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ATG Interviews Tom Sanville

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by **Margaret Landesman** (Head, Collection Development, Marriott Library, University of Utah,
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ATG: We're talking about the future of academic library collections. Do they have one?

TS: They do. But it could be an increasingly marginal one unless we commit to fundamental changes. In 2006, to succeed long-term, we have to respond to a radically changed environment.

We invented **OhioLINK** in 1992 as a new mechanism. We must start from there and move forward strategically, which may mean starting from scratch in some respects. At the same time, we have to keep **OhioLINK's** established and successful services prospering. In all we do we need a longer term perspective on our definition of success. We have to take the lessons and warnings of a greatly changed environment and reinvent our definition of success. Environmental changes over the past fourteen years have been dramatic. The effects have accumulated slowly and steadily. Some of these changes are threats to libraries, but they will not be catastrophic if we respond. If we do not change ourselves, we ultimately will see steady, slow deterioration in our capabilities. The scary thing is that only by looking back will we see how much ground we have lost. The slow decline is deceptively painless and even rewarded in our institutional cultures. If we wait too long, we will be unable to reverse the decline.

OhioLINK's mission was written almost 20 years ago. It is still valid. But the environment has changed and we have to respond in the future faster than we have up to this point. We need to look at the longer term picture; where we've been, where we are, and where we are going.

ATG: How would you characterize the most critical environmental changes?

TS: Information used to be scarce, based on print as the primary medium, and needed to be collected mostly on a library-by-library basis. Libraries had an almost exclusive role here as providers of free information. Libraries leveled the playing field and ensured information would be preserved for later generations.

We need to recognize how much the world has changed from 1992 when **OhioLINK** was conceived. Look at the **Hobbes** Internet timeline. It shows changes year by year. **OhioLINK** was founded a year after World Wide Web software was first released. In 2006, we have a generation of students that has grown up with the Web. They are comfortable with it as their primary information source. Their expectations for what Websites should do and how they should respond to users are not driven by library Websites. The **OCLC** research study asked students in several different ways, "where do you go to get information?" Every time, 75

to 90% say they use the search engines as their primary source. Libraries and library Websites are a very small slice of the pie.

Of all the changes the Web has brought, none has had a greater impact on libraries than the dominance of the search engines.

Beloit College publishes a survey of what freshmen have known in their lifetime. The current generation of students, the so-called **Generation NeXt** or **Millennials**, have always known cyberspace and had email. Think about how different they and their expectations are from the students of 1992 and before.

Corporations such as **Google** harness their powerful information retrieval capabilities for their shareholders' benefit. This may or may not guarantee the free exchange of ideas and the long-term preservation of information. Technology enables every consumer to create and distribute information, to collaborate with others to create even more information, and to find and consume information at enormous rates. Most of the time, they really aren't thinking about the quality of that information in the way librarians do. Have we really kept up with all these changes? We're the same size, maybe even a larger size, fish. But the information pond we were once in is now an ocean.

The long-term outlook for higher education and academic libraries has changed. No longer do we expect more and more funding with a periodic economic downturn from which we then recover and push back up. There's a general sense that funds for higher education are going to be hard to come by. No one foresees a significant upsurge in funding anytime soon.

In Ohio it was not so hard to make adjustments in 2001 and 2002. In 2006 and looking to 2007, we are not much better off as a community than we were five years ago. We are losing or not gaining ground. The world has changed in important ways and our response needs to be strategic, transformative, and disruptive. I think publishers have rightly argued

that in light of the changes in our global society, higher ed needs to invest more in information resources. A complicated topic to be sure, but the reality is that this is not going to happen to a degree which would make publishers happy and preserve their status quo.

ATG: What have been the successes of consortia?

TS: Consortia have helped libraries keep up with the rapid growth of the Web ocean. Through group economic action we have built online libraries which offer users access to far more information — and especially journal collections — than libraries ever could even dream of offering before. In **OhioLINK's** case we have eliminated severe deprivation and rationing of information resources found in most Ohio libraries. We have developed statewide systems to deliver and integrate physical and electronic resources. As a result we have seen use of our information resources grow dramatically. But remember the results from the **OCLC** survey showing the dominance of search engines? I can only ask, what should our use levels be if we were really reaching all our users?? How do we become more effective in reaching users with different expectations than those we have traditionally held?

With regard to scholarly communication, we have been successful in mitigating the effect on individual libraries of a dysfunctional system. But we haven't changed the fundamentals underneath. As a combined seller and buyer community we have yet to figure out how to move from a world of information scarcity and rationing to one of abundance and abundant accessibility. We as buyers and providers will still ultimately lose ground. Through our group purchasing programs we have slowed down, and sometimes even avoided, the impact of more information at steadily increasing prices. But ultimately we will return to the same fundamental pressures that stimulated the growth of consortia in the first place as long as there is a fundamental imbalance in our resources versus the quantity and cost of information being produced

ATG: Where do we go next?

