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Papa Abel Remembers-The Tale of A Band of Booksellers, Fascicle 12: What's Your Role? Executive or Staff?

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has to be more responsive. If the public library turned down the user in such a situation, this user would potentially vote “no” in the next millage election, could complain to the mayor or the city manager, might write a letter to the local newspaper, and possibly tell friends and family about the negative experience with the public library. Unlike the student in the academic institution or even in the school media center, a single user has much more leverage in the public library. This leverage has limits, since I will admit that a user who wanted the library to purchase a vinyl record, a betamax tape, or even an audiocassette might get turned down; but this decision would rest upon policies that eliminated entire classes of formats rather than not duplicating a permissible format for the user who wanted it.

A corollary from this principle is that moving into the digital age may have more costs for the public library because it can’t abandon users who aren’t ready for the transition. For early adopters, the public library will be asked to consider eBooks in multiple formats, lots of computers with Internet access, and downloadable films and music. Yet the public library won’t be able to abandon the traditional formats for those who want them. This principle may even extend to at least some reference materials for those patrons who will tell the librarian: “I don’t like those new fangled inventions like the computer. I don’t know how to use one and would like to continue to find the

materials I need on the shelves.” I doubt that many public libraries will have a good response other than continuing to provide at least the most used materials for pre-computer users.

I also don’t want readers to assume that the public library is looking at a generation gap. A modest computer and an Internet connection are luxuries that a family facing foreclosure might decide to forego. (I’ll admit that cell phones may be an exception to this rule.) The children of parents who don’t like computers may not see their importance for their children. Last week at a local library conference, I heard the story of parents who wouldn’t let their children bring home free computers because the parents would be financially responsible for their loss. Given the possibilities of damage or theft, I would judge that the families were making a rational decision to turn them down. Those of us in the middle class are too likely to assume that the rest of the world is just like us.

I don’t see any easy answers for public libraries except to wait until the world changes enough that no one will seriously protest taking away the pre-digital products. Doing so will require monitoring use before eliminating older formats. The public library may be able to do so more quickly for less popular items as their use falls or for subject areas where digital expertise can be assumed. The computer books could go digital while the cookbooks would stay in print. Finally, the public library might simply have the policy of saying yes whenever a user, like the student at the beginning of this column, asks for a different format. “We aim

to please. How quickly do you need it?”

As an addendum to this column, I asked the readers of the Colleges Libraries Discussion List if their library would buy a print copy of an eBook already in the collection if a reader requested a duplicate print copy. I also asked for comments whether the status of the user (faculty or student) or an explicit mention of a digital divide issue would make a difference. Out of the eleven responses, seven libraries would purchase a duplicate print copy. Four didn’t have any conditions. Three did: “after checking with faculty,” “for compelling reasons,” “for a faculty request.” One response was “perhaps” with more weight given to a faculty request. Three responses stated that the library wouldn’t buy a duplicate print copy. One librarian said that the library would get a print copy on interlibrary loan.

Broader issues included comments on how important eBooks had become because the eBook packages provided so many books at a relatively low cost per title, but one librarian brought up the concern about whether these were the titles needed by faculty and students. One response to a “no” answer asked why the library wouldn’t purchase the format that a user wanted, the main point of this column. One library still had a policy of strongly preferring print to digital. The digital divide issue wasn’t all that important in the responses but might be a small factor for some. One response indicated that their institution required all students to have a laptop so that the digital divide didn’t apply. 🐼

Papa Abel Remembers — The Tale of A Band of Booksellers, Fasicle 12: What’s Your Role? Executive or Staff?

by **Richard Abel** (Aged Independent Learner) <reabel@q.com>

After four years, the approval plan forms and the “backlist” of titles were available electronically, with the input provided by punch cards. We modified the approval plan for non-subject parameters to eliminate superfluous forms, and libraries now received only forms for titles in the library’s profile subject areas or for titles selected by managers as suitable for their collection.

