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ATG Interviews JoAnne Sparks

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librarians think of you as the memory of their own approval profiles as well as the most knowledgeable person at the company. With this history, what factors caused you to leave?

BN: Coutts got my attention because the company developed and implemented a strategy for integrating print and electronic resources, which is what I think will be needed for any company to prosper in the years ahead. A lot of smart people work at Coutts, and I am enjoying the chance to work with them. It is a reborn company with global reach. After 21 years, it was time for a change.

ATG: Will you be traveling more with Coutts since the company has more UK clients?

BN: At this point, I don't have exact plans. But I do expect periods of heavy travel, yes, depending on company and customer needs. Early on, I will be needing to go on the road with experienced Coutts staff, which will be one of the best ways to learn about the company and its customers.

ATG: Won't it be strange to represent the company without an in-depth knowledge of the company processes and staff?

BN: I would mostly be listening and gaining a better understanding of the client base. In time, I'll be able to contribute more than just listen.

ATG: Your listening skills are some of the best in the business. One of the reasons librarians view you as a colleague is because you understand the complexities of academic collections. Another reason is your writing and participation in professional organizations. Do you expect to continue the same level of participation with your new position?

BN: Yes, and I expect to encourage others at Coutts to participate in the same way. Some of my new colleagues like Bob Schatz are already very active. Bob serves on the NASIG Board. We vendors learn a lot when we work with librarians in this way. We meet people, we hear what they're thinking about, and we learn the language they are using to describe the day's issues and questions.

ATG: One of your former colleagues at YBP described your departure as emotionally traumatic. Could you comment?

BN: My boss at YBP, George Rego, was gracious about giving me time to say "goodbye" in person to people on the day I left. I'm grateful for that. Yes, it was emotional. I'd worked with some of these people for ten, twenty years. Normally when a person leaves to join a competitor he must leave immediately, with no goodbyes allowed. Since I left, a number of capable people have been given greater responsibility and real promotions. I'm happy about that. YBP had become a

different company, in many ways, than the one I'd joined and known for all those years. In a very real sense, the best thing I could have done for the company was to leave.

ATG: I remember the Coutts company that John Coutts founded with the University of Toronto as a big customer. Are they still a customer?

BN: Yes, they certainly are. Toronto is a very large customer. A couple other large customers in Canada would be the University of British Columbia and the University of Western Ontario.

ATG: Tell me about the Coutts customer base, is it primarily Canadian?

BN: Actually the biggest group of clients is in the UK, with Canada second, and the U.S. next. Coutts has offices in four different countries, including the Netherlands, where Coutts Nijhoff International is based. The people in these offices have the language skills and the cultural skills to expand globally.

ATG: Is hiring you part of the company's goal to expand the customer base within the U.S.?

BN: Yes, there is certainly a lot of room for growth in the U.S. Stanford is Coutts' more prominent customer in this country. A few of the others include Central Michigan, Nova Southeastern, and James Madison.

ATG: Has Coutts hired others from YBP?

BN: Yes, Carolyn Morris and Cathy Boylan were hired from YBP. Carolyn is Director of New Business Development in the U.S., with territory responsibility in the Northeast. Cathy is responsible for sales in Europe.

ATG: Ingram is now the parent company for Coutts. Could you explain how this arrangement works?

BN: The day I interviewed with Coutts it was announced that Ingram had acquired them. Coutts will become the academic division of Ingram. Coutts has the people with expertise on academic libraries. Ingram has

an enormous inventory that Coutts will now be able to draw upon. Also, the combination of eBooks, with Coutts' MyiLibrary platform, and Ingram's Lightning Source print on demand business, should be a powerful one. MyiLibrary will become part of a division called Ingram Digital Ventures, headed up by James Gray, who had led the revived Coutts since buying the company a number of years ago.

ATG: Is the Coutts relationship with Ingram analogous to the YBP relationship with Baker and Taylor?

BN: Yes, the situations are similar, in that YBP became the academic division of Baker & Taylor. But the possibilities at Ingram Digital Ventures are unique.

ATG: Another phrase from the press release describing your appointment was "the full seamless ILS covering both print and electronic content" can you elaborate?

BN: The electronic content of eBooks is fully controlled by Coutts, since MyiLibrary, the company's eBook platform, is a sister company. Coutts controls the platform and the content, and so does not have to rely on third party suppliers or aggregators.

ATG: When I read the phrase "fully integrated" I imagined eBooks delivered automatically to a library as part of an approval plan. Is this possible with Coutts?

BN: This is a service offered now by Coutts, yes.

ATG: Will you be relocating as a result of your new position?

BN: Yes, eventually I'll be moving to the Buffalo, New York area, nearby where I grew up.

ATG: Was this location a positive factor for your decision to change companies?

BN: Well, it wasn't a negative. I can live with snow.

ATG: At least it isn't snowing here in Seattle. Thanks so much for talking with me, Bob and I wish you every success at Coutts. 🐻

ATG Interviews JoAnne Sparks

Director of Library Services Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center

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

ATG: What you have done at MSKCC in the past three years has been incredible! You have made the library the center of the Research Center and this was after three years with no library director in place. Can you tell us what you did and how you did it?

