

September 2010

Back Talk

Anthony W. Ferguson

University of Hong Kong, ferguson@hkucc.hku.hk

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg>

 Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

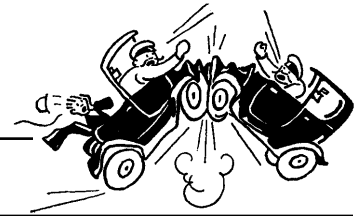
Recommended Citation

Ferguson, Anthony W. (2010) "Back Talk," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 22: Iss. 4, Article 13.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.5601>

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

Back Talk — Geese, Nuns, and Revenge: The Innovative Interface/OCLC Lawsuit



Column Editor: **Anthony (Tony) W. Ferguson** (Library Director, University of Hong Kong; Phone: 852 2859 2200; Fax: 852 2858 9420) <ferguson@hkucc.hku.hk>

I decided that my **Back Talk** essay this time should deal with the **Innovative Interfaces/SkyRiver/OCLC** lawsuit. By way of disclosure, I want to make it clear that the following words do not represent the views of either **OCLC**, *Against the Grain*, or indeed my own university/library. (I am fairly confident that my high school literature teacher, my wife, six children, and 15 grandchildren would also want me to keep them out of it as well).

The basics of this lawsuit is **SkyRiver Technology Solutions** and its parent company, **Innovative Interfaces Inc.**, claim that **OCLC** is trying to prevent them from competing in the library cataloging services business, that **OCLC** is trying to dominate the integrated library systems (ILS) market through illegal practices, and that **OCLC** refuses to let for-profit firms access and resell the cataloguing records they find in **WorldCat**. A good introduction to all of this can be found in **Marshall Breeding's** news note in *Library Journal*.¹

Upon reading this and all sorts of things in the blogosphere, I asked myself, why is **Innovative** doing all of this? I mean, yes, **OCLC** with its **WorldCat Local** plans to go toe-to-toe with **Innovative** in the ILS marketplace by lowering the price of accomplishing the goals of most ILS systems through cloud computing (a new name for relying upon computers accessed via the Web, but located elsewhere, to get work done — the technique employed by **OCLC** for the past 40 years or so for obtaining cataloging records). **Innovative** is clearly worried about this sort of new competition even though it has been successfully competing with a whole lineup of ILS vendors and has heretofore won for most of the past few decades by providing high value for high cost. I thought, why don't they simply adopt the cloud computing technique themselves, instead of inventing a new company to invade **OCLC's** library cataloging service business as revenge or in hopes of driving them away from the ILS business?

Having been raised by parents and grandparents who used stories and aphorisms to explain things, the phrases "killing the goose that laid the golden eggs" and "cut off your nose to spite your face" came to mind. The goose phrase refers to the story about a farmer who found his goose was capable of laying golden eggs and, rather than collect them day by day, decided to cut the goose open to grab the large store of gold from which the eggs were being produced. The nose phrase refers to the practice of adopting short-term solutions which seem to be successful, but in the long term prove to be self-destructive. Apparently there were some Scottish nuns who, in the face of a Viking invasion, decided that to make themselves unattractive and thus protect their virginity, defaced themselves (no pun intended) by cutting off their noses and upper lips. The Vikings indeed did not violate the nuns sexually, but instead burned them alive in their houses.

Libraries are of course the geese which lay the golden eggs. We spend large sums buying computer systems to keep track of everything we buy; help us to create catalog records which help patrons to find the books, journals, and all sorts of other things that we own; and do all sorts of backroom things to make our libraries operate efficiently. **Innovative/SkyRiver's** attempt to force **OCLC** to let it break into and resell the catalog records in **WorldCat** will upset a shared record-sharing system which has saved libraries enormous sums of money. I have underlined the word system intentionally. It is a system with many interdependent parts, which means you can't tamper with one part without affecting the other parts of the system. **OCLC** gives libraries money to help encourage them to create expensive original cataloging records, anticipating that it will someday sell the records to some other library. **OCLC** buys the records sight unseen, and it is not making the purchase with a future buyer in hand. In the case of Chinese books, for example, **OCLC** annually pays

my library for the tens of thousands of printed and electronic book cataloging records we send them. Were it to allow for profit companies to grab the records without pay that my library and thousands of other libraries sent to **OCLC**, and then sell them to others, **OCLC** would soon go bankrupt. When this happens, all the libraries now sending records would stop sending them to **OCLC**, and the collaborative cataloging database would end. This, in turn, would force libraries to repopulate their libraries with original catalogers, and we would return to the days of large staffs and backlogs. Again I ask myself, why are they doing this?

