September 2006

ATG Interviews Patrick C. Kindregan

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Recommended Citation

Montgomery, Jack (2006) "ATG Interviews Patrick C. Kindregan," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 18: Iss. 4, Article 17.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.4924>

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wants, and increase the amount we spend on materials that are actually needed. Not every library could do this in equal degrees, of course: there are some libraries, like **Harvard's**, or the **New York Public Library**, that have missions (and budgets) specifically oriented towards creating and preserving comprehensive, permanent collections. Such collections are not just practical resources for the everyday user, but also monuments to Western civilization, and those collections serve an important purpose in society.

But they are also very much exceptions to the rule. Most libraries, whether public or academic or corporate or "special," have missions that are much more narrowly targeted, with budgets and physical space to match. For the average library to attempt to collect comprehensively and permanently on a "just-in-case" basis makes much less sense in 2006 than it did in 1956 — or even in 1990, before it was clear that the World Wide Web was about to turn the information economy upside down.

Almost all libraries now struggle to house and manage the collections they already have; at the same time, budgets are stagnant, serials inflation flirts with double digits, and new and expensive titles continue to proliferate. The implication seems obvious: when you're out of room and you're out of money, you're going to have to start buying less. Instead of figuring out how to ratchet down the activity of our current acquisition model, perhaps the time has come to move towards a different model altogether. It may well be that the very idea of a comprehensive and permanent library collection has outlived its usefulness. 🐾

Endnotes

1. Except, of course, in those cultures where it was stored mentally and transmitted orally, rendering it even more expensive and obscure, if quite a bit more portable.

cial services, for now at least, provide access to digitized versions of music which started life on CD or vinyl or paper. Libraries could theoretically collaborate to locate, acquire, house, and preserve all or selected recordings represented in these databases, given adequate time and money, regardless of their digitized existence in a commercial database. However, with born-digital music, new techniques to ensure preservation and long-term access will need to be developed. The **Database of Recorded American Music** is an example of the JSTOR licensing model. Its content comprises the catalogue of the label **New World Records**, supplemented by music from other labels whose focus is American music. Funded initially by the **Robert Sterling Clark Foundation** and by ongoing support from **The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation**, its market is academic institutions and libraries. Another model is **Alexander Street Press's "Digital Music: Collections to Own,"** which offers libraries the option of an annual license for streamed access, or one-time purchase of audio files from participating record labels' entire catalogues that the library agrees to stream to one user at a time. The purchase includes a hard disk containing an archival copy of the audio files.

Though acknowledging some uncertainty about whether librarians will trust commercial vendors to preserve content and provide access for the long term, **Roger Press** is optimistic about the future. With so many efforts, commercial and non-profit, by **Google** and many others, to digitize the world's information, "one way or another, the information won't disappear off the planet."¹⁶ We need to develop mechanisms for collaborating as librarians, publishers, and vendors to justify **Roger Press's** and **Kevin Kelly's** optimism about the universal library.

Will libraries need to collect music at all, if all music is digitized and part of the universal library? As they have for centuries, libraries acquire music and make it available to their users, including those who cannot otherwise afford it or who lack the required technology to access it. Librarians know how to describe music, organize it for subsequent retrieval, and teach their users to locate and access it. Librarians understand the importance of preservation and long-term access. Until the universal library is truly populated with all the music needed by our user communities... until everyone has affordable, easy access to the universal library and can find what they need when they need it... until we can guarantee that the music will always be available to our users, there will continue to be a role for libraries. 🐾

ATG Interviews Patrick C. Kindregan

Associate Director, Better World Books, www.betterworldbooks.com

by Jack Montgomery (Western Kentucky University) <jack.montgomery@wku.edu>

ATG: Patrick, how did you come to work with Better World Books?

PK: I heard about Better World Books from a college friend, **Dustin Holland** (our current Director). **Dustin** was recruited in 2004 to jump start the Better World Books' Library Discards and Donations Program. I continually followed the incredible progress of the program, and in early 2005 I received word from **Dustin** that he was interested in speaking to me about joining the library team. In early April, I attended the **ACRL** conference in Minneapolis to learn more about Better World Books and the library industry. My new career officially started two weeks after the conference.

