying to sneak into book sales early. He even went so far as to hide the night before at the biggest book sale of the year at the Public Library. He pretended to be a volunteer helping to sort books and when it came time to close he slipped under one of the tables and slept there all night so he could be first in the morning. He spent the night hiding books in the bathroom and under the staircase. When I reported him to one of the ladies running the sale she just said "He's paying for everything. What's the problem? The money all goes to charity. Now hurry along and buy some yourself".

He did have deep pockets and he never worked at anything other than buying books. His father had owned half of Storyville and when it was shut down after World War One he had taken over most of the other "Houses" in the surrounding Parish. **Anatole** was an only child and even after his father's death he continued to receive cash payments every Monday morning from his father's lawyer. From some old timers who knew the family I learned that **Anatole** hated his family and that he retreated into a world of reading and book collecting to run away from the rough criminal life that surrounded him. His collecting became more and more obsessive as he grew older. After his wife died and his children moved out his collecting became truly monomaniacal.

A doctor who had made a house call mentioned finding books everywhere in the house. Even the oven and bathtub were overflowing with books. There simply was nowhere to walk or move. He slept on the fire escape for weeks since he couldn't get into the house anymore. That's when he began buying old warehouses south of Canal and filling them too. When he had bought everything in New Orleans he travelled to England after World War Two and tried to buy everything there too. Then he hired agents to keep the books coming after he returned home.

His two sons had left the old man to his bibliomania as long they got their cash in the mail every week, but when the gravy train stopped, they made a beeline for New Orleans and to their father's house. From the time the sons got there he had been reduced to simply sitting with a blank stare while he muttered

over and over "They're just words...just words." He had developed what appeared to be Alzheimer's or some kind of dementia and they were going to have to move him into a home.

From his son **Felix**, the one that answered the phone, I learned that the two sons were all that was left of the family. Neither of them gave a damn about the collection. It was all just so much pulp as far as they were concerned. They had grown to hate everything about books from long weekends driving around the country being left in the car while their dad bought more books. **Felix** said he was trying to get on the **NASCAR** circuit and he was in a hurry to get back to Daytona. He told me that his brother worked at a gambling casino in New Jersey that he got into through some family contacts. **Felix** told me that when the cash from his dad stopped coming in they called the family lawyer. They were horrified to hear that **Anatole** had sold off all of his properties in order to continue his orgy of book buying. The sons were hoping that the money from the sale would pay off some of their gambling debts and bankroll a new race car for **Felix**. They were hoping to get millions, but they couldn't figure out why anybody in their right mind would want this stuff. The old man's muttering in the background only proved to them that books were a waste of time.

"So how much are they worth?" was the first thing that **Felix** asked me after I had been in the warehouse for about five minutes.

"I've only had time to scan the shelves. I would need days to just get a feel for what's here."

"Do people really pay good money for this stuff?" he asked with a slack jaw.

"The old man sure did. There's gotta be some other wackos out there," piped up **Louis**, the other son.

"I'll have to have some time. I probably can't even afford this. I'll get you an appraisal and you can put them up for auction."

"We don't want to wait. We want the money now."

"I could talk to some of the heavy hitters in New York and see what I can put together. Give me the catalogue your dad put together and I'll try to see what kind of dollars we're talking. I'll get back to you in two days if we don't get hit with that hurricane."

As I went to leave the old man grabbed my hand and blurted "They're only words...only words."

"Yeah we know pops" snarled **Louis**.

It was sad to see the old warhorse so demented. He couldn't even get out of his chair anymore.

Two days later I called back and went over to 15 Tchoupitoulas. I had gotten the go ahead from a syndicate of auctioneers to offer 2 million dollars for the collection. That worked out to about four dollars a book. A real bargain for the syndicate. They were lusting after a collection that was legendary in the book trade. **Anatole** had spent wildly at New York auctions through his agents there and even though none of the syndicate knew him personally they did know that he had bought only the choicest items. After I faxed a portion of the massive catalogue the syndicate called and said they would agree to buy it sight unseen. A collection of this magnitude hadn't come on the market in decades. They would fly down after the storm to deliver the check.

As I walked over to the warehouse the wind was whipping something fierce, but it appeared that New Orleans had dodged the "Big One" again. When I entered the warehouse the old man stopped me and started his litany "They're words...only words". Wow he was gonzo. He needed to get some professional attention real soon. **Felix** was happy to hear what I had been able to put together. But before I left I wanted to look at some of the books that I had only had time to scan with a flashlight from behind piles of boxes. I wanted to collate a few of the better pieces. Just from reading the catalogue and looking at the bindings I was sure that this was going to be a landmark sale. The syndicate was making out like bandits. Sure there was lots of junk, but that could be sold off or donated to the library for their book sale.

It was too dark to really see much of the collection so I asked the brothers to open up some of the iron hatches on the windows. As they pushed the heavy storm shutters open I reached for a Shakespeare folio dated 1623 on the spine. There were two others just like it sitting on the shelf. My hands trembled as I opened this Holy Grail of all bibliophiles. The light from the open windows had cut into the murky darkness and I could make out what appeared to be shreds of paper falling like snow onto the floor. The weight and heft of the massive tome had turned to air in my grasp. The entire contents were like confetti blowing in the breeze. The binding was intact and beautiful, but that was all that remained. I reached for the other Folios and they too opened up a confetti storm of paper as the wind kicked up from the open windows. I frantically picked up a handful of the chaff and I was struck that all the pieces were black. The white paper around each word had been chewed away leaving only a single word... and wind. The termites! The world's most ravenous termites had gotten to the collection. New Orleans was home to a strain of termites that could devour a whole house in a day. They could consume a living oak. They were slowly eating the whole city.

In **Anatole's** brick warehouses they had devoured only the paper in the books, the ink being poisonous to them. Volume after volume liquefied at my touch. The wind from the storm was picking up the word chaff and spinning it madly out the open windows and into the street. The two sons were struggling to close the shutters and swearing at me, like it was somehow my fault. They had never as much as opened one of their father's books. **Anatole** was screaming "They're only words...words".... Now it made sense. He had gone mad when it dawned on him that his whole collection had become nothing but a mass of pulp. As the gathering wind forced open even more windows **Anatole** jumped up from his chair and began chasing the whirling words, trying to cram them into his pockets, chanting "they're mine...they're mine" as he plunged out the third floor window grasping at the words in the wind.

Back Talk

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those we visited are trying very hard to stay within the bounds of copyright. While some of these libraries had older western language books that appeared to be a bit worse for the wear, others had row after row of nice shiny new books in both English and Chinese. They also seemed to be fairly well managed. I visited China with a delegation of East Asian librarians in 1979 and asked each director what were their three major problems to overcome. The most frequent response was the lack of qualified staff. While the libraries we visited this time still had many relatively uneducated staff members, they also had many young, eager well trained librarians who were well trained and interested in how to become more effective.

I am optimistic about the future of China's libraries. Annually the **University of Hong Kong** sponsors with the help of others a library leadership institute. To each institute will come scores of very bright, animated, and enthusiastic librarians. It is inspirational to see them attack the management problems that their small teams are asked to resolve. There are, of course, all sorts of problems for Libraries in China — especially the lack of freedom to select and read all points of view; yet, compared to the past, the stories being played out in most libraries, seem to be much happier than during the previous 60 or 70 years.

See <http://www.hklib.org.hk/about-us.htm> for more information.