A request by a couple of the **Atomic Commission Agency** libraries inaugurated the firm’s first venture into cataloging as the **ACA** libraries awaited **Library of Congress** cataloging for newly purchased titles, that created a backlog and delayed circulation. Therefore, we agreed to perform original cataloging if the **Library of Congress** provided no catalog record within a brief period. This worked out so well that we began to provide this service to other libraries. All of this, of course, meant that we inputted **LC** cataloging on a regular basis. We studied our cataloging process for

purposes of timing, comparison, and other future uses.

In the meantime, several libraries asked us to select and provide books for new “undergraduate libraries” that were under construction. We carefully reviewed those institutions’ current course catalogs to determine a balance among subject areas. (We were always given a dollar amount, a budget timeline, and the final size of the planned opening collection.) Then it was back to a far more extensive body of bibliographies to assist me in making the selections. One of the more interesting and challenging collections was the **University of California at Los Angeles**. I met with the acquisitions staff and a group of faculty library advisors on this project. One of the faculty advisors included a quite distinguished professor of Classics. The advisory committee decided that our firm should send in 10,000 books initially so that they could judge the content quality and subject distribution of the selected titles. If they found our

performance satisfactory, we would then provide an additional 40,000 titles, employing the same criteria of selection. As the assembled group was leaving the table, the Classics professor approached me and voiced grave doubts about my capacity to select the best of the Classics literature. Now this was a distinct challenge to a **Reed** graduate who still breathed the air of the humanities curriculum. So when I began selecting the 10,000 trial titles, I provided a selection of **Loeb Library** titles that met the curricular distribution percentage at hand. At our next meeting, about six months later, the Classics professor authorized us to proceed with the 40,000 balance and kindly told me that he could not have done a better job himself, which was a significant and gratifying comment for a bookman.

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After developing a few of these new undergraduate libraries, their cataloging departments were overwhelmed by the avalanche of books and asked for our help. The firm was now up to its eyeballs in the cataloging process, and shortly thereafter, the book processing process, performing possession stamping, attaching spine labels, circulation cards, and pockets, and attaching bar codes for those few libraries that had computer catalogs. The computer staff, still compelled to use machine language, had to provide for the various cataloging options sought by different libraries and, at the same time, integrate the cataloging databases with the approval plan and undergraduate title databases. They were a hard-pressed but remarkably ingenious group, who came through with good systems that did the jobs needed, although I was often biting my nails about meshing time commitments to libraries with our internal capacities to meet them.

All of these varied demands for cataloging resulted in a rapidly growing catalog database. The firm slowly accumulated the first 100,000 catalog records, but each 100,000 thereafter came in progressively shorter periods. This growth in the catalog database arose from inputting both LC and original cataloging to support the needs of both the approval plan libraries seeking "books with cataloging" and the varied holdings formed for undergraduate collections, which were increasing. The firm now supplied cataloging almost as much as it supplied books. Indeed, in a growing number of libraries, we supplied both, as they came to trust our wide-ranging bibliographic knowledge as well as our mature cataloging expertise.

About this time, **John Coutts** started his firm in Canada, leaving us with the problem of quickly finding a replacement. **Bernhard Starkmann** opened the Amsterdam office around the same time. Then **Don Chvatal** came aboard. **Don** was a librarian at **University of Montana** and first recruited by **Jim Cameron**, who came to know **Don** when calling on that library. **Don** agreed to open a Texas office near Dallas-Fort Worth. The Texas office was an interesting venture, and **Don** always relished a challenge. The libraries in the **Texas University System** were bound to order from the low bidder in an annual bidding game. **Baker & Taylor** had always won the bid in those days. **Don** was aware of this but also aware that a substantial volume of orders was returned as "OP," "OS," "not available through the trade," etc. The volume of sales from these rejected orders along with sales to private universities and libraries in neighboring states were sufficient to make the Texas office quickly profitable. This office was served by the Zion, Illinois, regional office.

