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ATG Interviews Ron Boehm

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title, a four-volume work. I knew it was an amazing project, but I was still very nervous about what the reviewers might think. I was then very pleased to see that in almost all the reviews, which were positive, they singled out the **Reader's Guide** (a thematic table of contents that is placed after the headword list) and commented on what a nice added value feature that was. So, when we sign up a new project, there is a built in plan to add features that have proven useful.

ATG: *Do you use reference librarians as consultants on your reference projects?*

RJ: My favorite question! When I established **Sage Reference**, I assembled what is known as the **Sage Reference Industry Board**. The Board consists of six academic and four public librarians. They represent such institutions such as **University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Miami of Ohio, New York Public and Phoenix Public**. Their job is to mainly help me with macro topics, issues, concerns, but I rarely use them to comment on specific topic ideas. They have been such a great asset to the imprint and have been instrumental in steering the imprint through these first three years. They have been particularly helpful in helping us with our ad and direct mail design and content. The look and feel of our marketing was really co-developed with the Board. One member had even mentioned that **Sage Reference** should publish an *Encyclopedia of Social Theory* so I am pleased to say that we will launch just that, a two-volume work that we will publish next spring. The Board meets twice a year at the **American Library Association** meetings. Our last meeting at Midwinter in Philadelphia was a real eye opener as we discuss the implications of budget cuts and what that means for an imprint such as **Sage Reference**. Not the cheeriest of discussions but very necessary in the scheme of growing **Sage Reference**. I was most pleased last year when the two-year term was up and none of the Board Members wanted to leave. We have since decided to eliminate the term limit so that the original group can continue.

ATG: *That type of commitment is impressive.*

RJ: Yes, it is. Our Board has been great. And we have also established a Topic Selection Committee consisting of over forty reference librarians. We send them abstracts of potential topics for encyclopedias. They not only give us thumbs up or thumbs down, but have also given valuable and specific information to include in our encyclopedias. Some have even given us some ideas for products that we have since signed up!

ATG: *You have published a number of well-received reference sets, as well as single volume titles, in print. We may have missed it, but do you have plans for e-publishing your reference works?*

RJ: Yes, we do have plans to launch e-reference products next year (2004). I have been watching the e-publishing market from day one and although **Sage Reference** will not be a pio-

neer, I feel our initiatives will be attractive. Again, our Board has advised me on this subject so their input has aided our decision-making process. We know that projects like our *Encyclopedia of Terrorism* lend themselves to an e-reference product, especially if we can provide affordable updates, so this is one direction that we will go in. Next January we will also launch a multi-volume *Encyclopedia of Leadership* and since next year is an election year, we could do some attractive things with that. I still am a believer in "print will never die" but I am enjoying the prospects of our e-reference initiatives.

ATG: *Will you offer these titles as stand alone databases at a one-time cost? Or will you try to combine related sets into a larger database, searchable by the same search engine and sold as a subscription?*

RJ: We will offer titles as stand alone databases, as well as combining titles into a larger database, searchable by the same search engine. There are still questions about the merits of subscription products so we need to sort that angle out very soon. As I just mentioned, we have a very exciting major work, the *Encyclopedia of Leadership* due in January, and with 2004 as an election year, there are many possibilities for expanding the content on a frequent basis, so keep an eye out for news on that.

ATG: *You recently have made exclusive deals with databases like ProquestABI Inform to provide full text to a number of your journals. Are similar deals being considered for your reference titles down the road?*

RJ: Yes. These are more complicated deals but **Sage Reference** titles are always in the discussions. As you might know, we launched the *Sage Collections* last year which are full text

journal databases using the **Cambridge Scientific Abstracts** platform. No decisions have been made but we are looking into possibilities for the reference content there as well.

ATG: *If you had a crystal ball, what would reference publishing look like in five years, in ten years?*

RJ: Wow, always a challenging question. Five years from now? An obvious answer would be that a majority of the reference works would be digital products, delivered in many various ways. However, I think print reference will still be around for the sole purpose of longevity. With rapidly changing technology, I know some librarians feel a bit more secure buying print knowing that the content will be intact as long as the book remains on the shelf.

Ten years from now? Who knows if there will even be a classroom then but I think there will still be an important role for the library in the academic community. No matter what technology prevails, knowledge is still vital to the learning process and this knowledge has always been supported and enhanced by authoritative reference. And, it has always been and will continue to be the librarians role in collecting these resources, whether on a microchip or in print form. As a publisher, we will always have the ability to create the content so ten years from now, I'll be staring at some plasma-wired device but having the same creative discussions with an editor on what topics and added value we need to build into our next encyclopedia. And...check back with me then but hopefully our Board will hang in there for ten more!

