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Back Talk -- In Your Face

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I Hear the Train A Comin'
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JE: Sorry to be a contrarian, but we don't focus enough on journals as "currency" (great term!). Some people will tell you that we are entering an "articles economy," which is a highfalutin way of saying that people read articles on a stand-alone basis. The problem with this view is that it assumes that an economy is determined by the users of a product, when it is the other way around: the economy serves the producers — which is what we mean when we talk about a return on capital. I suppose someone could claim to go to the theater simply to hear **Hamlet's** famous soliloquy, but the soliloquy is embedded in a dramatic context, which in turn floats upon the tangible realities of the stage, the theater, and all the people who helped organize the event. The journal is the infrastructure that makes it possible for **Hamlet** to perform. Pay-per-view makes cowards of us all.

GT: *What role should university presses be playing in scholarly publishing?*

JE: University presses should evolve as the primary commercial agents for their parent institutions, with the aim of delivering a return on the investment in the creation of intellectual property. The only press that even remotely does this today is **Oxford**. The presses should be much, much larger — as big as **McGraw-Hill**, as profitable as **Thomson**. The ultimate goal for a press is to become a major source of funding for its parent.

GT: *This would require a major transformation in the presses' philosophy, staffing, management, and operations, would it not?*


JE: Oh, boy. Where to begin? First, let me make a plug for one of my articles that takes up this point; it's called "The Wisdom of Oz: The Role of the University Press in Scholarly Communications," (*The Journal*




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Establishing goals and achieving them are of course two different matters. Over the course of the next six months we will establish a working party to work with public and private funding agencies in Hong Kong as well as with those promoting research at each of our universities to see that actions are implemented to turn the goals into reality. 🌱



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of *Electronic Publishing*, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.3336451.0010.103>). But for this program to be successful there would also have to be an enlightened view of the presses' capabilities by university administrators and the management boards that oversee the presses. As a rule, a board member should also have bona fide operating experience, but how many CEOs sit on press boards now? How many board members can read an income statement? If you want a university press to compete with commercial entities, they have to be managed differently and resourced differently.

GT: *Is the institutional repository a fad whose time has passed or an enduring scholarly communication mechanism?*

JE: Neither. The purpose of IRs will change, is already changing. The idea that they would become a substitute for the likes of **Elsevier** and **Springer** has yielded no fruit to date. On the other hand, there is indeed a significant and growing need for online, public storage for certain kinds of materials that are

unlikely to find a sustainable market. My term for this is "the hard drive in the Cloud," meaning the "Internet Cloud." This is the place for Open Access to selected materials. I have in mind such things as notes, bibliographies, data sets, and other information of special interest but not likely to find many customers.

GT: *The scholarly communication space has seen a remarkable amount of consolidation in recent days. Why?*

JE: Well, this is "Mergers & Acquisitions 101." As a market matures, as it has with scholarly communications, it becomes more difficult to find new customers, so businesses attempt to make more money on the customers they do have. Consolidation reduces transaction costs, typically reduces finance costs, and provides a bulwark against new market entrants. We are only in the early innings of the consolidation game. I envision a situation where 85% of market share, as measured in dollars, goes to four players, as it is in the K-12 market in the U.S. today.

GT: *What do the private equity firms that have taken on high profile assets such as Thomson Learning, SirsiDynix, and Endeavor see in the higher education space that has them investing so heavily?*

JE: What do they see or what do they think they see? For one thing, they can buy these companies mostly with borrowed money because interest rates are low. Secondly, they see opportunities to wring out costs by consolidating operations and reducing investments in new projects. Third, they see a cash machine, which even if it were not to return to the public markets at some point, could be a reliable source of dividends. I don't think there is any publishing vision behind these deals. It is all financial engineering.

GT: *Much attention has been paid to the "long tail" phenomenon and its applicability to scholarly publishing. What is the fit, if any, in your opinion?*

JE: The "Long Tail" is one of three parts of

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Endnotes

1. **Dempsey, Lorcan.** (2007, April 12). *Environment and People*. Presentation given at the **2007 The Academic Librarian: Dinosaur or Phoenix, the Chinese University of Hong Kong**. Power Point retrieved June 4, 2007 from <http://www.lib.cuhk.edu.hk/conference/aldp2007/programme/index.htm>.
2. **Breeding, Marshall.** (2007 May 13). *The New Generation of Library OPACs at the 5th Annual Library Leadership Institute, Redefining Libraries: Web 2.0 and Other Challenges for Library Leaders* from http://lib.hku.hk/leadership/2007_ppt/Topic%206%20Library%20OPAC.ppt.

