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Issues in Vendor/Library Relations -- Leaving

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magazines, theses and other information licensed from a huge list of publishers from the entire globe. **CSA** is a very effective sales organization. The group is privately owned, and not subject to the merciless scrutiny of Wall Street every quarter. I would expect a flow of new products tying indexes and full text content together.

The imperative behind the **ProQuest** sale is clear, and has more to do with accounting management than anything else. **CIG**'s motivation is more interesting, and reveals a concern about the future of the index.

Abstracting and indexing databases are under threat from **Google** and the other major search engines. Most searches, even by researchers, start with a general search engine such as **Google**. Most A&I publishers have sat on their hands and watched this happen. As **Google**, **Microsoft** and other continue to interest themselves in the scholarly and scientific communities, A&I publishers that want to survive have to distinguish themselves from these giants. What **CIG** has done is to put itself in a position where new products can combine indexes and full text. It is a logical extension of the announcement **CSA** and **ProQuest** made in June 2006 that collections of full text **ProQuest** material would be made available as an upgrade to **CSA**'s bibliographic databases in sociology and political science. The first product is to be launched this Spring. **CSA** wants to continue to be a "must have" destination for library purchasing.

Does this put aggregators in a stronger position? Or will publishers take fright and start to withdraw their journals and other content from aggregators? Will libraries — and their users — find aggregated databases an acceptable substitute for the primary journal, or is the researcher's need for immediate access to the primary journal literature still an over-riding imperative? All the evidence to date is that journals and aggregated databases serve different constituencies in the university library: faculty and researchers, and undergraduates, respectively.

U.S. academic libraries constitute 40% of the world academic library market. The majority of scholarly and scientific journals originate outside the USA. Given the U.S. dollar's weakness, and library budgets that are not even inflation-proofed, many publishers are worried that the evidence may change in the next few years.

So why are private investors, from family businesses like **CIG** and **EBSCO**, to private equity houses like **Cinven** and **Candover**, so interested in mergers and acquisitions in scholarly and scientific publishing?

First, the market is mature, and is not a significant growth sector. That means expanding publishers have to capture market share, largely by acquisition. A lot of acquisition activity means that there is a market in which competitive bids lead to high prices paid for good publishing properties. This works at

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Issues in Vendor/Library Relations — Leaving

Column Editor: **Bob Nardini** (Group Director, Client Integration and Head Bibliographer, Coutts Information Services) <bnardini@couttsinfo.com>

I knew it was time to leave when I read an email from a librarian I didn't know personally that said something like, "**Bob Nardini, Mr. Yankee Book**." That was ten or twelve years ago, I would guess. So I stayed for ten or twelve more before finally taking my leave from the company a few weeks ago, after 21 years. I am now all of three days into a new job.

Academic librarians change positions all the time, of course, in a job market that's publicly reported in places like the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, *College & Research Libraries*, *Library Journal*, and so on. Usually there are search committees, campus visits, onsite presentations, lunches and dinners, tenure considerations, and all sorts of other formal structures that make job-watching among librarians a spectator sport. "Do you know who's applied for the AUL job at such-and-such university?" is a question all of us hear regularly.

For vendors, though, the job market is more of an underground economy, one far less visible to all the potential spectators. And spectators there would be. When a librarian leaves a library, the assumption is always that it's a good career move, not some form of repudiation of "Library A" in favor of "Library B," not a story with the subplots and intrigues of a **John le Carré** novel. When a vendor moves, though, often the assumption is that there has to be more to the story. Partly it's the surprise element that causes this, since the formalities of academia largely don't exist in the private sector. Who knew *that* job would come open? There might not even have *been* a job in the first place, before someone is hired to do it.

Of *course* there's more to the story. There always is, and not just for vendors. For librarians too, in their leavings, there's always more to the story. There's always more because a job is never just a job. More, that is, than a job description, a desk, computer, office or a cubicle, and the particular work you do. A job, instead, is a constellation of people within your orbit, an orbit within a universe where the governing physics are the elemental forces of geography, economics, and technology. But in this solar system the physics can change. So can the planets. Today the planets change in the real solar system, so why not? What was it again they decided for Pluto? In your own system, you wish there were some cute way to help keep it all straight. Mary's Violet Eyes Make John Stay Up Nights Pining? You'd have to redo this every week.