At that time, we also started a more formal program for training promising young candidates who lacked experience in the book trade. **Dan Halloran** was the first, a bright young graduate student in Middle East studies who possessed a broad bookish background. A recruit from Germany also joined us, **Tom Schoppach**, who had considerable experience dealing in the Russian export/import book busi-

ness. He manned the Berne, Switzerland office, as the firm needed access to Russian publishing to meet library needs, and Switzerland provided close proximity. **Tom Slatner**, formerly with the marketing department of **Cambridge University Press**, joined us to help with buying and selling UK titles. We also planned for a New Jersey regional office that **Tom Martin** would open and manage. To prepare for this development, **Al May** came aboard to manage the Los Angeles office. **Al** had been an associate of **Lyman Newlin** at **Krochs**.

All of this rapid development left me with little time to work with the Northwest libraries. But as good fortune would have it, **Jim Quick**, who had achieved a splendid reputation as a manager of the **J.K. Gill Co.**, a Portland bookstore of national repute, decided to join the band of Argonauts. **Jim** quickly took over the responsibilities for the Northwest libraries, a natural for him, as he was a devoted fly fisherman and could cast his line in the small creeks and lakes that dotted the area as he made his rounds to the libraries.

Over the years, it became obvious to virtually all the managers that there was a continual cataloging backlog in our approval plan libraries, and they also noted a disproportionate number of foreign language titles in the backlog. We needed to find a solution to end the problem. So I called the head of cataloging at the **Library of Congress** and proposed a deal. We would send foreign language titles to them at no charge if they would catalog them within a couple of weeks for the then standard fee of \$25 per title cataloged. He advised they would gladly do so, for such a program would not only give the Library a subvention for cataloging each title but also eliminate the cost of acquiring these titles.

We planned to announce this initiative at the **ALA** mid-winter meeting in Washington, D.C., the following January. In mid-December, I wrote all the heads of the **ARL** libraries and invited them to a lunch meeting a day before the **ALA**. I arranged with the hotel to set up a lunch for about 60 people. Virtually every **ARL** head librarian was there. The Librarian of Congress, the assistant, and one of the university head librarians, however, refused to take a seat, standing in the doorway for the entire session. The plan I proposed called for a shifting group of at least three libraries to buy one copy of every United Kingdom and European title that was in keeping with their Approval Plan profiles. For each book purchased, we would guarantee LC cataloging, in a card set or on electronic tape, within two weeks of delivery. We would price the books at the converted publishers' list price plus \$10 dollars for the cataloging record. I pointed out the value of books available for circulation shortly after publication; the value to other libraries who would now have cataloging available for these titles; and the value to the **Library of Congress**, who would acquire a substantial number of free scholarly titles plus the income from the subvention we would pay for cataloging.

Unhappily, and unexpectedly, after the presentation, various **ARL** librarians turned the planned question and answer period into

a small riot of complaint about the **Library of Congress**. I put a stop to this departure because I had not called the meeting to criticize the Library but to put together a win-win program for everyone. On that sour note, I closed the meeting. I was puzzled by this turn of events. However, as I worked the halls and meeting rooms, I gradually acquired bits and pieces of a secret undertaking. A small contingent of **ARL** librarians had approached the **Ford Foundation** with a plan to put into place a "shared cataloging" program. They sought a substantial subvention (\$10,000,000) to launch and operate the program under the sponsorship of a separate body, subsequently styled the Council of Library Resources. The objective was to help eliminate the cataloging backlogs in the nation's scholarly and research libraries by sharing a new cataloging acquisition and distribution initiative, but this was at the expense of the libraries furnishing "shared cataloging" to this pool. Our firm was already doing this to some limited degree, and the initiative we proposed at the meeting would provide a substantial boost. It was no small wonder that the wheel horses of this embryonic **ARL** plan created a noticeable distance at the luncheon.