ATG: Can you tell us a little bit about the company's history, its founder and its overall business philosophy?

PK: The Story — Better World Books began with a single book drive at the University of Notre Dame in 2001. Organized by re-

cent graduates, the book drive benefited the **Robinson Community Learning Center** in South Bend. Drop boxes placed on campus were soon full of books that would otherwise have been wasted, thrown away in dumpsters, or hauled off to landfills.

Those recent graduates who ran the book drive, **Christopher "Kreece" Fuchs** and **Xavier Helgesen**, along with another of their college friends, **Jeff Kurtzman**, realized two important things with that first book drive. First, there was a huge market for unwanted textbooks to be sold online. Second, college students and members of the community were more interested than ever in making a difference. These three friends seized on the opportunity and began to work spreading literacy locally, nationally and around the world. They founded the social venture that is now **Better World Books**. Their company began to convert unwanted, wasted books into funding for non-profit literacy partners.

The Cause — Worldwide Literacy. One-seventh of the world's population is illiterate (nearly 900 million people). Over 2.6 billion people in the world live on less than \$1 per day. **BWB** is committed to breaking the cycle of poverty and dependency through promoting literacy and education around the globe "one book at a time." **BWB's** core non-profit literacy partners include: **Books for Africa** (www.boooksforafrica.org); **Room to Read** (www.roomtoread.org) and **The National Center for Family Literacy** (www.famlit.org). Better World Books has contributed over \$750,000 in total funding to over 38 literacy partners.

In addition to active book drives on over 600 campuses nationwide, **Better World Books** has expanded our business model to include libraries and secondhand stores. Since the program's inception in late 2004, over 500 libraries across the U.S. have partnered with **Better World**

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Books to sell their library discards and gift book donations online.

ATG: *What if any specialized training, experience or education did you receive before getting into the used book business?*

PK: Throughout college, and during the years after college leading up to **Better World Books**, I sold books and other used goods on Websites like **eBay.com** and **Amazon.com**. This experience was a great introduction to the online used book marketplace and has helped me effectively communicate our program to librarians.

In order to learn more about libraries, I continually read industry publications and listservs, attend conferences, and visit libraries across the U.S.

To stay aware of current trends in the online used book marketplace, **Better World Books** employs a full time rare and antiquarian book expert at our warehouse in Mishawaka, Indiana. We attend regular professional development sessions at our warehouse to continually improve our book knowledge.

ATG: *Who do you see as primary customers of Better World Books? Are you organized to respond to a certain patron group?*

PK: With respect to libraries, our primary customer is any library with surplus books! Our flexible logistics options allow us to work with small libraries that ship us 6 boxes annually, as well as large multi-branch systems that ship many truckloads per year. Our client list includes academic, public, and special libraries.

ATG: *So far, what has been notable in your experience in dealing with libraries? Have there been any unexpected issues?*

PK: The most notable aspect of my experience with **Better World Books** has been getting to know our client librarians. It's wonderful to work with a group of professionals that share our mission of supporting literacy initiatives worldwide and saving books from landfills. Librarians also keep us on our toes by pointing out typos in marketing materials and emails!

ATG: *From a Used bookseller's standpoint, what is one thing you wish most librarians knew but sometimes seem to forget or need to learn?*

PK: First of all, I wish more librarians knew that we can sell their ex-library books online. We can sell books that have the traditional markings of a library book (markings on the spine, stickers, labels, due date cards, stamps, plates, etc.). Secondly, many librarians say that some of their withdrawn material is "outdated" and "nobody would ever buy this." While some books certainly are more popular than others, it is estimated that 100 million people comprise the online book marketplace. The international market allows us to sell material to consumers overseas that may not be popular culture in this country.

ATG: *Do you find it difficult to compete with large companies/vendors?*

PK: Not at all. In the beginning, we struggled as all new companies do with building name recognition. However, with over 500 library clients actively participating in our program, **Better World Books** has quickly become an industry leader; our program has spread throughout the library world mostly via word-of-mouth.