ATG: *Rolf, It's been great talking to you. We appreciate you taking the time to share your insights with us.*

RJ: It was my pleasure.

ATG Interviews Ron Boehm

President and CEO, ABC-CLIO

by **Tom Gilson** (Head, Reference Services, Robert Scott Small Library, College of Charleston; Phone: 843-953-8014; Fax: 843-953-8019) <gilson@cofc.edu>

ATG: *We have been hearing a lot about ABC-CLIO in the last couple of years, your eBook program, your plan to double your history reference titles, etc. But how did it all get started?*

RB: **ABC-CLIO** was started by my father and mother in 1953 when they began the planning for *Historical Abstracts*. They were in Vienna, Austria, where my father was stationed in the Air Force. In the late 1950s when he left the military, they moved to California and settled in Santa Barbara, which is still our publishing headquarters.

My father's interest in technology solutions to publishing problems has left an enduring legacy in the company. After seeing what publications such as *Chemical Abstracts* were doing in the early 1960s in applying information processing techniques to their content, he took on the challenge of "computerizing" *Historical Abstracts*. He managed to

accomplish this without the substantial government subsidies given to most science publishers in the post Sputnik years. This meant that when *America: History and Life* was launched in 1964, it had been designed as a database from the start. When our three A&I services (*Historical Abstracts*, *America: History and Life*, and *ArtBibliographies Modern*) went online with **DIALOG** in 1975, they were the first non-science databases available on the service.

We expanded our subscription databases in the mid-1980s at the same time as we moved into the school market. These evolved into our social studies Web services in US and world history, state and world geography, and American government.

ATG: *What about your history reference titles?*

RB: Our history reference book program started with bibliographies in the 1960s, and

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changed to primary reference encyclopedias and handbooks in the mid 1980s. We got into eBooks fairly early, around 1999, because we saw an opportunity to add a great deal of value for our customers, primarily with expanded access and integrated tools.

In the 1980s and 1990s, we also worked with educational software and video products across a number of disciplines, and large print and audio trade books. Over the past few years, however, we have refocused on history, and have sold our political science and art history product lines. We want to concentrate on building our position as the foremost history reference publisher with the broadest range of products on the Web and in print for students, teachers, and scholars.

ATG: *ABC-CLIO is a second-generation family business. In the midst of all the mergers and acquisitions, how have you stayed independent and still managed to grow? With all the big names in the business, how do you stay visible and in the forefront?*

RB: Well, staying independent requires nothing more than staying profitable and just saying no to purchase offers. We are approached regularly by all the usual suspects and others from outside of publishing. To date, we have grown ABC-CLIO mostly through internal development of new products, rather than by acquisition.

As far as staying in front, we are willing to get involved early in product evolutions, particularly in the digital arena, ones that make sense to us for the long term. We may have an advantage in that our new product investment is lower than for those companies less familiar with technology, due to our forty years of experience in creating information management, production, and delivery solutions for a broad variety of products and business models.

As far as being visible, this may be because we are often an early adopter. Everyone else watches to see whether early adopters stumble or succeed. We have to watch our risks carefully, however, because you can only afford a few mistakes every decade.

ATG: *With the ever-increasing demand for online full text journal articles, how will you bring more full text to your flagship products America: History and Life and Historical Abstracts?*

RB: We've heard clearly from our users that they want links to full text. We link to or are in the process of linking to every full text collection with journals that we cover. These include several JSTOR collections, the History Cooperative, and Project Muse journals. We've experienced rapid increases in usage of HA and AHL due to our linkages to full text journals, and at the same time, JSTOR has experienced a sharp increase in users coming from outside their system. In 2002, our databases provided over 240,000 links to articles in the JSTOR collections, the highest number of any A&I service.

ATG: *Will the move toward Open URL play into the mix?*

RB: Yes, definitely. We will expand our users' ability to link to fulltext substantially with our databases' recent implementation of OpenURL compliance. This will make it easy for our subscribers who have OpenURL servers to link to journal collections such as those provided by Swets-Blackwell, EBSCO, and ProQuest, for example.

Over 10% of our 1.2 million entries are currently linked to full text articles. However, approximately 60% of the journals we cover are currently available only in print. We're looking at how we can do something about this, without getting into the business of journal publishing.

ATG: *Without giving away any trade secrets, what strategies have created the growth of your reference line? ABC-CLIO publishes a number of single volume niche titles, is that part of it?*

RB: We publish across US and world history, cultural geography, and current world issues. Our titles cover the breadth of history topics: military, social, political and legal, scientific and technical, religious, cultural, environmental, and ethnic history. We strive to add titles to each of these subject areas every year in a balanced manner. In addition, we seek to have in each subject area a balance of single volume handbooks and encyclopedias, and multi-volume definitive subject encyclopedias.