While flying back to Portland after **ALA**, I made the decision that the firm needed eyes and ears in Washington, D.C. I had toyed with this notion for months, but my ruminations focused on Congressional legislation and agency regulations and those decisions that increasingly shaped the destinies of the firm and more frequently blindsided programs, which cost us dearly in time, effort, and money to put into place. After the meeting, it was clear that we needed eyes and ears focused upon more than simply governmental initiatives. So shortly after my return, I inquired of friends about whom they worked with in Washington to protect themselves. A great many recommended a lobbyist who had developed a number of connections in Washington as a congressional staff member and had recently set himself up as a hired gun. And so began yet another odyssey having nothing to do with scholarly books that would play itself out in some surprising ways.

Early in this period, **Paul Sibley** informed me that he was in over his head with the financial affairs of the firm, not only with the growing complexity of the accounting but the management of our bank loans. The bank told us repeatedly to make no further calls on new libraries or take on new business from established accounts. However, this was like trying to prevent a band of thoroughbreds from running. **Paul** suggested a young CPA, **Keith Barker**, who was the chief honcho of a recent annual audit by **Ernst & Ernst**. Such a suggestion, which greatly affected **Paul's** place in the firm, was typical of the camaraderie of our management group. In due time, **Keith** came aboard. He quickly got the bank into a much more cooperative stance and revamped the accounting systems.

We now had a great group of Argonauts and an increasing number of internal systems to assist them in a growing variety of jobs. The firm seemed rock solid and well-positioned to realize the objectives we all agreed on. But

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At the only Edge that Means Anything / How We Understand What We Do

by **Dennis Brunning** (E Humanities Development Librarian, Arizona State University) <dennis.brunning@gmail.com>

A Book with a View

Let's Vook.

Founded in 2008 by **Brad Inman**, **Vook's** goal is to blend story-telling with words to story-telling in video, connecting author and reader through words, image, and social networking.

Vook's idea is to create a new media experience. Books are not books anymore but a reading experience. Take the **Kafka Stories Vook**. **Vook** commissioned two European film-makers, **Michel Franchetti** and **Adad Warda** to write and direct thirteen video documentaries that accompany each story. Stories like **Metamorphosis** are accompanied with documentary detail in **iPhone**, **iPad**, and Web browser format.

The e-commerce part is easy — can we imagine otherwise? **Vook** takes the major credit cards, has you fill out the pertinent information as you setup **MyVook**. Once submitted, an email confirms your purchase, and you're good to go.

Text displays on the right, and the first video is on the left. You click thumbnails to advance videos. You can watch, read, mix (watch and read), or connect to social networking — mostly reading groups.

The **Kafka Vook's** first video introduces us to modern Prague street scenes. Soon, with the voice over of a Professor of **Kafka**, we learn about **Kafka's** childhood, upbringing, and education. The style is the familiar documentary — expert talks over still and moving images from the archives.

Users expecting links between text and video — or content and explication de texte — will be disappointed. In the text there are links from words or concepts to **Wikipedia** entries.

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in the late 1960s, I made the first of several strategic errors, which badly hurt the firm. Increasingly, my time and attention were turned to matters of finance, personnel, and similar "executive housekeeping" concerns. I was far more interested in dealing with books, ferreting out internal and library problems, and developing systems to solve them. As I became aware of my growing disinterest and diminishing involvement in the "executive" things, I should have sought a first-class manager, who enjoyed and was good at "executive" responsibilities. I should have fallen back to a bibliographic and systems (manual and software) research, design, and implementation position. I failed to do this because I saw so much developmental work ahead and thought it the role of the "executive" rather than a staff member to carry out that development. In retrospect: too bad. 🐼

This won't go unnoticed by literature teachers. Still, the videos inform sort of like the **History Channel** meets the library. Production values are high; this is not **YouTube**.