Applying my mother's aphorisms to my own situation wasn't and isn't always easy, and the case of **Innovative** and the cut noses story isn't an easy match. But let me try: In this case, **Innovative** is clearly pursuing a counterproductive course of action to protect its turf. Just like the nuns who decided to deface themselves to protect their virtue, **Innovative** seems totally willing to spend a lot of its funds, as well as do damage to the libraries' collaborative system of sharing cataloguing records, in order to publically what happens to those who challenge its domain. It is too late to suggest to the nuns that they should have instead attacked the Vikings with sharply-honed rulers and scowls of disapproval or to have taken a less radical course of action to escape the wrath of the Vikings, e.g., running, tunneling, or cooking great dinners to go with the grog the Vikings were stealing. It isn't too late to counsel **Innovative** to get rid of their lawyers and focus on making sure that **Millennium**, their current one-stop shop offering to libraries, does indeed last 1,000 years (or, in computer time, 10 years at least).

I spent years in libraries with problematic ILS systems — most of which are dead or nearly so. I always wanted to work in a library system rich enough to have an **Innovative** ILS. For the past nine years, because it can handle Chinese-Japanese-Korean records/needs so successfully, I have finally landed in such a library. It is nice to work in such an ILS crisis-free environment. Moreover, the eight universities of Hong Kong have also successfully employed **INN-Reach**. We are, I am told, the most successful group of libraries to take advantage of this piece of software. Therefore, all should be good, but I find myself in the midst of a battle pursued by **Innovative** which only adds to all the problems facing libraries. It is sad, but it could be turned around. I hope it will be soon. 🌱

See *SkyRiver Response* on page 85

ADVERTISERS' INDEX

| | | | | | |
|----|-------------------------------|-------|----------------------------------|----|---------------------------------|
| 29 | AAAS | 83 | BUSCA, INC. | 2 | IGI GLOBAL |
| 43 | ABC-CLIO | 15 | CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS | 27 | IGI GLOBAL |
| 11 | ACS PUBLICATIONS | 69 | THE CHARLESTON ADVISOR | 77 | McFARLAND |
| 35 | AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF PHYSICS | 10 | THE CHARLESTON REPORT | 88 | MIDWEST LIBRARY SERVICE |
| 25 | ANNUAL REVIEWS | 21 | COLD SPRING HARBOR LAB PRESS | 65 | MODERN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION |
| 33 | APPI | 8 & 9 | COUTTS INFORMATION SERVICES | 19 | NEW ENGLAND JOURNAL OF MEDICINE |
| 37 | ASBMB | 49 | EASTERN BOOK COMPANY | 23 | OECD |
| 41 | ASME INTERNATIONAL | 7 | ELSEVIER | 13 | PROQUEST |
| 5 | ATG | 61 | EMERY-PRATT | 53 | RITTENHOUSE |
| 81 | BASCH SUBSCRIPTIONS, INC. | 73 | THE ENDOCRINE SOCIETY | 31 | SIAM |
| 39 | BEGELL HOUSE PUBLISHERS | 59 | GIBSON LIBRARY CONNECTIONS, INC. | 45 | WORLD SCIENTIFIC PUBLISHING |
| 87 | THE BOOK HOUSE INC. | 17 | IEEE | 3 | YBP LIBRARY SERVICES |

For Advertising Information Contact: **Toni Nix**, Ads Manager, <justwrite@lowcountry.com>, Phone: 843-835-8604, Fax: 843-835-5892.

Endnotes

1. **Breeding, Marshall.** (2010, August 12). **SkyRiver and Innovative Interfaces** file major antitrust lawsuit against **OCLC**. [Electronic version]. *Library Journal.com*. Retrieved August 12, 2010, from http://www.libraryjournal.com/lj/home/886099-264/skyriver_and_innovative_interfaces_file.html.csp.