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Media Minder — Interview with Ursula Schwarz, Executive Director of The National Media Market

Column Editor: **Philip Hallman** (Ambassador Books and Media) <philip@absbook.com>

Established in 1978, **The National Media Market** (<http://www.nmm.net/>) is a unique forum for library media selectors who would like to evaluate materials prior to purchase. Unlike the book selection process, there are no approval plans for media materials so the NMM becomes a great way to preview materials and meet vendor representatives in one fell swoop. We spoke with **Ursula Schwarz** (director@nmm.net), the Executive Director of the Market, who gave us a brief history of the Market, its mission and a sense of what makes it so special.

Ambassador Book and Media Services (Ambassador): First off, congratulations on celebrating the 30th anniversary of the **National Media Market**. As Executive Director, obviously you are doing something right in order to keep a non-profit organization going for so long, especially given it serves such a specific niche audience! But before we continue, can you tell some of our readers who may not be familiar with the NMM, what it is and what makes it unique?

Ursula Schwarz (US): This will be the 30th Market — the first one was held in Knoxville, TN in 1979. This is only the fourth Market I am coordinating, so I can't take *all* the credit for the Market's longevity.

What makes the market most unusual is that it is a collaboration and coalition between both buyers and vendors. There are a number of rules that ensure that all vendors have equal access to buyers — creating a level playing field for large and small companies. Buyers relish the market for the networking opportunities, ease of previewing new releases, ability to secure the best possible pricing and chance to share "best practices" with colleagues all over the country. Vendors find the market most useful because of the great number of hours they get to spend one-on-one with customers as well as having the opportunity to listen and learn about what is happening in the industry in an intimate and focused atmosphere.

Ambassador: So just to be clear, you are not a film festival per se, correct?

US: Correct, this is a screening and buying event. Vendors submit information about the new programs they will be introducing at the Market, and we put together a program guide. This guide is also available online. Distributors are free to bring any titles they feel will be of interest to the buyers. No attempt is made on the part of the Market to pre-judge or pre-select titles, and awards have not been part of the Market.

Ambassador: What are your duties and what is your background?

US: A lot of planning goes into the Market. My duties include inviting the maximum number of media companies and buyers, promoting Market activities, maintaining procedures for registration, printing brochures and program guides, handling financials, acting as a liaison with hotels and making appropriate recommendations for future Markets, visiting and recommending prospective sites, and providing day-to-day coordination and decision-making responsibilities for all Market activities. A million details....

I have worked for several of the participating companies as a sales representative and also served on the Board prior to accepting this position.

Ambassador: Tell us how the market has changed over the years?

US: The Market was called the **National Film Market** until a few years ago. Initially 27 companies participated, selling only films. Now there are also a few companies that sell related technologies, such as media management and scheduling systems, captioning and description service, etc.

Companies were selling 16mm film in the 70s and were just starting to consider videocassettes. Fewer programs were introduced each year, primarily because most companies actually produced for the education market. It was more involved to show a 16mm film — companies were required to adhere to a strict schedule that was published ahead of time. VHS and Beta cassettes gradually replaced 16mm, laser disks came and went, and now the preferred format is DVD and digital files.

There was a lot more purchasing done at the actual market in the early years. Many institutions came prepared with purchase orders and took advantage of special Market discounts. Most institutions now submit their orders after they get back to their agencies, which I think is mostly due to changes in required purchasing procedures.

Ambassador: Is anyone still with the organization that attended the first market?

US: Yes, there are six companies who participated in the first Market: **Phoenix Learning Group, Weston Woods, AIT – Agency for Instructional Technology, Lucerne Media, Bullfrog Films** and **The National Film Board of Canada**.

Ambassador: How many exhibitors will there be this year?

US: 55 companies, which is the maximum admitted.

Ambassador: Technological innovations have affected the way media is purchased and presented to students in classrooms. It must affect the market as well and how you have had to set up and make titles available?

US: The Market introduced **Market Mania**, a group presentation of clips a few years ago. Participating companies showcase their newest and most exciting programs in 7-minute clips on the first day of the Market. It's a good way to present to a large cross section of media professionals, and for new companies to be introduced.

The Market provides TV/DVD combos for the actual screening in the company suites. Many distributors also show programs on their laptops. The changes in format have made it easy to provide on-demand screening.

Ambassador: One of the interesting features of the market is that it has a wide array of distribu-

tors with an even wider range of materials available to preview. College and university buyers can mingle with those buying for a K-12 audience.

Has that always been the philosophy of the market — to create a venue for as diverse a group as possible?

US: The audience was always a mix of K-12, college/universities, and public library media professionals. During the last few years the number of educational broadcasters attending the Market has increased. This year we are actually collaborating with **The National Educational Telecommunications Association (NETA)**, a professional association that serves public television and educational entities. NETA will host an education professional's day on Monday, September 22nd, in conjunction with NMM. The agenda will feature valuable professional development for outreach professionals, producers, and education staff focused on emerging technologies and industry-wide initiatives.

Ambassador: The market moves from various cities across the country. My understanding is that it is in one city for two years before moving to another location, although it was in Las Vegas for many years consecutively. What is the thinking behind moving it from place to place each year (or more accurately every two years)?