Back Talk — In Your Face

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The problem, it seems, is that we in academic library land are increasingly finding that our “stuff” is not where our students are at. That is, as shown by the **2005 OCLC Perceptions of Libraries and Information Resources** study, and echoed in more recent reports, our students come to the library for information only when coerced by their teachers or the goddess of information, **Google** fails (or her international sisters like **Baidu** in China). The **OCLC** study indicated that while 84% of college students started their search for electronic information with a search engine, only 1% started with a Library Website. The perception is, that we, like the shops in towns across the world that are made redundant by one-stop-meets-all-needs stores like America’s **Wal-Mart**, or the **French Carrefour**, both of which mega-store chains abound here in China, will soon be bypassed and forgotten.

The solution, it seems, is that unless we are willing to wait like the buggies and their whips to be replaced by cars, we need to get our stuff out in the face of our users. The **Phrase Finder** <http://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/202800.html> suggests the phrase “in your face” originated in basketball where one player scores a basket in the face of the opponent in a “bold or aggressive manner.” For us, we need to boldly and aggressively get our stuff out on the Web where are students are, and put it “in their face.”

Lorcan Dempsey spoke of this need at two conferences recently held here in Hong Kong. To reduce his message to the need for librarians to get their stuff out in the face of their users is grossly unfair, but it is the feeling that I came away with and this has instilled in me a conviction that we at my library need to take action.¹ Our need to change the nature of how we communicate what we have to our read-

ers was further emphasized by **Vanderbilt’s Marshall Breeding** who gave a presentation on the new generation of library OPAC’s at our **Annual Library Leadership Institute**.² He began by describing the cosmetic attempts by OPAC vendors to help readers find what they want in a single search, but concluded that there was “widespread dissatisfaction with most of the current OPACs.” He shared lots of interesting information about replacement OPAC front ends like **Endecca** and **AquaBrower** and the fairly similar work being done by **OCLC**, **Ex Libris**, and **Innovative**.

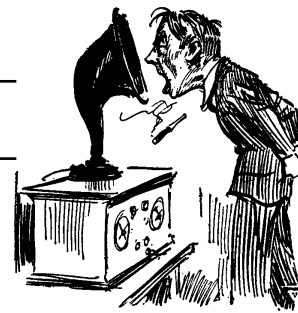
How to get our stuff out in the face of our users is complicated. We can, for example, go out to Websites like **Wikipedia** and make sure our “stuff” is referred to there. At **HKU** we have been digitizing Hong Kong government documents and laws. We might, therefore, consider going on the Web to resources like **Wikipedia** and add links to our Hong Kong and other special collections materials. Another approach is to make our library Websites more like the search engines, to Web 2.0’ize them, to lure readers away from **Google**, so that our students can access the best of both worlds — at the same time access the Web’s resources and access the millions of dollars worth of books we have acquired over the years and the electronic resources and books that we continue to acquire. Finally, the approach that I want to spend the rest of my space here talking about is to load up our home grown “stuff” in an institutional repository within the overall Open Access environment in order to make it accessible to our own students and readers across the globe.

On May 17 and 18 my library, together with the support of the other **JULAC** academic libraries of Hong Kong <http://www.julac.org/>, sponsored the **Promoting 21st Century Schol-**

arly Communication: The Role of Institutional Repositories in the Open Access Movement. We began the meeting by noting that the methods employed for scholars to communicate with each other are changing, that these new ways coexist with the old ones. Our speakers then helped us understand what Open Access is all about, the funding agency policies designed to encourage scholars to share their research findings on the open Web, what universities are doing around the world to showcase the intellectual output of their students and faculty, the need for data archives as well as narrative materials, and descriptions of what is happening to implement open access and to create institutional repositories both here in Hong Kong, and more widely in China.

At the conclusion of the conference we established some official goals to be pursued by our eight universities:

1. Insure that the intellectual contributions of Hong Kong scholars are made widely and openly available to members of our own and world communities. That is, as stated in the Bethesda Statement on Open Access Principles, that authors and copyright holders “grant(s) to all users a free, irrevocable, worldwide, perpetual right of access to, and a license to copy, use, distribute, transmit and display the work publicly and to make and distribute derivative works, in any digital medium for any responsible purpose, subject to proper attribution of authorship” (<http://www.biomedcentral.com/openaccess/bethesda/>). These contributions can include peer reviewed articles; books and chapters in books; conference presentations, technical reports, patents, theses, or any other document or object deemed valuable by authors and their institutions.
2. To make this possible, employ institutional repositories to preserve in perpetuity the scholarly contributions of all Hong Kong authors.
3. Retain those elements in the scholarly communication process that add value, such as peer review, and augment the process with new open access elements.
4. Work with all stakeholders to ensure that Web-based scholarly communication is sustainable, that is, insofar as is possible, the needs of authors, readers, and those involved in the publication and dissemination of information are mutually met.



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