We prepare a book for a variety of readers' purposes, whether that be ready reference, introductory context, or more extended research involving a number of related topics covered by the book. In fact, the focus on target audience is what often distinguishes a planned, compiled book from the results of an online search, which retrieves a number of unconnected entries from unrelated and diverse publications.

ATG: *You launched your eBook program in the fall of 2002. What has been the impact of e-publishing on ABC-CLIO?*

RB: Our books have actually been available as eBooks for over three years from netLibrary. We have offered our own hosting since earlier this year. Every title since 2001 is available as an eBook, as well as a selection of over seventy of our best selling reference titles from before 2001. We are publishing simultaneously in e and print formats. A small part of our book revenues come from eBooks, just the start of a migration from print to e-Book versions of our titles. I expect that reference titles will move gradually from print to electronic versions much as reference subscription publications moved from print to CD-ROM to online in the past decade. At first, simple benefits such as anywhere access or being able to easily copy, paste, cite, and browse will get people to prefer their reference books in electronic format, but other not yet implemented benefits will undoubtedly arise, just as with online databases. For instance, one can't link directly to a full text article from a printed abstract, but it is almost expected today.

We also now enjoy a more direct relationship with our customers. With eBooks, we know who is buying our books, and which books are in their collection. This will help us to make suggestions on collection development.

The larger impact is likely to be on our cus-

tomers. Because we have been offering unlimited access within an institution since the inception of our eBooks, multiple users and entire classes can access one of our titles simultaneously. netLibrary, incidentally, offers our titles on an unlimited use basis as well.

ATG: *Our experience with netLibrary is that readers can "browse" titles simultaneously. But that browsing is limited to 20-30 minutes. However, if a student checks the book out from netLibrary, it is not available to anyone else. Does your agreement with them differ from that?*

RB: Yes. Someone who purchases our eBooks from netLibrary gets 10 virtual copies put on their reference shelf. This alone should mean that there's always one to check out, but libraries can also set their own checkout times, which potentially can be shorter for reference books.

ATG: *You also have your own hosting system and from what we have heard it sounds very flexible.*

RB: Yes it is. It was built for us by Tony Lavender of Promedia in Boulder, CO. He was involved in building netLibrary's system. We also have many years of experience with databases, so we made it familiar and as simple as possible. We also wanted it suitable for reference titles. We are constantly tweaking it to make it more and more user friendly, based on librarians' suggestions.

Some of the flexibility is due to NOT having a checkout system. We never built it, because our unlimited access model doesn't require checkout. In our hosting system, there is no checkout, just straight access. I would expect that a student might have several of our reference books "open" on their desktop, and move from book to book as necessary. No checkouts, timeouts, or turnaways.

Libraries also benefit from more flexible offerings from us. We are currently offering different eBook subject collections at a discount, print/eBook sets at a substantial discount, and have a subscription model for one of our consortia partners.

ATG: *That sounds interesting. How does it work?*

RB: It's really just an alternative payment method. Let's say there is an ABC-CLIO eBook collection that a library could buy for \$1,000, plus a hosting package of \$300 for seven years hosting. Under the subscription model, they could subscribe to the package for a year for \$300 inclusive of hosting. As an incentive to keep subscribing, they own the books after five years of subscribing, and the price drops to around \$40/year for hosting that collection.

ATG: *Even though the clamor for eBooks has cooled somewhat, are there any new deals with netLibrary, or anyone else, for eBook distribution?*

RB: At this time, we've not given much thought to offering our titles through others. It takes significant investment and technical expertise to host and control access to materials. If there was demand from the market to add other distributors, and those distributors demonstrated the technical capabilities, we would consider adding them.

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ATG: What do you think is the future for eBooks in reference publishing, or for publishing in general?

RB: Web-based eBooks really make sense for reference titles. The anytime, anywhere, unlimited access model works well for books that are generally used for less than half an hour. Librarians can concentrate on putting their patrons with the right materials rather than dealing with handling the physical books. Ready Reserve is no longer necessary. Distance learners are automatically served if they have access to their institution's library system.

At some point, I think that libraries will get beyond the "great deal" in buying eBooks. Buying older, low usage, lower value books sold in large collections doesn't seem to make sense when building a print collection; why would this be a good collection development strategy for eBooks? I'm not surprised that libraries are not satisfied with the usage of their eBook collections. Shouldn't their expectations for such eBook collections be about the same as for print versions of these older, low circulation titles? Just because a title is available as an eBook doesn't mean that demand for the content goes up.