US: The NMM Board of Directors decides to change locations based on feedback from exhibitors and buyers. Finding a reasonably priced hotel in a pleasant location that can accommodate our unique requirements is not an easy task. Las Vegas was popular because of the availability of cheap flights and hotels, good entertainment, and good weather. It was determined that moving the Market east would make it possible for many media buyers with limited travel budgets to attend.

Ambassador: During the Las Vegas years, did you hear any "what happens in Las Vegas stays in Las Vegas" stories or do you have to keep those to yourself?

US: I have pictures and documents that I am keeping in a safe place.

Ambassador: In addition to presenting materials for preview, the market also has a variety of forums or seminars available on various topics relevant to media librarianship. Can you tell us about those?

US: The professional development sessions offered each year are targeted to be of interest to the attendees and have covered topics such as copyright, collection development, cataloguing, **The Patriot Act**, media literacy, digital deliveries, etc.

Ambassador: I understand that this year you will be holding a forum prior to the actual start of the market that resulted from an ongoing discussion on the listserv VIDEOLIB concerning video streaming and libraries. Tell our readers what that will be?

US: Gary Handman, UC Berkeley, is organizing this meeting. Librarians, media professionals and distributors from across the country are

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invited to participate in a discussion of evolving access and licensing models for digital video (streamed video-on-demand) in light of current institutional needs, and current technological and market realities.

Ambassador: Are there any plans to make those discussions available in a print version for instance for those that may not be able to attend?

US: I am certain there will be documents, blogs or wikis. Information will be posted on the NMM Website as plans are evolving.

Ambassador: I see that there is now a Best in Show awarded to the film that the attendees like best. How did that come about?

US: It was intended to be an opportunity for distributors to highlight a couple of new or special titles and to encourage buyers to visit all exhibitors and get audience reaction.

Ambassador: As you look into your crystal ball, what role do you see the market playing in collection development over the next ten years?

US: Collections are important to librarians and media specialists, especially relevant, standards-based content. The use of technology in the classroom may increase the need for content, but things are happening so fast that it is difficult for me to guess where we are heading. I do see a need for some kind of "Market." The time buyers set aside to spend looking at new programming without interruptions is invaluable. The Market is usually the only time most buyers meet with their company representatives, and the chance to form personal relationships is very important to them now and I imagine will be in the future. Networking with colleagues to exchange ideas and share strategies is another reason media professionals will keep coming back.

Ambassador: Thanks for your time. Have a great 30th market and hopefully 30 more!

Something to Think About — Preparing for November

Column Editor: **Mary E. (Tinker) Massey** (Serials Librarian, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, Jack R. Hunt Library) <masse36e@erau.edu>

In July, I begin preparing for the **Charleston Conference**. I tend to push myself to add more meat to the workshop on coping with change. Finding new materials always seems to be a challenge, but answers and new material comes from strange places. This year, I was ravaging the **Barnes and Noble** shelves for mysteries when I suddenly saw a section of books for a dollar apiece. Being a little leery of the quality, I began reading the titles. Wow! I found four books new to me, but intriguing in their concepts on coping with change. There wasn't much listed on the Internet that I hadn't either read or scanned. This is a rare find. Now I'm off and running on a new slant for the presentation.

I had an email from a specialist at **UMI** who is interested in me giving some historical information for his presentation on indexing microfilm. I wasn't sure how I could help, but a short phone call elaborated on how I could be a solution for his needs in the presentation. I can add a slant that will be somewhat different and perhaps offer the attendees some new thoughts on the subject and set him up to present something very new and exciting. I tend to get really charged when there is new technology being presented. There is an opening of doors to creative ideas and that means the solving of problems. Perhaps I will hear just the right words that will begin a new path of solutions.

My other presentation will be on microfilm as primary and secondary sources for our journal collection. I think this will be fun. All I need is a couple more good articles or books that will cement the logical thought process in the speech. I look forward to the discussions we have at the end of the presentation, because I never fail to learn something new. Finding information — researching the topic is the essential step in producing an interesting speech. Ordering that information into a logical outline is also a must, but it is the way in which a topic is presented that makes it

good or just so-so. I look for the best handouts or make them based on my research and try to provide visuals that will keep people awake. The other feature I find necessary is to give the speech the feeling of a one-on-one conversation with each person in the room. Each person hears and interprets your speech according to his/her own experiential background, so don't be surprised to find you've made a point you don't remember saying. It's a little weird, but if it works for them, it works for me too.

The rest of the conference is involved with a great deal of preparation. Whether you learn about the sessions before you arrive or upon receipt of the program, you must sit down and examine all the topics and mark which ones you are interested in hearing. I hear people say, "If only I had known..." and I wonder why that happens. Preparation is most important! I usually make a schedule out each day with primary events to attend and back-ups if I get too tired or hungry to meet the schedule. Sometimes it is good to establish a few niches of down time so that you do not get burned out or worn out. You want to keep your energy high and keep storing that energy for your return home. Measure out the absorption of the conference energies and begin to assign them to various activities and tasks on the home front. This assures you of not becoming overloaded. Sometimes I spend time mentoring newcomers and get them to the right rooms on time. "Try it, you'll like it!" I find that I talk to a lot of people I have never met before and collect business cards as a simple hobby during the conference. The activity is fun and it's surprising who turns up in your collection. One year I sat in the large banquet room waiting for a presentation and found myself next to a person who was from California. It turns out that she knew me from **Listserv** communications and published articles and was delighted to finally meet me. You never

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