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Library Perspective, Vendor Response

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Library Perspective, Vendor Response

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Column Editors' Note: *This column for Against the Grain is devoted to discussing issues affecting library acquisitions, library vendors and the services and products they supply to academic libraries, and the publishing marketplace as a whole. It is an ongoing conversation between a book vendor representative, Robin Champieux, and an academic librarian, Steven Carrico. — RC and SC*

Robin: Steve, for this month's column we wanted to discuss the end user and specifically if and how libraries should aim to make visible the work and cost of providing resources. This has been on my mind recently because of the diverse approaches I see in working with libraries at **EBL**. I was hoping you could start us off by describing the approach at **UF** and your particular views.

Steve: I'll use a story that occurred this past summer which might illustrate the problem of visibility for libraries. One of my close colleagues was ailing and I went to visit him at the **UF Health Sciences Center** hospital. He told me an interesting interaction he had with his cardiologist, who happened to be an avid researcher involved in many grant projects. When the cardiologist found out my colleague was a library professional

they got to talking about libraries, online resources, and research; at one point the doctor said something about how much he was paying for journal articles from one of the leading publishers. My colleague replied, "But why are you paying for those articles? You can access that publisher's journals through the library." The doctor was stunned and said something to the effect of "Why didn't they tell me?" When word of this conversation got back to the Health Sciences Center Library the librarians there responded, "But we do tell our faculty and researchers about the resources available through the library — all the time." To be fair, the librarians at **UF** do meet regularly with faculty at departmental meetings; offer ongoing classroom instruction and Web tutorials; and give presentations at faculty orientations and other campus functions. This story of the cardiologist is hardly an isolated case, so despite all these efforts, clearly the library does not market itself as effectively as it should.

Robin: So, are you saying that marketing and discoverability go hand-in-hand? And, do you mean marketing should focus on the resources or that marketing should focus on the library and the resources it makes available? My apologies for the semantic exercise, but I do think it is an important difference. Your story also brought to mind the **Ithaca S&R 2009 Faculty Survey**; it found that scientists were the least likely to use library specific discovery portals for research. This was presented in the context of an overall decline in usage of library-specific discovery points across faculty. So, if that's the case, how do you get the resources in front of them and how do you make sure they know the library is the provider?

Steve: Yes, marketing and discoverability must go hand-in-hand, or better still be joined at the hip! Maybe that wasn't true for libraries in the pre-Web days, when walk-in patrons knew who was responsible for providing the library materials — you were in the library, duh! Discoverability then meant finding sources in the card catalog, the vertical files, or shelf browsing. It's all changed now with the online environment. Half the time users are unsure where the resources are coming from or who is providing them, until they have to fork over money to pay for something. Our cardiologist recognized that the journal articles he was paying for came from the publisher, his credit card statement reminded him of that; but library marketing fell through because he didn't realize he could go through the library portal and access those same journals for free. In addition to marketing themselves and the resources they offer, academic libraries must

make clear how the library is responsible for providing many of the online journals that users are accessing, and that these online resources require a large budget. Sometimes it seems that the administration and faculty don't really recognize just how much of their university libraries' budgets are spent on paying for online resources and journal packages. Of course, our cardiologist has a better idea, because he has personal experience in paying for articles individually for a long period of time — although I'm sure he can afford it. So my answer to your question is this: the marketing should focus on the library and the resources it makes available but also on the expense. Heck, why not brand each item but also state what every item costs, in big flashing neon lights if that's what it takes: "this journal article is brought to you by the good folks at the **UF Library** and would have cost you \$37.50." You know, like **PBS** does, only with a price tag.

Robin: Great idea, **Steve**. Maybe you could also incorporate a couple drives per year. Users could still access resources, but you would have a librarian standing by explaining the ins and outs of obtaining and maintaining that resource; always gets me with **NPR**. But, seriously, given the importance and the library's role as buyer and organizer of an institution's research materials, what are your thoughts on publishers and content producers skipping the library, marketing and selling directly to faculty and students?

Steve: Jeeze, **Robin**, I feel like I'm at an interview with all the questions you're throwing at me ... just don't ask me to list my strengths and weaknesses. I don't have the slightest problem with content being sold directly to the faculty and students — why would librarians have a problem with that? Let's return to our favorite M.D., the cardiologist and his direct and out-of-pocket purchase of a publisher's content. The only problem I had with that acquisitions model is he was wasting his money when he could have received the content through the library portal for free. But if a **UF** person wants to purchase content directly from a publisher let him or her do so; I would hope that he or she checked to see that it was content not already available to them via the library. By the way, I love the idea of the **NPR** telethon. Perhaps we can have a has-been, big name celebrity perform while we beat the drum to "support your local library."

