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# The Renaissance of the eBook: Transformations and Question Marks

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# Against the Grain

*“Linking Publishers, Vendors and Librarians”*

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## The Renaissance of the eBook: Transformations and Question Marks

by **Tony Horava** (Collection and Information Resources Coordinator, University of Ottawa, Canada) <thorava@uottawa.ca>

Ah, eBooks. The near demise of **netLibrary** a few years ago seemed to be the death rattle of the eBook industry, but that seems like long ago — the comeback in recent times has been very pronounced and remarkable. Various publishers such as **Springer**, **Wiley**, and **Blackwells** have recently released eBook collections, with **Elsevier** poised to follow suit. The development of **Google Book Search** (now including Spanish libraries), the **Open Content Alliance**, **Amazon’s Search Inside the Book and Upgrade**, the growth of aggregators such as **EBL**, **ebrary**, and **Coutts MyiLibrary**, and the commitment of various university presses, all bear witness to the newfound acceptance of eBooks as a viable medium for scholarly communication and research for students and faculty. At conferences

and workshops, in discussion groups and blogs, eBooks are a hot topic.

The eBook produces a gut reaction in people, and this ranges from skepticism and anxiety to guarded optimism and edgy excitement. Why? The eBook harkens back to the core of the traditional library — the monograph collection — and challenges our assumptions, especially for those of us who entered the profession before eBooks ever



existed. Even trying to define an eBook leads to controversy. The eBook is a touchstone for a wide spectrum of issues, such as: the economics of publishing models and the viability of print and online formats in different

subject areas; the concept of leasing rather than ownership; the proliferation of licensing and access models; the preservation of eBooks and archival access (e.g., in relation to the mass digitization projects above); the measuring of usage and the critical need to assess value for money; the large impact on library workflows; new modes of collaboration between authors and readers; and student habits and learning issues. I expect a few years from now we will conceive of the term “author” and “book” in radically new ways, as scholarly communication evolves to meet new expectations and opportunities. And what is the future of sustained reading in a Web-dominant culture? These are large and slippery issues for which answers will hopefully emerge in the coming years. One

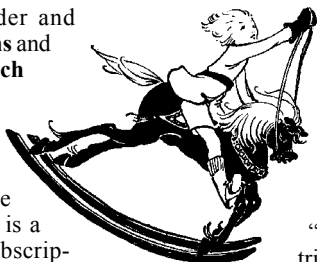
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## If Rumors Were Horses

**Big news!** — **Prenax Inc.**, a wholly-owned subsidiary of the global subscription agency **Prenax Global**, has acquired the shares of **Basch Subscriptions Inc.**, based in Concord, New Hampshire. **Mats Edlund**, is President and CEO of **Prenax Global**. **N. Bernard “Buzzy” Basch** is the Founder and President of **Basch Subscriptions** and will continue as President. **Basch Subscriptions** and **Prenax, Inc.** will continue as separate entities. There will be no merger of brands, and customer service and systems will continue as before. The **Prenax Group** is a global business-to-business subscription management company headquartered in Stockholm, Sweden. Founded in 1991, **Prenax** maintains operations in Sweden, the United States (New York, Boston, San Francisco), the United Kingdom, and France. **Basch Subscriptions Inc.**, based in Concord, NH, is a

subscription management company founded in 1995. **Basch** serves the government, medical, and corporate markets, and academic, public, and school libraries. See our interview with the awesome **Buzzy**, this issue, p.56.

[www.prenax.com/](http://www.prenax.com/)



Thanks to the on-the-ball **Ramune Kubilius** <r-kubilius@northwestern.edu> for this tip. The awesome **Elizabeth Connor** (Daniel Library, The Citadel) has just won the **Murray Gottlieb Prize** for “The Body Politic: The Contributions of Physician-Patriot Joseph Warren.” The **Murray Gottlieb Prize** is awarded annually for the best unpublished essay on the history of medicine and allied sciences written by a health sciences librarian. The **Gottlieb Prize** was established

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thing is certain — many of us are investing a huge amount of time dealing with eBook licensing and acquisitions, and this needs to change. It is not sustainable in the long term, and efficiencies of scale and workflow need to be developed. The question of digital rights management bedevils us at every turn, and undermines our clients' ability to use eBooks for research and learning. The fact that business approaches and access methods have not evolved towards a standard model, in contrast to eJournals, reflects the problematic state of the eBook industry for academia. eBooks are in catchup mode. We are in a period of rapid transformation that is rife with opportunities and bewildering with complications. I find it a fascinating time (although it can be equally frustrating, depending on the day!). Every day there are new questions to confront.

