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ATG Interviews Diane Kovacs

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Index Appreciation:
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tation of placing late-breaking news such as copyright acknowledgments following the index, because what good is the index if the researcher turns to the back of the book and quickly assumes there isn't one?

Into the Future — The Index Goes Electronic

How old-fashioned, you are perhaps musing at this point, to go on at such length about a soon-to-be-obsolete enterprise! Many scholarly books, including reference books, have been loaded into electronic databases without their indexes on the assumption that the automated full-text search will replace the index function — which indeed it does, although often rather poorly. All too often, excessive numbers of

search results that are not sensibly prioritized lead researchers through labyrinths of not particularly pertinent text passages, obscuring rather than illuminating the location of the substantive information that they really need.

On the other hand, if automated algorithms are customized to the content through the creation of thesauri to connect similar ideas expressed in different words; if professional evaluations of content authority and usefulness are applied; if the book index is incorporated in the search metadata or, as a second choice, in the offerings of links from one content tidbit or "digital object" to another; then electronic searches can work amazingly well. However, without the analytical choices made by indexers, full-text searching is often no more than a promising mishmash.

In fact, top-notch databases and library online catalogs use similar methods to pro-

vide access to large amounts of information. It is exciting to think that as these techniques improve, full-text searching will provide links to relevant material with the ease of a good book index. As automated full-text searching becomes more intelligent — incorporating more and more levels of indexing-like human analysis to connect questions with their most useful answers — new types of meta-searching will increasingly bring valuable content to the light of day. Information will be not only accessible, but locatable as never before, and indexers will never be out of a job!

Sylvia K. Miller has twenty years' experience in scholarly publishing, at Macmillan, Scribners, and Routledge.

ATG Interviews Diane Kovacs

President, Kovacs Consulting Internet & Web Training <diane@kovacs.com>

by **Tom Gilson** (Head, Reference Services, Addlestone Library, College of Charleston, 66 George Street, Charleston, SC 29401; Phone: 843-953-8014; Fax: 843-953-8019) <gilson@cofc.edu>

ATG: *Diane, you began at Bucknell University in 1989 as a reference and government documents librarian and four years later you started your own consulting business. What prompted you to take such a leap of faith? What opportunities did you see that maybe some of the rest of us missed?*

DK: Well I compare myself to the penguins that get pushed off the iceberg to test the waters for Sea lions and Orca. But, the real story is that I had so many people asking me to develop training that I felt it necessary to form a business to cope with it and keep it separate from my day job — by 1991 I was at **Kent State University Libraries**. Also, around that time my husband was doing a lot of computer networking consulting and we formed the business together. So initially it was both of us — him doing networking consulting and me doing training.

ATG: *It's great that you and your husband were able to match talents enabling you to branch out. By the way, what were your job duties at Kent State? How did that experience play into your decision?*

DK: I was just Reference Librarian — my hiring area was Humanities Reference. What I actually did was to do a great deal of the Dialog searching, and then Internet training for both, the library faculty, and the faculty in my own areas of collection responsibility. About 1991 spring — I think — the **Kent State University Library School Dean Rosemary DuMont** asked me to design and teach an Internet course for librarian continuing education. Also, the University put me in their list of referral consultants and I began doing Internet training for community organizations/businesses. **ALA**, **MLA**, **SLA** folks all asked me to do programs

on various Internet related topics at conferences. I did a lot more of those back then than I do now — I don't have the travel budget for more than one conference per year. I tend to specialize with **MLA** now.

ATG: *You were a pioneer in advocating that librarians collect and organize Websites, and in a sense, create electronic reference collections like we create print reference collections. What common criteria exist for collecting, evaluating, and selecting in both the print and digital world? What criteria are different?*

DK: All criteria used in selecting print resources apply in the digital world. If you keep your mind flexible — even the size of the resources matters — e.g., the size of the books matters in terms of how they fit on a shelf — the size of the digital resource matters in terms of how much disk space and bandwidth you have to support it.