Robin: I think quite a few librarians would have a problem with that, but let me elaborate and draw from a recent article **Rick Anderson** of **University of Utah** contributed to *Educuse Review*, "If I Were a Scholarly Publisher."¹ **Rick** described the four survival options he sees as available to scholarly publishers as they

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I attend the reference meetings and the collection development meetings at the library. The collection development ones I would attend anyway as the Head of Acquisitions. Another case of wearing two hats — hard to break the habit of using that phrase. The reference meeting keeps me up-to-date on new databases and services that might be of use to my faculty, and I can pass all that relevant information along.

I've got to say that the best parts of the job of Library Liaison are the relationships I build with faculty and students. Whatever you can do for them, render a service, get a book or video in on time, help with building the collection in their area of research, or alerting them to new books and databases that come in of relevance to them, you get a good payback. In Technical Services we are often shielded from that direct contact and the heartwarming praise that is so frequently the reaction of those we help is the greatest benefit of being a Public Services Librarian. 🐼

try to navigate the shrinking revenue available from their primary, traditional marketplace — research libraries. It is the third option, “find a way around libraries into the scholarly marketplace,” that **Rick** believes librarians should find most concerning. The role of the library as broker or buyer is one that users recognize and value.¹ When this role is no longer accepted as necessary or valuable, what happens, keeping in mind that other important roles a library plays are often unrecognized and under-utilized?

Steve: Thanks for the citation, professor, now I had to go read it. Just kidding, it's a very interesting article, and as usual **Rick** makes you stop and consider a topic from a variety of perspectives. I'll not retract my statement that it wouldn't bother me as a librarian to see faculty purchase resources directly from publishers, but perhaps I better recognize **Rick's** point that it could be a dangerous and slippery slope for libraries to begin to lose their role as content purchaser/information broker for the campus. I can't fathom this happening soon anyway; can you imagine the logistical headaches for publishers if they attempted to sell their content directly to thousands of faculty and students across the world? Any increased revenue the publishers earned with this model would be paid out to all the new customer representatives they'd have to hire, that's all I can say!

Robin: And, my understanding of the crux of **Rick's** position is not that he is trying to gal-

vanize the profession to derail this possibility. Rather, he is drawing a connection between this development and the consequences for academic libraries' relationships to scholarship and scholars. Now, this is just my interpretation, and not **Rick's** words, but it harks back to themes often repeated in our column: change, how we respond to it, and the evolution of academic libraries and bookselling. If we were to imagine the reality of what **Rick** describes — wherein, the library is not the broker and buyer of scholarly materials — what kinds of services and value is it delivering? It's probably a necessary, but potentially exciting, question.

Steve: I'd remind you that librarians do far more than acquire resources. I don't know if exciting is the term I'd use if libraries lose their role as the centralized content broker for academia. It could mean a lot of librarians will be revising their position descriptions in the future, but I guess that's a form of exciting times. Maybe we can pursue this topic next time, cause the fat lady is singing. Arreverderci, **Robin**.

Robin: I agree, let's explore this in a bit more depth. Until next time, and please don't forget that list of strengths and weaknesses. 🍷

Endnote

1. **Anderson, Rick.** *EDUCAUSE Review* 45 (4) (July/August 2010): 10-11, <http://www.educause.edu/EDUCAUSE+Review/EDUCAUSEReviewMagazineVolume45/Ist-WereScholarlyPublisher/209335> (accessed October 4, 2010).

Lost in Austin — The Last of the Mohicans?

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Forty-five years ago, as I write this, I had a little more than a hundred days before being separated from the **United States Army**. I wasn't yet a true short-timer but I was close. I have, as of late September 2010, 276 days until retirement (9 months, 3 days and counting) and am even further from being a true short-timer than I was in Fulda, Germany back in 1965, but I can feel a tug from the future as a detached concern about my current responsibilities creeps into my psyche.

There are a few things left for me to do before I bring the librarian phase of my life to a close. In June 2011, I will have been a librarian for 38 years and by my reckoning, that is long enough. The time is right, and there is no turning back.

This is not my final column for *Against the Grain*, but I do want to spend some time now (and perhaps later, too) looking back at my career in libraries and use this opportunity to bid a fond *adieu* to those friends and col-

leagues who have enriched my life and my career. How many will read these words is anybody's guess and not a concern because I am really writing this for myself as a psalm to librarianship as it once was, as it became, and as it is beginning to be.

When I speak of librarianship and those intellectually curious, bookish (in the best sense of the word) people who inhabit its world, I include not only those who actually work in libraries but those who work with librarians — those in publishing, book selling, serials, and all of those other areas (not all new, by the way) that populate the exhibit halls during library association conferences. The changes over 38 years have affected them as much if not more than they have affected libraries.

My professional career began at **Stanford** in 1973, but I had been working in the **UC Berkeley** Rare Books & Special Collections and the **Bancroft Library** since 1969, work

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