JS: We transformed a traditional print-based library into a mostly electronic collection,

we completely renovated the existing physical library space that was left, and we launched a state-of-the-art Website (<http://library.mskcc.org>) available anywhere with a public Internet connection — all in less than three years! Recently we opened the Cyber Library Café. See the announcement message at: http://library.mskcc.org/scripts/portal/about/news/nov06/wnew_01.pl — another little plug for people to venture to our Website! The Cyber Library Café is located on the ground floor

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of the **Zuckerman Research Center**, our newest research building at **Memorial Sloan-Kettering**.

Part of the library's success has included cultivating a clear vision of where we need to go, part luck and timing, and finally, the support of the center to transform the library into a new kind of service, a modern library service, rather than simply a physical space that stores journals and books. Unexpectedly, the place HAS become even more important than we expected, even as the collections moved dramatically to an almost entirely electronic format. A key theme of the vision includes integration of physical and electronic on many levels, not just with respect to the format of the materials and zoning of the physical spaces. We did bring some print journals back and we integrated coffee, print browsing journals, wireless and wired connectivity in an interactive area of the main library. Another major aspect to our success has been implementing a new operational model in terms of the staffing resources and service offerings. Another key success factor is that we have been fortunate to recruit some excellent "modern" librarians to join in this endeavor and will continue to recruit for these kinds of individuals.

ATG: *Tell us how big the library is. How many print and electronic subscriptions do you have, etc.*

JS: The library has about 1,800 electronic journal subscriptions, about 50 that are print only and approximately 150 that are print and electronic. The printed book collection has about 5,000 volumes and we now have several hundred electronic books. Users have direct access to about 50 databases and of course, we can access hundreds more as needed. A key component of our Library is an integrated approach to "just in time" needs for primary source material and access to databases. This extends our capacity to provide services to niche topic areas. We are able to purchase by the article anything we need for our users and we also do searches in databases where we do not have subscriptions but can pay as you go. Of course, we also participate in resource sharing networks including the **National Library of Medicine's DOCLINE** service and **OCLC**. We also make use of **CISTI** and the **British Library's** services for "just in time" articles. Our locally developed Document Delivery application helps our users to easily request articles, book chapters, etc., which supports our just-in-time philosophy. All requests are submitted electronically eliminating any paper-based request forms and can be tracked by both our staff and users. We do not charge our users for routine requests including rush requests on a transactional basis. Rather, we allocate expenses annually on a divisional basis. We also study our "just in time" requests as we go so we can convert these to subscriptions throughout the year if a particular journal title becomes more popular (and thus, more cost effective as a subscription). We are also experimenting with tokens and pay per view

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ATG: *Future plans for MSKCC library (ies)?*

JS: We plan to focus on how to integrate search and environment — including continuing to explore how to recreate an experience of serendipity in physical spaces that is connected to electronic content. We will also continue to develop current awareness tools and services that integrate across search engines, vendors, publishers and databases in order to anticipate user requests. Our big project for 2007 is an author portfolio Web application and service, a virtual repository of our authors' publications with added features for our authors, grant writers and editors to aggregate, assign metadata, format bibliographies and more. We do not plan to store articles, but rather to store local metadata and links to outside vendors and publishers. We are also exploring collaboration with computational biology and bioinformatics especially concerning information flow, data mining and search. Finally, we are working closely with the hospital's strategic planning group to brainstorm and test transformational ideas, and provide published literature support. On another front, I have an agenda to introduce and implement usability methods and testing approaches for all kinds of applications and services to employees and patients. We also have some ideas about applying knowledge management or organizational dynamics concepts including some of **David Snowden's**

work with culture, personas and complexity theory, and narrative approaches.

ATG: *How do you get people (administrators) to buy into your "vision"?*

JS: I was chosen for the position after **Pat Skarulis**, our Chief Information Officer, conducted a national search for a Director of Library Services. She enlisted outside librarians to assist with this search and the institution's scientists and researchers to interview the finalists. Needless to say, applying the vision to the needs of the constituents was made easier by the depth of the recruiting process. What I am using is a stakeholder management approach to implement changes and improvements and to understand the utilization of current services. We do not have a standing library committee but rather, we continue to study all of the user segments and demographics in great depth. Included in this ongoing user assessment approach is a deep commitment to usability testing as an iterative design and testing methodology. The new library Website was developed in this way and will be improved accordingly. Librarians as well as others in various professions think they know what their users want and how to provide services — again and again, I am humbled by the power of this approach. It first and foremost involves listening and hearing what your users tell you about their needs, their gaps, how they seek and find information. Our stakeholder management approach has been incredibly successful — and is unusual in our setting where most services are oper-

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ated by an hierarchical approval process. Our “approval” process is quite unique and does not involve the hierarchy to a great extent except to account for senior management as a stakeholder segment.