The most important aspect that is unique to

electronic resources is archiving. So much of what we use is in e-form only and may disappear if proper attention is not given to making sure it is archived and available. Access is the second most important — libraries provide access to books by buildings being open during certain hours. E-resource access might be 24/7 *if* the technology infrastructure is set up properly to do that and that requires attention be paid to a patron's ability to access resources. Not everyone has a computer at home/office. Not everyone has an understanding of all the hoops you have to jump through to get to a virtual library — especially password/proxy protected e-resources. I'm getting a sharp reminder of this, this summer, as I am teaching an undergraduate information literacy course for non-traditional students. I'm still trying to get them to use email.

ATG: *Who are these nontraditional students? In our experience it is highly unusual for students not to be somewhat comfortable with technology. Do all of your non-traditional students have concerns about using technology? What are those concerns?*

DK: These are adult learners — working people who are returning to school to pursue further education e.g., business associates/bachelors degrees, administrative assisting, medical assisting, and criminal justice associates degrees. I have a couple of IT bachelors/associates students as well — but ALL of my students are first year/first semester returning adults. Their main concern is time, I think. Out of 30 students — two sections — only one of my students is a regular computer gamer. And none of them were regular users of Internet Messaging — those latter two activities are what I think

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most younger people come to college with — they give you a sense of ease in doing email and Web browsing for serious research. Most of my students had used inter-office email before — but only a couple had ever emailed for non-work and a different domain. Three or four had used Web search engines previously. Oh and average age was about 38 for these two groups. Quite a few were my age and two were older.

ATG: *Are you satisfied with the progress libraries have made in creating e-collections? Are librarians and patrons finding such collections useful? What else should be done to increase their relevance to users?*

DK: Satisfied? I'm truly impressed. I remember when I was almost shouted off the stage once by people proclaiming that print was all libraries needed to deal with and that the computer resources were like CB Radios and a passing fad. I don't want to be negative but that incident did almost stop me... but not quite. There were more people quietly telling me in private that they thought it was a marvelous opportunity for libraries to get ahead of a popular culture/information-seeking trend for once...

ATG: *What is it that has impressed you? Are there any specific library Websites we should look at to see examples of good e-collecting?*

DK: I'm impressed by the number of working consortia — my main experience is with **OhioLINK** and **Illinet Online** — **OPLIN**, **Clevnet**, etc., that sort of thing. I know there are many others in other states either existing or in development.

ATG: *Yes that's true. Here in South Carolina we have developed a working consortium called PASCAL. But the e-collecting being done is more shared licensing of databases with e-content, like JSTOR, etc. There is no plan to harvest quality Websites to be shared by the member libraries. Are they doing that sort of thing in other consortia?*

DK: Some yes — **OhioLINK** does it a bit as does the **Michigan Electronic Library**.

ATG: *Do you think there is a need for a comprehensive database of core Websites or are services like the Librarians Index to the Internet enough?*

DK: There is need for comprehensive databases of core Websites — **Librarians' Index to the Internet** <http://lii.org/> is okay — but it is really not doing a comprehensive collection — it does a core collection with a California focus. The **InfoMine** <http://infomine.ucr.edu/> concept is a bit better in terms of core academic resources and the **Internet Public Library** <http://www.ipl.org/> is a bit better in terms of core public library resources and **Google** is my friend. I think that the most important part of your question though is 'core' — there are only really a few compared to the many sites available — that are truly useful. Much of what is out there really is 'brochures,' 'pamphlets,' 'personal correspondence,' 'sales flyers,' etc.

against the grain people profile

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Diane Kovacs

BORN & LIVED: 1962 Colorado — Illinois from Kindergarten to University.

EARLY LIFE: Oldest of 9 children — grew up in small town and farm — Goats/Pigs/Sheep/Chickens — Parents returned to college when I was 10 and completed their degrees — Mom, Nursing — Dad, Agriculture and then Nursing.

FAMILY: I married **Michael Kovacs** in 1984 and we are still very happy — We didn't manage to procreate but we have 23 neices and nephews and a Godson to spoil. At the moment we have three dogs — two rescued Shih Tzus and a Tibetan Terrier and four cats — all rescues.

EDUCATION: I went to the **University of Illinois** because that is my family college — when they go to college they go there usually.