Over 21 years, you've seen the planets spin every which way. You've seen planets collide and spin right out of the solar system, and on occasion, spin right back in. You've seen meteor storms, auroras, comets, eclipses, solar flares. From time to time, you've even seen

the physics change. No

big deal for a millennium or two. Then one day you look up and notice that it's not the same old solar system at all. Is this, you ask, where I want to spin my remaining orbits?

For a vendor, especially one who has spent much of his or her working life in the field with librarians, the big question always is, "After so much time with one company, how can you represent a different one?"

That sounds like a hard question. Actually, for a vendor rep who's been at their job for any length of time, it's not so difficult.

Who *do* you represent anyway, after you have been talking to librarians for 21 years? Vendor representatives who last that long have at some point crossed the line, probably long ago, where they are representing the customer to the company at least as much as they are the company to the customer. Any vendor rep worth anything does both, and the more successful and long-lived the rep, the more freedom there is to concentrate on the former, which is at least as satisfying as the latter, and often more fun. "Why don't we do this?" or "Why aren't we doing that?" are questions that when backed up by convincing customer anecdote, and especially when reinforced by scary competitor information, can make things happen back at the office on behalf of libraries, and can make the rep feel a little heroic.

In a way, then, there can be very little change in changing companies (not literally true at all, of course, as I can testify, due to the need to find the nearest photocopy machine, to figure out the phone system, to get your computer to work, to know how to mail a letter, to fill out the forms to get paid, to learn to navigate all the unfamiliar terrain of a new organization, one populated by no one you knew until now). The customers with whom you have come to identify will often be the same people, no matter which company you work for. You've talked with them for years. They've talked with you for years. They will recognize a false note if they hear one, so there's no point in determining to reinvent yourself or in glibly talking about some piece of business prior to understanding what it actually is you're talking about.

What you do get in changing jobs is a new audience for your performances back at the office. And it does feel like a certain kind of performance. "How am I doing in the Opening Act?" you wonder with your first meeting, with an encounter in a hallway, at dinner or lunch with new colleagues. In no time these people will be familiar faces, but for the time being, you are as new to them as they are to you, and everyone watches closely. You think

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about your lines, your delivery, your entrances and exits. You try to define your role, while studying theirs.

Of course any job is always something of a performance, no matter how long you've been at it. And at some point, "Opening Night" was a long time ago. You have your lines down so well you can deliver them without thinking. When other cast members speak theirs, there's hardly a need to listen. Members of the cast come and go, of course ... but can't somebody do something about this script? If not, if the script isn't rewritten once in awhile, to longtimers each workday begins to feel like veteran cast members of *Les Misérables* must have felt somewhere about fifteen years into the run.

Even *Les Misérables* didn't last forever, though. It ran for 6,680 performances on Broadway. Eventually, enough is enough. Everyone from the hinterland had seen it. New Yorkers long ago were no more conscious of *Les Mis* than they were of the Triborough Bridge. It's easy for a production to rest on past plaudits, and for a long time. So too for a library vendor rep. It works.

Until it doesn't. What anyone who speaks on behalf of a vendor really represents is themselves. That is, their own ability to deliver on promises, things that will happen in the future. There's the short-term future, as in a jaunty, "Sure, I can take care of that." Then there's the middle-term future, "Of course we'll be ready for that by then." And finally the longer-term future, "We know where things are going." That last future may not have much to do with the other two. In fact, the short-term future is really the past, "We know how to do a known thing that we've done many times before."

One day, after a long time working with one set of futures, you may find it's time to try out another. And there's nothing to say it will have much to do with your own past. 🌿

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many different levels, whether the sale of an individual journal or an entire publishing company. An investor is likely to get a good price on exit.

Secondly, scholarly publishing is stable, and is not subject to the ups and downs of the economic cycle. That means that publishing scholarly books and journals is relatively easy to predict and plan for.