I also think that the shared book model will fade away. We have chosen not to participate in programs that offer older titles to a large number of institutions on a one book, one user basis. Most publishers will not offer their frontlist

titles in this way. Reference publishers and libraries have a symbiotic relationship. Publishers have to sell enough books to libraries to have a viable and sustainable business, and libraries depend on the publishers for the titles. Selling one copy to a large number of institutions means that a publisher is likely to sell many fewer total titles overall. This threatens the viability of the fundamental business model.

ATG: From what you're saying, eBooks have a real future in reference publishing. What about print titles? Are they slowly, but surely, being placed on the endangered species list? Or will print and eBooks reach a mutually beneficial accommodation?

RB: If we look again at what happened with our abstracting services, we had a rapid migration once they were available through the Web. Yet there are a number of subscribers who keep both the print and e-versions. The library has bought the intellectual property with the first version, and is just trying to enhance their patrons' convenience. We've tried to make this easier by providing a steep discount for the print version. This is mirrored in our eBook/print bundle pricing. So I don't think print reference books will go away, but the use of the print medium may evolve much as radio evolved when TV was invented.

ATG: On your Website, you note "ABC-CLIO takes pride in constantly re-inventing itself." What will be the next incarnation? What "new technologies, new paradigms, and new business models" does ABC-CLIO plan

to use in keeping your edge in the marketplace?

RB: I'd say that there are two key points about our future. First, we'll continue to design from the intended use up, not the information down. Second, we will expand our offerings in history.

Designing from the intended use up is just saying we are customer focused. We don't intend this in a cliché way. We start our product planning for books and databases by anticipating what projects the users do regularly. We ask what content our publications should contribute to these projects, the amount of time users have to find what they need, and the level of detail that users might want. Our content, the selection and search capabilities, and, in electronic products, our information management tools, are designed to assist.

Second, our history-oriented products and services are likely to expand into more and different genres. We are not unfamiliar with software, video, and textbook development, as we have offered many different publication types in our fifty years of existence.

Together, our design orientation and the expansion and integration of our offerings will be of great benefit to the history practitioners we serve — scholars, teachers, and students — and to the librarians who work with them.

ATG: Ron, thank you, it's been a pleasure talking to you, and learning more about ABC-CLIO.

RB: It's been great. I enjoyed it. 🍷

From the Reference Desk

by **Tom Gilson** (Head, Reference Services, Robert Scott Small Library, College of Charleston, Charleston, SC 29424; Phone: 843-953-8014; Fax: 843-953-8019) <gilson@cofc.edu>

The two-volume *Oxford Encyclopedia of Theatre and Performance* edited by **Dennis Kennedy** (2003, 0-19-860174-3, \$275) has many of the features that one looks for in a good reference. It takes high quality content, then combines the content with solid indexing and other helpful features, and then presents it in an attractive, easy to use format.

First let's talk about the basics. Editor **Dennis Kennedy** has amassed 4,300 entries writ-

ten by approximately 300 international contributors, and complemented them with over 100 black and white illustrations. The coverage is international and considers more than American and European theater. Asian, Caribbean, Latin American, Middle Eastern and African theater are also represented. A great deal of space is devoted to brief biographies of major playwrights, directors and actors, as well as stage and lighting designers and theater managers and critics. Individual articles discuss topics ranging from the ritual origins of theater, to the medieval morality play, to the studio theater movement, and from classical Greek tragedy, to

British pantomime, to street theater in India. There are also numerous articles on broader themes like critical concepts and methods, social theories and issues, character and performance types, as well as those that speak to the architecture of playhouses and discuss theater companies and festivals, and theatrical organizations and institutions. Special features include an excellent thematic table of contents, a sixty page selective index of dramatic titles, listing the articles in which they appear, a timeline

matching theater and performance events with historical and cultural ones. Other features include a complete list of contributors with their credentials, and a bibliography of further readings.

As **Mr. Kennedy** notes in his Preface, the *Oxford Encyclopedia of Theatre and Performance* is grounded in contemporary theater and performance studies, so it is no surprise that the treatment is scholarly. However, it is accessible to the general reader, as well as the serious student. This reference is appropriate for both public and academic libraries and should take its place among other titles like **Routledge's World Encyclopedia of World Theatre** (1994, 0415232058, \$900) **McGraw-Hill Encyclopedia of World Drama** (1984, out of print but available, used via **Amazon**) and the *Cambridge Guide to Theatre* (1995, 0521434378, \$50). (This later volume would be a good choice for libraries strapped for funds, or branch libraries with smaller collections.)

Wiley-Interscience has released another high-end science reference. The new two-volume *Encyclopedia of Space Science and Technology* (2003, 0-471-32408-6, \$550) edited by

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