Vook's catalog is small. Subject categories are similar to the Book of the Month Club — Self-Help, Entertainment, Romance. And the catalog gets even smaller when you consider that **Vooks** are often divided up into mini-**Vooks** — a guide to fifteen minute **Pilates** exercises is sold one **Vook** for each exercise. Each of these is sold for \$4.99 so that to **Vook** the entire original book would cost about \$24.00.

In many ways a **Vook** is a DVD. It is a multimedia book production. It adds to the information and entertainment value of the original content at a quality price point that doesn't cause you to flinch.

Or better not. You can probably read **Kafka** in one hand and enjoy added information from some other source — like your library. Or wait for **Kafka** to appear on the **History Channel**.

Your Links:

<http://vook.com/>

Where the Wild Things Are eBooks December 2010

Shh! After a hungry 2009 where a mighty appetite for all things "e" couldn't be satisfied, 2010 slowed down. Time to digest.

Kindle — New Kindles — smaller, trendier, cheaper, appeared on the market. At \$139.00 you can buy a wifi model, thinner and sexier than version 2. \$189.00 will buy a standard 3G/wifi model. The marketing angle: you can read with this one anywhere, the beach, the subway, in the air. The bigger story: the **Kindle Store** dominates eBook market despite **Barnes and Noble E Book Store** and **iBooks** for the **iMachines**. And the **Kindle** app brings **Kindle** to almost any device.

iPad — Millions have sold since the April 2010 debut. 300,000 sold in the U.S. in the first month clearly outgunning all the early adopters and clearing the way for the followers. The big question: will it deliver major newspapers and magazines back to profit? Major publications have jumped on board with fantastic apps that deliver enhanced versions of print editions. Clearly, the **iPad** is more fun than the dedicated readers. On a **Kindle** you can only read about drag racing; on the **iPad** you drag.

Google Book Settlement — All is Quiet on the U.S. front as His Honor, **Danny Chin**, failed to rule on **GBS**. The groundbreaking

case, with its new take on copyright, got hung up with federal concern over, well, copyright. Iced it down well through the summer, and now it's winter.

Hachette Job — **Google** settles with **Hachette** to not violate French copyright law and "partner" with **Hachette** in the scanning, searching, and sell of books. The agreement breaks to the favor of **Hachette**; they will determine what will be scanned, searched, and sold by **Google** and what will merely be "discovered" there. Apparently **Google Book Settlement**, unsettled still in the U.S., doesn't translate into French. Droit d'auteur prevails.

E Textbooks — Textbook book barrier may be broken by the stitching together of textbook and course content — cheaper for students? It will seem cheaper...

Perhaps the biggest motive to go e is the big push by higher education into online. More popularly known as "college in pajamas," online students need everything on the desktop. Think about it, with every e-text you get a coupon for **Abercrombie and Fitch** for the sleepwear of your choice.

Patron-Driven Book Selection — Far from this Madding Crowd, academic eBook publishers press forward with new collection development models that put customers in control. Patron-driven collection development allows users to select content under the watchful eye of librarians who used to do this. The idea is very Ranganathanian — get 'em what they want, when they want it. Time is saved, money even; whether or not it builds collections is the very unRanganathanian question.

E Apps — Perhaps the most interesting development this is year is the steady growth of magazine and newspaper for the browser and reader devices. These are special versions developed by electronic publishing companies like **Zinio** and **RealView** to join print and digital in a unique reading experience.

The industry hopes to renew interest in paying for their medium (both in subscriptions and higher advertising rates) and reverse a decline engineered by the Internet. As librarians we can only hope that these new and improved products become part of our market, reversing a decline in our own tired and tried versions sold to libraries. The breaking point: will consumers return to reading magazines in apps beyond the superficial interest consumed by clicking and moving on?

As we go to press ...

Shh...don't disturb the kids and their video games. Let the adults have another Shiraz... Google Ebookstore has arrived just before

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