Thirdly, scholarly publishing generates cash. Journal subscriptions are paid before many of the costs of publishing are incurred. That cash flow means that publishers' cash requirements are much lower than in most other industries.

Any cash positive, stable, predictable business in a sector where there is a real market for companies that are for sale is immediately attractive to private investors. So watch for more of the same. 🌿

Against the Grain / February 2007

Standards Column — Restructuring NISO's Standards Committees

by **Todd Carpenter** (Managing Director, NISO) <tcarpenter@niso.org>

During the recent **American Library Association Midwinter** meeting in Seattle, I had the opportunity to meet with more than sixty members of our community to discuss the new directions that **NISO** is taking in the leadership of the development of standards. Certainly, this column would hardly be compelling reading if it constantly focused only on the internal structure and developments within our organization. Indeed, there are important standards developments and ongoing work that you all need to be aware of and these concerns will be the focus of future columns.

However, as **NISO** is at an important crossroads and the changes we are putting in place will have a significant, profound, and, I believe, positive impact on the how we coordinate standards development and promotion as well as the types of standards we develop, it is important that we explain in some detail how the new structure will work and what we hope to achieve. We hope that those interested in standards work and **NISO**'s directions will provide valuable input on our activities in order to further improve and smooth the process.

As background, since many of you might not be familiar with **NISO**'s structure, let me explain the oversight process that has been in place. Reporting to the Board of Directors is a **Standards Development Committee (SDC)**, whose responsibility is to both provide advice on the organization's strategic direction in areas of standards and to monitor the activities of the various working groups that generate and update **NISO**'s standards portfolio. This committee has performed a difficult job commendably, despite its small size and broad responsibilities. However, it is unrealistic to expect that a small number of people will have the breadth of knowledge, or the time to commit, to managing the work of nearly thirty active and diverse standards-setting technical groups. With a diverse portfolio of standards ranging from bibliographic formats to Web services and from metasearch to binding, no group comprised of fewer than ten people could realistically hope to keep pace with all of the underlying issues and ramifications to effectively direct it all. Those who have served on and lead the **SDC** deserve our great thanks for their energy and commitment to **NISO**'s governance and for the work that they have done in stewarding the standards process.

Among the many recommendations that were offered during the strategic planning process over the past two years, the restructuring of the **SDC** was among the top priorities. The two key responsibilities, of setting strategic

direction and of managing the working groups, would need to be split up and addressed separately in order to focus the efforts in these areas, albeit with significant communication back and forth between the groups managing these responsibilities. Furthermore, to expand the breadth of expertise and ease the management burden of diverse community needs, separate topic areas that will provide arenas for more concentrated attention on standards in those areas would need to be organized to provide a more cohesive and efficient oversight of the work underway.

To begin, we have created four separate committees to lead our standards process. The Architecture Committee will review **NISO**'s strategic vision and convene Topic Committees to manage a portfolio of standards activities.

These Topic Committees will coordinate and monitor the work of the Working Groups, which will continue to explore issues and come to consensus on standards. We are currently organizing three Topic Committees: Discovery to Delivery, Content and Collection Management, and Business Information. Although these three areas comprise the majority of

NISO's activities, it is not expected that all of **NISO**'s standards will fit neatly into these three groups or that its work will be limited to these three topic areas. Realistically, there are limited resources to organize these groups and developing too many committees simultaneously risks not organizing any well enough to succeed. Over time, additional Topic Committees may form or be divided into more specific areas of focus.

The Architecture Committee will play a key role in the oversight and direction of **NISO** and in concentrating **NISO**'s limited resources on those key areas where they can be most effective. Bringing together a diverse group of experienced leadership will ensure that **NISO** is addressing issues affecting our constituency. The expectation is that this group will provide a vision of where standards need to be developed, point out areas of overlap with other standards bodies, and identify forces outside our current environment that will impact our future standards development activities. Led by **Chuck Koscher**, Technology Director at **CrossRef** and a member of **NISO**'s Board of Directors, the Committee will include representatives from each of our communities: in the library and publishing communities, from automation and other vendors, from the academy, and from other standards-setting organizations. The Architecture Committee's primary short-term goal will be the expansion of the **NISO Strategic**

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