Today, **Better World Books** is a top 25 seller on **Amazon.com** and a top 200 seller on **eBay.com**. In September 2005, **BWB** was the 15th fastest growing company on **eBay.com**. We occupy 180,000 square feet of space at our new warehouse facility, and we have the option to expand our total space to 250,000 square feet. Currently, we have 1.2 million books in inventory.

ATG: *I've seen your Website and it looks great and navigates smoothly! What do you envision for the future of your online ordering/interactive Website?*

PK: We are continually working to improve our Website and other technology. We utilize a custom Web portal where libraries can print prepaid **UPS** labels for their book shipments. In addition, we provide our libraries access to an online sales report to track daily sales, payments, and commissions.

The next improvement you will see with our Website is our concept of a virtual book sale. Library patrons will be able to browse the inventory of our client libraries — essentially creating an online bookstore to allow community members to buy books from their local library online.

ATG: *How many staff do you currently employ and how is Better World Books generally organized?*

PK: Our warehouse currently employs about 80 people that help us with all aspects of selling books online: receiving, sorting, scanning, pricing, shipping, etc. In addition to the warehouse, **Better World Books** has three active co-founders, a C.E.O., twelve Regional Directors (running book drives on college campuses), four employees working with libraries, and a large technology team.

ATG: *What would you say is the most challenging aspect of what you do?*

PK: The most significant challenge for the Company is to effectively and efficiently manage the explosive growth of the business. Additional challenges include: alleviating the pressures directly related to explosive growth (on people, systems, technology, training, deploy-

ment), building out pricing features to give **BWB** a competitive edge, expanding technology infrastructure (to ensure stability, reliability, security and redundancy), maintaining a fun work environment, adapting rapidly to changing marketplace conditions, moving from our old warehouse facility to the new warehouse facility, selecting new warehouse space, staying one step ahead of the competition, educating the public on the emergence of Social Enterprises, maintaining extremely high feedback ratings, continuously driving down the cost of inbound/outbound logistics, and responding quickly to clients' needs.

ATG: *Do you see Better World Books ever taking a position in the whole eBooks trade? Do you envision making eBooks a part of your inventory?*

"...Better World Books has quickly become an industry leader; our program has spread throughout the library world mostly via word-of-mouth."

PK: At this point, **Better World Books** remains focused on selling used books online.

ATG: *Where do you see Better World Books going within five years? What directions have you considered taking?*

PK: In order to improve efficiency and decrease logistical costs, we may eventually open new warehouse space closer to the West Coast in addition to our facility in Indiana. We are also currently working out logistics options to expand our program into Canada.

Another big push for **Better World Books** will be **Corporate Book Drives**. This program allows an organization to collect books for us to sell on behalf of a non-profit literacy partner. We have several drives in progress already.

I also see **Better World Books** establishing more partnerships with literacy initiatives and other organizations that share in our mission.

ATG: *Finally, what do you do with your free time?*

PK: When I'm not traveling around the country attending conferences and meeting with libraries, I enjoy a round of golf, spending weekends boating and fishing at the lake, and attending baseball games (Go Braves!).

Rumors from page 16

Bunnell, "I am proud to be a librarian and a Googler ..." This is from **netconnect** (supplement to **LJ**), summer 2006, p.28.

Speaking of **Google**, picked up this cool, but very long, article from the **NFAIS information community news**. It's in **Baseline Magazine**, July 6, 2006, "How Google Works" by **David F. Carr**. <http://www.baselinemag.com/article2/0,1540,1985040,00.asp>

And the dynamo **Jill O'Neill** (**NFAIS**, Director, Planning and Communications) <jilloneill@nfaeis.org> puts the **NFAIS** information community news together.

The Chronicle of Higher Education ran a story several weeks ago (August 25, 2006) regarding the **University of California** deal with **Google**. The contract was released as part of an "open records request" from the **Chronicle**. See "U. of California Will Provide Up to 3,000 Books a Day to Google for Scanning, Contract

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