TS: We need to consider a total rearrangement of how we do things and certainly think about our priorities and their relative importance. We are probably paying a lot of attention to the wrong things — old things and ideas that have been successful for us, but will not keep us successful.

We need to connect with where and how our users are starting their Web activity, not where we'd like them to start. As I said, I look at the number of increasing uses we get and conclude that's good. But what we have to ask ourselves is "What should it be?" And we're not there.

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Do we really understand what they need and how they want to use it? Do we really understand how we can best integrate into their lives? Do we really build services that are attractive as well as build better information seeking habits? How do we build the services they need? And most importantly, in a search engine dominated world, we either have to apply a massive amount of effort and resources into changing this or recognize our three important priorities to building our services: 1. discovery, 2. discovery, 3. discovery. If our users don't find us or what we provide in the first place, end of game.

There are some good things happening on which we must build. **Google** and **EBSCO** seem to want to collaborate to get **EBSCOhost** results in **Google** searches. Our resolvers will work with **Google Scholar** and **Microsoft's New Entry**. We need to maximize the development of these types of things.

The **OhioLINK** has spent an enormous energy on commercial information. **OhioLINK's Strategic Plan** specifies a relative shift away from content. We need to focus on our ability to fit into and affect the information seeking habits of our users. Content is not the end-all if we're buying stuff in pricing formulas that are unsustainable or it's not used as it should be. We have to somehow break that short-term bond of being compelled to buy it at ultimately unsustainable rates. This is supposed to be a free market system. That means sellers will take as much pricing room as buyers will give them. If we start to say no, we will slowly begin to increase our bargaining power. We have to be willing to take some heavy short-term bullets, selectively and strategically. We need to more rapidly evolve our just-say-no backbone. In this market game we must play with a long-term perspective recognizing the realities of higher education budgets. We have to emphasize sustainability and increasingly better value equations. If this is the information age then we increasingly must buy more information per dollar spent if we are to succeed. We need to begin to act more rationally in light of the environment we live in. It was one thing, five years ago to make some adjustments, but after five years of nearly flat budgets, it is not sustainable.

We need to adopt the mentality that first came out in the *ARL Bimonthly Report* 234 June 2004, "Libraries Dealing with the Future Now," by **Joseph M. Brewer**, **Sheril J. Hook**, **Janice Simmons-Welburn**, and **Karen Williams** of the **University of Arizona Library** (<http://www.arl.org/news/234/dealing.html>) and amplified in **David Lewis'** "The Innovator's Dilemma: Disruptive Change and Academic Libraries" published by **Library Administration & Management** (<http://hdl.handle.net/1805/173>) on disruptive technology. We have to disrupt our successes if we are going to continue to succeed.

ATG: What are the dangers of the changed environment?

TS: The biggest danger is feeling we don't

need to respond differently to our changed world, to believe that we can get away without changing and that there will not be an impact. Unfortunately, the enviable stability of our institutions can contribute to this false sense of security. There is not necessarily a succeed or die mandate. Look at your own institution. We can all say that the **University of Utah** is not going to go out of business, nor is the library, any time soon. So there isn't an immediate strong motivation to change if it's painful. But it's easy to see, if you look at trends, that with the enormous growth in the amount of information, **Utah** will collect smaller and smaller percentages of what is available, just as more and more is available to our users outside the library. If we tell the faculty we will not buy unreasonably priced journals, we don't get rewarded for that. This makes us safer and more comfortable contributing to our own demise. Don't be lulled to sleep by this.

We need to hold ourselves to some higher standards. We don't have to do this because we will go out of business, but we have to if we want to be what we are capable of. We don't have that immediate survival motivation, and the environment we live in doesn't reward doing the things that we ought to.

Some of the issues we agonize over are not ours to agonize over at the root cause level. We are agonizing over the symptoms. What else can we do? The publishing system problem is certainly one such issue. We need to dwell less on our ability to solve that short term. One danger is that we will continue to focus so heavily on it when in fact we have a lot more control over building digital repositories and digitizing our collections.

ATG: What stops us from seeing the need for reinvention?

TS: Academic libraries probably underestimate the amount of accumulated change and therefore tend to have a view of themselves that may have been true 15-20 years ago. There was no Internet. There was no World Wide Web. If the library didn't have it, where else would you go? But there is increasing volume of information: from 1986 to 2002, the number of journals published increased by 58%. During roughly the same period, world-wide production of books increased approximately 50%.

The library and its collections haven't gotten smaller. But the library is a smaller player in the lives of its users. This we have underestimated. Libraries still act as if they are the biggest game in town. We have to stop fooling ourselves about where we stand in the pecking order, figure out exactly where we do stand, and transform ourselves.

ATG: What role will consortia play in the changed world?

TS: I hold to the view in today's world that each library is better off as part of a group. No matter how you choose to cope, you can succeed better within a group than on your own. The economics of the changed world in which we live simply reinforces this view.

This is true not only for buying, storing, and accessing physical and electronic collections but also in dealing with other issues such as infor-

mation literacy and promotion of library services and the library brand, support of campus digitization projects, the evolving role of the library as an important physical place, and advocating support of the library budget.

