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ATG Interviews Chris Warnock

CEO, ebrary

by **Katina Strauch** (Editor, *Against the Grain*) <kstrauch@comcast.net>

ATG: *There has been a lot of buzz lately about eBooks. Do you think that the time has finally arrived for success in the academic marketplace?*

CW: I think the time has arrived for electronic content in the academic marketplace. If each book is an investment, then from the perspective of an investment, I have a difficult time speculating as to why a library would choose to buy a physical book over its electronic counterpart. If the information is the same, more people can more easily access the content, it doesn't take any shelf space, there is no re-shelving cost, and if MARC records come with the electronic version for free, then the library stands to gain in every respect.

We had one customer tell us that he had the pleasure of walking around the library, telling his colleagues that he just added 30,000 titles to the library's collection — in one day. If you look at the role libraries play, there is an opportunity before us to enable libraries to organize and optimize their information for their patrons' use, at a scale and rate that they could not ever dream of achieving with physical information. Plus, libraries should also be able to build their collections much more cost effectively through electronic content.

From a researcher's perspective, the title of an electronic book is immediately available, and can be searched as well as navigated much more easily than the physical book. The user can highlight and annotate text electronically, and if they want to cite a section, the copied text includes a customizable citation with link and copyright attribution linking to the page it copied.

Even from the publisher's perspective, distributing the electronic version represents the potential for greater profits, so much so, that it

is conceivable for the publisher to make significantly more money, charging libraries less money, for accessing their content.

There are a lot of issues that warrant discussion regarding the purchase of electronic titles, archive-ability, ownership, access rights, etc... I do not mean to belittle any of these issues, or suggest that they are not important, but from the economic and efficiency benefit to a library, and its patron base, actually from almost every perspective, the benefits of purchasing or licensing the information electronically, significantly out-performs the print equivalent.

The only thing that prevents this from being one of the greatest periods of time in the history of publishers and libraries is the rate in which they adapt to new opportunities and technologies. For libraries to be able to continue to provide information for free to their patron bases, both publishers and libraries need to adapt the way that they think about their products and how they sell or purchase those products.

One of the issues before us is the role that electronic journals can play as a model for other forms of electronic content. The issue here is that libraries are forced to subscribe to multiple collections, whether they want multiple collections or not. This is done at the consortia level in order to increase their purchasing power. In fact, this practice may actually not be in the interest of either the publisher or the library. There are economic models that suggest that libraries purchasing individually can increase their purchasing power 10 to 1, and the publishers can still make more money.

The reason I bring up this last point, is in part it seems as though libraries and publishers have begun to settle on what acceptable business models should be for eBooks, and guess

what? It looks an awful lot like the status quo — which is fine — but the status quo, in the case of the economics for libraries, is a slippery slope in the wrong direction. The academic monograph, it could be argued, is on the endangered species list, as is, in some cases, many of the smaller university presses.

Electronic distribution should offer a solution that allows publishers and libraries to flourish. We are at the dawn of a new renaissance. The tools that we have at our disposal are amongst the most powerful in the history of the world. Libraries — historically — have provided the most unbiased and egalitarian access to published information and it is libraries that should be celebrated and promoted in this regard.

ATG: *You advertise that you have 900 customers in 100 countries. What sort of customer base is out there. ebrary has implemented many new initiatives and product clusters in a variety of subject areas. Tell us about them.*

CW: World-wide about 80% of our customer base is academic libraries, the rest is comprised of community colleges, public libraries and special libraries. About 40% of our customer base is in North America and 60% is everywhere else, and by everywhere else, I really mean everywhere else.

Our products — we call them “collections” — are designed to give our library customers the flexibility that they need to build collections efficiently and in a manner that works for them and for the publisher. In every case each collection or initiative has been asked for by a customer, we add it because we can, and we add it in addition to the other services or collections that preceded it.

We offer libraries the ability to choose how they acquire electronic content. They may subscribe to information for a yearly fee, or they may purchase titles and own them. We license our technology to libraries, publishers and aggregators to build databases of their own content for their own use, and we enable them to do this all under their own brand.

For the last five years we have been gathering statistics and developing models of usage patterns with content accessible under multiple business models. The results of this research enables us to provide our library customers with the ability to purchase or lease content under a business model that fits their needs. All of these business models offer content that is accessible from a single platform. We think this gives libraries a great foundation to build their electronic collections. With data that we have collected, we will be optimizing our collections to provide the libraries with more choices that will better serve their patrons' needs.

One of the most exciting things that we have been doing is working with libraries to provide

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re-evaluation and the results of this may be far-reaching and beneficial for libraries and their users. Perhaps the quality and strength of a library's print and electronic collections can be successfully combined with the usability and richness of popular Web interfaces which will prompt users to suggest, “why don't you just library it?” instead of “why don't you just Google it!”

Endnotes

1. Bates, Marcia J. 2003, “Task Force Recommendation 2.3 Research and Design Review: Improving User Access to Library Catalog and Portal Information.” Available online <http://www.loc.gov/catdir/bibcontrol/2.3BatesReport6-03.doc.pdf>.

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neous assessment possible. But this assumes you carry your laptop or other device around, which many of us do not. Perhaps we all will someday, but we're not there yet.

I will continue to think about this and maybe I'll find the time to read some of this stuff. And who knows, maybe “Drinking From the Firehose” and other *ATG* columns will transform themselves into the blogosphere somehow someday!