Being closely involved in eBook licensing and acquisitions, I was very happy to have the opportunity to develop an issue of *Against the Grain* devoted to the eBook, following on **Cris Ferguson's** excellent vendor survey in the November 2006 issue. In this issue, our contributors examine the impact of eBooks on libraries from the frontlines. Public service issues, workflow integration, and the implications for collection development are raised. **Michael Levine-Clark** from the **University of Denver** assesses the challenges for integrating eBooks into approval plans. He notes that "It is not so clear that all publishers recognize the need to supply their books electronically in a way that makes them fit easily into the library acquisition process." **Annis Lee Adams** from **University of Hawaii** at Manoa compares the content and functionality of four major eBook collections in medicine. She points out that "we need to communicate the strengths, weaknesses and desired innovations to the vendors at every opportunity, so that the vendors understand the features important to us." **Millie Jackson** from **Florida State University** examines the issues of title by title eBook selection versus acquiring eBook collection packages. She observes that "there is an increased need for evaluation procedures and policies and for marketing the items we purchase." **Barbara Williams** from the **University of Arizona** presents an analysis of engineering students' use of an eBooks database versus printed sources. She observes that "Engaging in intellectual exchange paves the path to mutual understanding and informed decision-making." **William Gee** from **East Carolina University** addresses the many challenges of eBooks for an interlibrary loans service, arguing that "Libraries and publishers simply must find methods either to truly loan eBooks or at the very least methods to cheaply and automatically rent them." **Lorraine Busby** from the **University of Western Ontario** reflects on the complex issues of eBook acquisitions, pricing models, and access. She notes that "The lack of consistency and the variety of options at the point of purchase should give librarians cause to pause and consider workflow repercussions

## against the grain people profile

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### Tony Horava

**BORN & LIVED:** Born in Montreal, Canada. Moved to Ottawa in 1987.

**EARLY LIFE:** Lived in Montreal until I was eighteen, then moved to Ottawa.

**FAMILY:** Parents born in Czechoslovakia; emigrated after World War 2. Have two children, **Malcolm** and **Adam**, and wife **Susan**.

**EDUCATION:** BA in English & History (like many librarians!) in 1983; MLIS in 1987; MA (English Literature) in 1994.

**FIRST JOB:** Medical research startup company ... didn't last too long.

**PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES:** Have worked at the **University of Ottawa** since 1987 ... Reference, Distance education, Document Delivery, Electronic resources, and Collection development.

**IN MY SPARE TIME I LIKE TO:** Play tennis (summer); cross-country ski (winter); sing in a community choir (good for the soul).

**FAVORITE BOOKS:** *Blink* by **Malcolm Gladwell**; *The Future of Ideas* by **Lawrence Lessig**.

**PET PEEVES/WHAT MAKES ME MAD:** Vendors who don't listen to clients; new technologies that are smoke and mirrors.

**PHILOSOPHY:** Bring dedication and curiosity to your daily work, take risks, and try not to take yourself too seriously.

**MOST MEANINGFUL CAREER ACHIEVEMENT:** Co-developing the model license agreement for the **Ontario Council of University Libraries**.

**GOAL I HOPE TO ACHIEVE FIVE YEARS FROM NOW:** Five years is a lifetime! I hope to be engaged in the effort to develop the library as a full partner in academia.

**HOW/WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS:** If we can find simpler ways of presenting the gamut of quality resources to our clients, and integrating services and collections, we can raise the profile of the library. We need to become more sensitive to the expectations and needs of clients, and influencing vendors to provide scholarly content and intuitive interfaces.

The emergence of new scholarly communication systems, and the debate over intellectual property/copyright issues, will loom large. We need to be at the forefront of this discourse to demonstrate how relevant we are to these issues. 🌱



and how much staff effort is needed to manage a digital format." **Aline Soules** from **East Cal State University** discusses the impact of licensing and acquisitions on the limitations of how eBooks are used. She observes that, "The possibilities and permutations are only going to increase. Now is the time for acquisitions to

devise ways to manage these new information sources and formats."

Taken together these articles provide insights into many of the challenges we face in dealing with eBooks, and illustrate the complex landscape in which we are now living and working. 🌱

### Rumors from page 14

Speaking of **email correspondence**, heard recently from **Tom the terrific Leonhardt** <thomasl@admin.stedwards.edu>. **Tom** is

on the **ALA Committee on Accreditation** so he's not spending much time in the exhibits, which is his usual hangout. He admits that he has been a delinquent contributor to **ATG**. He is reading galley for a book he is editing for **Haworth Press**. (He didn't give me the title,

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