November 2006

ATG Interviews Zoltan Papp

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Recommended Citation

Strauch, Katina (2006) "ATG Interviews Zoltan Papp," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 18: Iss. 5, Article 17.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.5017>

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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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ing such a high quality service we hope to attract more international authors, especially from the USA. We also of course want to provide the libraries of the world with a collection of content, available as both individual journals and through complete packages that meets their needs and is “library friendly” in terms of both pricing and licensing flexibility.

ATG: *Are you actually a profit oriented or a society publisher?*

ZP: We are definitely a profit-oriented company, majority owned by **Wolters Kluwer**, but our mission is to harmonize the profit making points of view and the interest of scientific community. Of course it is not always easy, but as a manager my philosophy is, that a well operating company is a common interest of all the stakeholders, and that includes our customers — who are our authors and our readers and librarians. Our scientists require basically just one thing: high visibility in appropriate venues. For **Akademiai Kiado** this means having a robust technical platform for online delivery (which we have subcontracted to **MetaPress**) and an equally robust marketing program, which we manage in house. In addition, of course, you need a strong editorial focus. This is provided by the editor-in-chiefs of our 48 scientific journals that are allocated to the institutes of the **Hungarian Academy of Sciences**, which is our minority owner. In order to provide our authors with true international reach the majority of our journals are published in English with good overseas authorship and readership.

ATG: *How and why did you decided to become a publisher or more exactly a publishing director?*

ZP: I began to work for **Akademiai Kiado** about six years ago as IT manager and I was responsible for all the IT support of journal publishing from the Website through to the back-office system. I was amazed by the complexity of this activity and it was a big challenge for me. I found the functionality of the subscription management system incomparably more complex than a traditional order fulfillment task usually handled by off-the-shelf enterprise resource management software. It was while struggling with these kinds of tasks that I learned the business model of **Akademiai Kiado** in detail, as well as gaining a better understanding of the players in the STM industry including libraries, subscription agents, hosting service providers, gateway aggregators, etc.

ATG: *Working on fixing the internal processes in your publishing house can only provide so much insight into the wider industry. Wasn't this a problem?*

ZP: I absolutely agree and it wasn't until 2003 that I was really able to engage with the wider industry, collected a lot of information about new trends of STM publishing at con-

ferences and training programs run by international industry bodies like **SSP** and **ALPSP**. We have attended many of the relevant conferences and employed consultants where appropriate in order to expand our knowledge of the international publishing market as rapidly as possible.

I have always been a passionate collector of benchmark data. During this review period I realized that the traditional print oriented scientific publishing could not be continued in the long term. We had to follow the trends and requirements of the online world. That is why we reorganized our pricing, announcing in 2005 an online friendly pricing policy and spent some time and money to encourage our readers to use the online version. Our particular network of users and readers have traditionally been big print fans. We value our content and allow the customer to choose the format, print, online or both. But analyzing our usage statistics we know that whatever the professors may say the reality is that readers have already chosen. They voted to the online. Nowadays the online readership of an issue is about ten times larger than the printed number of copies.

ATG: *As a summary what is the strength of Akademiai Kiado?*

ZP: Our mantra is “Quality journals at affordable prices.” I have mentioned our focus on quality already. As far as value for libraries are concerned we have 48 journals in 23 scientific branches. This is more fragmented than we would wish, however, for those libraries that value individual selection of journals over the “Big Deal” package approach, this of course does not present a problem. In fact many of our library customers appreciate the fact that they can buy a high quality journal at a reasonable price, even when they are purchasing just the individual journal. For those libraries that prefer to buy content in packages because of the unit cost savings they can represent then I would emphasize our life science package but we are also strong in the field of arts & humanities as well. In addition we have online only journal packages which provide deep discounts and thereby easy and cheap access to a wide audience.

ATG: *The STM journal publishing suffers from many factors, the always changing business models, the limited budget of the libraries or the increasing number of journals. What are your expectations of the future?*

ZP: We should face the problems but I am sure of two things: Good quality content will be saleable any time and if you focus on up-and-coming topics then you can achieve business success as well. For example we began to perform active marketing of our life science package and we achieved a significant growth within that field. I think that Open Access publishing is a work in progress, and we keep a close eye on developments in that field as well. We keep an open mind on which will be the most successful business models; one thing is clear however, there are

costs associated with running a traditional publishing operation and these need to be met.

ATG: *OK, but how do you determine what will be up-and-coming fields?*

ZP: Good question. I think for that you need at least two things, or three. First you can not do without editors with a deep knowledge of particular scientific branches. After that to make proper business decisions you have to statistically analyze the trends of scientific outputs. Nowadays this activity has become a stand-alone scientific branch called scientometrics. Perhaps it is not an accident that we have a journal with the same title. Last but not least you need some intuition. And as a fourth you need some luck as well.

ATG: *Does it mean you are open to launch new journals with the current depressed market situation?*

ZP: Yes, absolutely. The major publishers are cautious to launch new journals. But the numbers of the journals has been increased exponentially for 200 years and this growth is continuing now further, and parallels the growth in research activity. That means that without launching new journals your market share will be decreased. Fortunately **Akademiai Kiado**, as a Hungarian publisher, located in an emerging country should face lower production and financing costs than the average. So we can afford to invest in a new journal more easily. And we do. We are planning to launch some new journals to strengthen our life science package.

ATG: *Then you can be a satisfied manager of your department. Any further plans?*

ZP: Yes, we can be happy with our results but we should not forget to follow the trends of the industry. Nowadays our whole editorial and production process is issue based. This is going to break down as we move towards a more continuous publication model. To enable this we are introducing an online submission and peer review management system and an article based production process to provide a quicker publication process for our authors. There is no reason in the online world why one article should wait for another just because both of them will be published in the same issue in the future. In more general terms our strategy is to exploit our cost advantage; utilize our native publishing talent to the full, provide exceptional service to our authors, both international and domestic, and to utilize technology and outsourcing where appropriate in order to enhance our service proposition. Lastly we understand that libraries are our customers; they pay the bills, even if they don't read the journals. We must ensure that our pricing, licensing, customer service and online services are all tuned and appropriate to the library market that we serve.

Endnotes

1. <http://profiles.nlm.nih.gov/WG/Views/Exhibit/narrative/szeged.html>