Many thanks to **Georgie Donovan** and **Glenn Ellen Starr-Stilling** for sharing their blog-reading habits with me; to **Allan Scherlen** for ideas about columns vs. blogs; and to **T. Scott Plutchak**, whose blog was the first I ever read!

our services for content that they have purchased from other vendors, or publishers, or even content that they have digitized themselves. In this respect, we are trying to provide an example of an all encompassing electronic library — an electronic library that integrates and extends the functionality of their existing infrastructure, allows access to new and valuable content under multiple business models, supplies the user with research tools to increase efficiency when conducting research as well as provides valuable data as to how the information is used.

All of our initiatives and products are focused on solving our customers' problems associated with these issues.

ATG: *The need to download a separate application and reader is always a deterrent for the end user. Are there any plans to change this?*

CW: I do not agree that the installation of a plug-in or application is always, or even partially, a deterrent for the end user.

I would agree, that if the user is able to view information with the software that is already installed on his/her computer, then the user does not need to install new software or a new plug-in to view that information.

I would also agree that some people may choose not to install new software, either by choice or because their system administrators prevent them from modifying their system. We have found that the benefits that our Reader provides, with our 700K thin client, usually far outweigh the administrator's objections, and when the administrators learn that the plug-in may be installed and managed through scripts, the administrator ceases to be a deterrent.

The funny thing about installing new software is that the software will usually provide the user with some new capabilities, or advantages, that are important or necessary to the user. Hopefully these capabilities will provide that user with a reason to continue using the software.

Our usage statistics, tracking: page views, copies and prints, are more than doubling every year. This growth is significantly greater than the growth of the number of students licensed to use the system. We interpret this to mean that we are getting many repeat users.

We, as a company, are committed to extending the capabilities of our Reader. We intend to innovate and make information retrieval better, as well as improve the methods in which users can interact with electronic information.

ATG: *What sort of penetration do you have of the current book publishing market in the US? How many publishers do you have contracts with and what percentage of the total number of publishers is it?*

CW: Depending on whom you ask, there are roughly 28,000 book publishers in the United States alone. Some people claim the number is as high as 50,000, especially when considering the number of people that self-publish books through print on demand, but that number may even be low.

ebrary is primarily focused on providing non-fiction, scholarly, professional and STM publications for the academic and special library markets, so this reduces the number of critical publishers that we need to work with significantly. While we would like to represent every publisher in some capacity, at this time it is our intention to continue with the previously mentioned as our focus.

Currently we are working with over 220 publishers. This is only a drop in a very large publisher lake, with the noted exception that the majority of our publishing partners are among, if not the, most important publishers in their field.

We count publishers based on our contracts. We have some publishers who manage multiple imprints under a single contract, so we count that publisher, and all of their imprints, as one publisher. If you look at our title list, we have over 500 unique imprints.

From a content and publisher perspective, we have added more publishers and content in eight months, than we added all of last year.

The same thing happened the year before and the year before that, our growth is a solid trend.

ATG: *To follow up, how about the non-US eBook market?*

CW: As I mentioned earlier, we have partners that license our technology and services to build their own collections, to market to their own customer base. This has been strategically very valuable for us. This accounts for collections in Spanish, French and Portuguese that are available on our partner's sites through the **ebrary Reader**.

So far this has worked very well for us and also for them, as we provide them with proven software and English language content to enable them to enter their market with very low costs. In most cases we are able to sell their collections, and they are able to sell our collections, so effectively we are working together to bring multi-language collections to as many countries as possible.

ATG: *Any plans to deliver eContent in new ways?*

CW: Plans? Absolutely. We have been prototyping new technologies and business models with many of our publishing partners and libraries.

ATG: *And tell us about Chris Warnock — hobbies, family, reading, etc. Thanks!*

CW: I am currently reading a really fascinating book called *And a bottle of Rum: A History of the New World in Ten Cocktails* by **Wayne Curtis**.

I spend the majority of my free time reading and gardening, as I don't own a television.

I sold both of my cars in 2005 (my wife still has hers) and mostly ride bicycles, or take public transportation for my personal transportation needs.

I still love the physical book, and I do letterpress printing, bookbinding and blacksmithing as hobbies when I have the time — which is never as often as I would like.

ATG Interviews Zoltán Papp

Akademiai Kiado, Hungary

by **Katina Strauch** (Editor, *Against the Grain*) <kstrauch@comcast.net>

ATG: *I understand that Akademiai Kiado is the oldest Hungarian publishing house dealing with scientific journals; how does that history affect your current publishing activities?*

ZP: Our heritage and our links to the Hungarian academic community, both inside and outside Hungary, provide us with an exceptional source of content and ideas. This strong base of high quality content provides particular strength to our publishing strategy, but we are also very conscious of the fact that East-

ern Bloc publishing, to employ some Cold War terminology, suffered somewhat from its isolation from the development of academic publishing generally as it developed into the global industry that it is today. Therefore our challenge is to build a modern, forward looking and innovative publishing house that can provide the best possible service to our authors and readers.

Hungarian science and Hungarian education has an illustrious tradition having produced 18 **Nobel Prize** winners. Perhaps the

most famous is **Albert Szent-Györgyi** the discoverer of vitamin C.¹ If you look up the **Essential Science Indicators** from **Thomson Scientific**, you can find that Hungary has a much more illustrious rank in many scientific fields than could be expected given Hungary's population or economic weight. Our challenge is to provide an efficient and effective publishing service to our native authors that provide the widest and fastest distribution and visibility possible. By provid-

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