ATG: *I like your Website at MSKCC and your plasma screen set up. It's so cool. Can you tell us about it?*

JS: The new library Website (<http://library.mskcc.org>) was launched at the end of May 2006 and features *Today's science sparks*, a daily image from one of our own author's publications that links to the fulltext article at the publisher's Website. It is an innovative current awareness and community building feature that is very popular. We are able to feature authors at all stages of their careers, from their first publication to their first article in *Nature*, to the latest collaboration with others around the world. It is very satisfying to “advertise” our own authors on our public Website. Any visitor can go to the abstract of the article and then link through to the full-text if they have a subscription or want to pay-per-view if available at the publisher's site. The plasma screens are part of the *CyberLibrary Café* and feature these same images as well as video and animations from our own authors' publications and lectures.

ATG: *You have worked in several different libraries/environments — Bristol Meyers (corporate, special library), Drexel (academic), and now MSKCC (health, special). Can you tell us what characterizes each? Why is the library important in each? Can you tell us your favorite?*

JS: Yes, I have worked in every kind of library including the local public library when I was in high school! Well, first let me say what I think is consistent across all types of libraries in every setting. All of the libraries I have worked in existed for an end user, someone who would at some point want to access and use the materials provided. So excellent customer service in any setting seems to me to be an important pillar of library services. A key difference in the corporate setting was that there were NO barriers to access. Users could come into the physical library 24/7 and could request anything they needed at any time. Surprisingly, this completely “open access” did not result in overuse of the library or document delivery services. The maximum cost for this premium service was feasible and within reach, even in a non-corporate setting. It was very interesting to me to realize the number of barriers we had in place in all of the other environments where I had worked, as if an individual or department could want “too much information.” In these days of information overload, it almost seems ridiculous now! So, in my current situation, we have removed all such barriers to access. In fact, we moved from a transactional charging model for document delivery and literature searches to an annual allocation with the library absorbing all transactional fees except for unusual custom

against the grain

people profile

JoAnne Sparks

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BORN & LIVED: Born in Cleveland, Ohio. Lived in Cleveland, Ohio (and Tennessee), Schenectady, NY, Chicago, Philadelphia and now, New Jersey.

FAMILY: Paul, my partner and our dogs (Raymond and Buddha) and our cat (Miles).

EDUCATION: B.A., **Lee College**, Cleveland, Tennessee; M.S.L.S., **Case Western Reserve University**, Cleveland, Ohio.

FIRST JOB: Reference librarian, **Lee College**.

PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES: Member of **Medical Library Association, ASIST, ALA and ACM**.

IN MY SPARE TIME I LIKE TO: Gardening, reading, travel.

PET PEEVES/WHAT MAKES ME MAD: Fear-mongering! The future is bright — we need to embrace it and lead ourselves there!

PHILOSOPHY: Honor the fundamentals — don't just be a slave to fashion!

MOST MEANINGFUL CAREER ACHIEVEMENT: Launching our new library Website at **MSK**.

GOAL I HOPE TO ACHIEVE FIVE YEARS FROM NOW: I hope to have an endowment fund in place for the **MSK Library** that will support the modern library and a mostly virtual collection.

HOW/WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS: In five years I think more libraries will have closed, especially where they have not been able to embrace the electronic content model and their users, particularly the younger ones, expect it. I think more publishers will have consolidated, sadly enough, from my point of view. While globalization and consolidation offer many benefits, the loss of individualization and customization is a negative aspect. Having only a handful of STM publishers may, in the short term, provide return on investment for shareholders, but, I think it does not sustain us for the long term. For those librarians, vendors and publishers who are embracing the future, exploiting new technologies and analyzing how these tools can further extend their missions and financial goals, the future is very bright. I definitely think new services for libraries will emerge, new revenue streams for librarians and publishers and new possibilities for collaboration with authors, communities, publishers and librarians. What we call ourselves may even change although I am not quite ready to predict what that will be. Clearly, our roles have to do with making substantive (and sometimes ephemeral) content accessible, findable and lead users to satisfying results. 🐾

requests. To date, we have not had any high volume request that we considered so unusual we could not cover it. So, we have taken the focus off of how much information a user requests and focused it on providing complete access within the requestor's timeframe.

ATG: *You worked with Carol Montgomery at Drexel to cancel most print journal subscriptions, right? Can you tell us how this happened, was it successful, and how many print journal subscriptions you had in the final analysis?*

JS: The experience at **Drexel** was very formative for me in determining my own philosophy for content management. We aggressively moved to eliminate print and add electronic access in a library that had also been neglected for awhile. In the first year we went

from over 1,800 print journal subscriptions to just under 900 print subscriptions. The next year we reduced it further. The goal was to get to a much smaller print journal collection and a greatly expanded electronic collection. Chemists and physicists were very happy with the result which included access to their key titles from their desktops. We also weeded and shifted the entire print book collection. We upgraded the physical infrastructure of the library, added wired and wireless access, laptops for loan, and vastly improved access to workstations and high quality printing. When I arrived at **Drexel**, the library was quiet and underutilized. When I left in 2000, the biggest complaint was noise! It became a center of intellectual life on campus for all kinds of users and a place where students wanted to be. 🐾