1985 **UIUC** Anthropology/Psychology Cognate BA

1989 **UIUC** GSLIS M.S. Library and Information Science

FIRST JOB: Worked in the Office of International Agriculture at **UIUC** until Graduate School — First Library job was at **Bucknell University** — Government Documents and Law.

PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES: Pick something — lol — I used to be really energetic; <http://www.kovacs.com/dianevida.html> — I have vivid memories of being told that the Internet was a passing fad. No one was interested in email discussion lists and e-resources were too unstable/free etc. for real libraries — am drafting an article and presentation on the sort of history of how I developed my electronic collection development courses from about 1991 to now — Will present in October at the Ohio Library Council meeting and the article is for *The Serials Librarian*

IN MY SPARE TIME I LIKE TO: Read, Internet Message, Game, Walk, Belly-Dance (yes I'm one of those).

FAVORITE BOOKS: Very hard to say — I look for **Mercedes Lackey**, **Andre Norton**, **Ursula Leguin**, and **Lois McMaster Bujold**.

PET PEEVES/WHAT MAKES ME MAD: Educated people who won't read... I am very tolerant of people who need to learn to read — I like to teach them to read and enjoy it — but when people who are supposed to be readers don't bother and thereby waste my time — it really ticks me off.

PHILOSOPHY: What will be will be...You get what you need.

MOST MEANINGFUL CAREER ACHIEVEMENT: When **UIUC** GSLIS asked me to teach a LEEP course. Then I felt truly successful. Seconded by winning the Documents to the People Award for starting Govdoc-L.

GOAL I HOPE TO ACHIEVE FIVE YEARS FROM NOW: Be doing what I'm doing now in the newer technology — training and developing training. Web-based primarily.

HOW/WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS: Five years from now I see libraries being much more user-centered than now — more focussed on the resources needed by patrons for education/research/recreation/life skills and even less focussed on the format of those resources. Archiving of electronic resources will be more effective/reliable. I'd like to be really optimistic and say that our Catalog records will be converted to XML database formats and fully Web database integrable and searchable. **Google** might be a good OPAC vendor...

ATG: *We're not sure what you mean by 'brochures,' 'pamphlets,' 'personal correspondence,' and 'sales flyers?'* Just how would you define a comprehensive Website?

Are there other comprehensive sites that our reader's should know about?

DK: I mean that they are just sales pitches
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or very brief overviews or they are people's opinions and not research data. I don't understand what you mean by comprehensive Website... you asked me about collections. Google might be a comprehensive collection site for Web library resources — but in reality it is not a collection but an index. BUBL is as comprehensive within the scope of their collection policy as it is probably possible to get without a lot more funding.

ATG: In books like the Kovacs Guide to Electronic Library Collection Development most of your focus has been on harvesting Websites from the free Web. Where do recent publisher initiatives offering electronic version of their reference works fit in? Will they complement or compete with Websites from the free Web? Where does this explosive growth of digital information leave the collection of print reference materials?

DK: First, the focus is on the free stuff because I can show it to people. But the same criteria for selection should be applied to fee-based stuff. I don't know where it will leave the print reference materials, yet. The problem I see is that print is appropriate in some situations and it is not in others. I'd rather have a dictionary handy then go online just to look up a word but I sure do not want to be back using Sociological Abstracts in print again. The one thing that I think is most important for us to keep in mind though is that electricity is ultimately the controlling piece of e-libraries. If there is no electricity there is no e-library. If we have power failures we have no resources. Think California a few years ago when half my classes were cancelled because of power failures, Iraq, most of Africa, etc. We must think in terms of back-up now I believe. Print or microfilm access as a back-up to when the power is gone — or the computer crashes or the network is cut by idiots with backhoes — that sort of thing.

ATG: But can the average library afford to do "back up?" Are print and/or microfilm archives of electronic information realistic? Or are you thinking of some kind of national depository set up? Where might institutional repositories fit into this?

DK: Usually not, but I think that consortia and indeed individual libraries can make licensing arrangements for archiving. And I do think a national depository should be available at some level. The Internet Archive WaybackMachine <http://www.waybackmachine.org> is a step in the right direction vis-à-vis free Web resources.