ATG: There are those who worry that we are moving away from the true mission of the research library.

TS: It's not the mission that is changing but how we accomplish it. Show me an analysis of the environment that supports exactly what we are doing as a means to continued success. Our analysis says that is not the case. But we do not see a fundamental change in mission.

ATG: What are you planning to do next in OhioLINK?

TS: We have a working document. But the key is not the document itself, it's the energy it generates in our community to be creative. At this point it's more about possibilities than an iron clad plan. We are challenging ourselves to put innovative possibilities on the table.

Libraries cannot afford to hold onto any practice that can be improved upon by individual or collaborative restructuring. Just as changing economics and technologies compelled us to form **OhioLINK** and the regional book depositories, so must libraries examine all aspects of library operations. Higher education libraries cannot hope to outspend **Google** on the technology to deliver information services. With limited resources, libraries must creatively invest.

We see the keys to our success in:

First, a better understanding of our users' needs and preferences;

Second, a more realistic view to optimal commercial information purchasing at sustainable levels;

Third, a more comprehensive ability to create and control the intellectual property assets of our community; and

Fourth, more integration with the other players in Ohio who are trying, through technological innovation, to improve our educational and economic infrastructure.

That opens up all sorts of possibilities. Among the areas we are addressing are these:

1. We need to determine how to appropriately create a comprehensive ability to search all (as many as possible) of **OhioLINK** and library resources for one-stop searching. We don't need to be just like **Google**, but we had better learn from their successes.

2. Create access to **OhioLINK** resources where possible through Internet sites used by our patrons. Discovery, discovery, discovery. We know we are not the first stop for many of our users.

3. Create customization options to meet individual needs — active and passive. Again, we need to learn from others how to make our sites more attractive through user driven controls and through the added value we can bring to users based on their unique information seeking activities.

4. We need to be sure we deliver to the full spectrum of delivery platforms — PC's, cell phones, you name it.

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5. We need more aggressive management of content licenses to strike a balance between comprehensive and affordable. Publishers still assume long-term price increases beyond affordable levels and libraries have a poor record of combating price increases with cancellations. This needs to change. We still have great opportunities to bring about improved efficiencies and effectiveness especially in eBook and non-text based e-content licenses. We need to continue evolving our financial models.

6. We have to make sure the cure is not worse than the disease. If more and more relevant information is on the freely available Web, we need to maximize discovery of it.

7. We need to fully develop our second generation statewide Digital Resource Commons platform to create, control, and access our own intellectual property assets.

8. We will assist Ohio higher ed in investigating all options for more affordable text book delivery (both paper and electronic).

9. We must ground everything we do in regularly assessment of our users' needs by surveys or other methods

10. More aggressive and expansive coordination with our Ohio partners in higher education as well as K-12, business, and public libraries is needed. With technology as the enabler, instruction, research, and libraries are all converging in the same place. There are many players with overlapping agendas.

11. Examine all library operations to implement collaborative innovations to reduce and control costs and improve effectiveness. An obvious area is the expansion and coordination to ensure preservation and access to lesser used materials at the lowest cost.

And this is just the tip of the iceberg as our community puts its creative abilities to work.

ATG: *Think big, think comprehensively.*

TS: As in the past, a key is to think big and comprehensively. OhioLINK has succeeded in a state that is not at the top economically or in its support of higher education. There was no single thing for us to concentrate on that we all could agree on. We have succeeded in part because we created a big picture that swamped the traditional differences of members. And we delivered on the promise quickly. As a group, you have to cre-

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ate common ground and that is best done with a broad, multi-faceted agenda.

ATG: *What is the most difficult part of achieving this change?*

TS: That's easy. The hardest thing is to decide what not to do, or what not to do anymore. It is easy to say what to do. It's not always rocket science. But under limited resources, it is critical to do the much harder thing, which is to decide what not to do. We are all creatures of habit. Breaking those habits is the key.

Images Matter: The Introduction of Artstor at The University of California Berkeley

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Art and architecture librarians have sat on the sidelines watching resources for other disciplines migrate from analog to digital formats over the past two decades. Business, law, science, and social science scholars have access to a comprehensive array of full-text publications such as indexes, books, journals or conference papers. For the fields of art and architecture, however, the

printed book continues to be the format of choice for faculty and students. Museums continue to favor the publication of exhibition catalogues that offer readers high quality reproductions. The art monograph and catalogue raisonné are alive and well with no apparent trend in sight by publishers to digitize. Even today, only a small percentage of art journals are available in

full-text formats. There is, however, a major trend to digitize slides and images. This digital revolution has been welcomed by the academic community in the arts and humanities.

In 2004, the **Andrew W. Mellon Foundation** launched **ARTstor** (www.artstor.org), a non-profit organization that provides a digital library of images to museums and institutions of higher learning. For the first time, librarians and visual resource curators were given the option to license a fairly comprehensive, coherent

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