ATG: As a consultant, you do numerous surveys on core reference collections dealing with topics ranging from general reference to law and from medical to business sources. Without giving away too much, can you tell us what you have learned? Are traditional reference works being supplanted by Websites? If so, will recent publisher attempts at developing digital reference works stem the tide? In short, is reference publishing still relevant?

DK: I will give it all away to you once I get the data compiled. I do the surveys to help me teach better and write better — the information belongs to the people I query. What I have learned in a nutshell though is that it is very easy to come up with ten or fewer *CORE* resources or type of resources that everyone agrees on as useful in a given subject area. In terms of trends... the first time I did the survey the results were mostly print resources. This time it appears (they are still being compiled) the results are mostly Web resources. I plan to get to these soon — some of them anyway.

ATG: It sounds like you will be publishing or posting to your Website the results of your surveys. When should we look for the results? And speaking of *CORE* sources, have publisher sources like Gale's Virtual Reference Library and Oxford's Online Reference Collections hit the radar screen yet?

DK: Well I got side-tracked this summer with the Infolit course I mentioned earlier so I am still sitting here with raw data. Gale yes — Oxford no — at least not in my surveys of core tools.

ATG: This is a bit off topic, but what is your take on recent Google initiatives like Google Scholar and Google Print? What do they say about the future of libraries and the library community? How can we stop from being marginalized?

DK: We can stop from being marginalized by embracing these efforts. We should have been leading them but Google is NOT replacing us — it is giving us a new set of tools. We should be embracing and teaching these

tools. We will be marginalized if we cling to the idea that we — libraries — have to be the originator of information collections or that everything has to be filtered through librarians. This has never been true. I'm trying to remember stats from last time I studied this — less than 1/3 of people using a library from my reading actually ask at the reference desk. In Use and Users of Information class in library school, I studied medical professionals and found that very few of them ever go to the library 'first' anyway — they only go to the library when they exhaust their personal collection or their collegial networks. That is our role — to be there and be obviously there and available, when people need us. And we need to stop thinking they know we are there and do a bit more marketing...

ATG: For those of us interested in pursuing the issue of library marketing and/or reaching out to users, can you suggest some further reading? Who/What has inspired you to think along these lines?

DK: Experience. Interactions with people in the community — especially the business world — who have no clue what their own public libraries offer for them. I can't think of a good marketing libraries source. There have been several good speakers on the conference circuit. I have my ideas but I've never done a formal presentation except in basic marketing of Websites.

ATG: Diane, thank you for being so forthcoming. You've given us a lot to think about. We, and our readers, appreciate it.

DK: You're welcome and thank you for asking me.

ATG Interviews Erin McKean

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by **Tom Gilson** (Head, Reference Services, Addlestone Library, College of Charleston, 66 George Street, Charleston, SC 29401; Phone: 843-953-8014; Fax: 843-953-8019) <gilsont@cofc.edu>

ATG: Erin, is it really true that you have wanted to be a lexicographer since you were eight years old? I doubt I knew what the word meant at that age. What triggered this amazing interest?

EM: When I was eight I would read anything that came into the house — including my dad's *Wall St. Journal*. And one day the "floating" column on the front page was about **Robert Burchfield** and the editing of the second edition of the *OED*. I thought it was so cool — I'd never really considered how dictionaries were made before — and thought, "hey, I'd like to do that!" And nobody ever tried to talk me out of it, so here I am.

I actually have a copy of the article. I had cut it out and saved it, and when I went away to college it turned up again. A few years ago I was in touch with a reporter from the *WSJ* who

knew the reporter who had written the article; he said he'd let her know that she had been responsible for my whole life, basically!

ATG: What made you think that making dictionaries would be a "cool job"?

EM: I think, even at eight, I really liked words: the nuts and bolts of them. I liked the idea of being a word cataloguer, if not a word curator. The more I learned about lexicography, the more I was interested in it. There's a wonderful quote about lexicography that I have hanging in my office, by the lexicographer **James R. Hulbert**:

"I know of no more enjoyable intellectual activity than working on a dictionary. Unlike most research, lexicography rarely sends one in fruitless quests; one does not devote days, months, or

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