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Pelikan's Antidisambiguation — Whistling whilst Walking past the Graveyard

by Michael P. Pelikan (Penn State) <mpp10@psu.edu>



This writing occurs as North Africa is undergoing dramatic and sweeping calls for change, country by country. The response, regime by regime, has reflected the instinctive responses of those who have become accustomed to being in power, whose expectations are that they can remain in power, that any means are justified to permit them to maintain their stranglehold on control: control, not only over their countries, but over the very nature of the debate itself....

It's an unjust comparison — no lives are being swept away in brutal slaughter, it's not about Human Rights. But. Make no mistake. The state of siege many publishers and book sellers find themselves in today emerges as a **grim analog**.

Do a search in **Google** news on the search term "textbook publishers," and you'll get an immediate overview of the breadth and diversity of upheaval in this long-standing staple of publishing and selling stability.

Countless articles, state by state, speak to dissatisfaction with K-12 textbooks, ranging from controversies over accuracy of content to more basic, even embarrassing, reports of typographical and grammatical errors (at least, **let's hope the publishers are embarrassed**), in books that, frankly, are bloody expensive — and difficult to update after they're sold (to say the least!).

You get the sense that there's real anger developing among folks who feel they really ought to be getting a better product for their tax dollars.

Meantime, Dallas area schools are preparing to shift to eBooks as the format of choice for some materials. A February 4th story in the *Dallas Morning News* speaks of Middle School students reading "*Much Ado About Nothing* on ...**Sony Readers, Kindles**, even an **iPhone**."

And why not? Anyone who's dabbled with the state of e-content today would come away with a high degree of certainty that the e-text rendering's of **Shakespeare's** works available in Open Source have reached a **reasonable degree of accuracy and authority**. A growing number of Middle School students — maybe most, before long, will be carrying devices with Internet Access in their pockets: their Smartphones. There isn't a single Smartphone that can't find, download, and save a copy of *Much Ado About Nothing* in a matter of minutes.

And the bits rendering the work of the **Bard** are weightless. Those bits add nothing to the load borne by backpacks straining under the weight of textbooks and notebooks. Many of these Readers, either dedicated or in software, offer searching, annotation, and other useful tools — these tools are not "cheats," they're merely **useful tools for scholarship** that are unavailable by nature in the traditional paper-based book publishing format.

So, some Book Publishers are including CD-ROMs with their textbooks, containing electronic content as a "bonus," as if this constitutes a feature offered by the forward-looking firm with the purchase of the bound copy. It's **perhaps too severe** to suggest that this constitutes a meager, halfway measure, an attempt to get by on the cheap, a kind of "whistling whilst passing the graveyard," **but only perhaps**.

The *Billings Gazette* asks in a February 4th headline, "Why are textbook prices so high?" Publishers take note: you've had a real good run, but your grip on the game may be slipping....

So what we have is a period in which both consumers and publishers are faced with the growing sense that the whole scene is undergoing fundamental change — change we aren't simply going to ride out — change that could change everything.

This darned e-content! It takes a while to come to terms with it. I've undergone a lengthy, meandering, evolution of attitude toward it myself.

I simply love my old favorite books. Some are from childhood — **Herge's** *Adventures of Tintin*, in the British translations, in the original large-format editions, or **Holling Clancy Holling's** masterful works such as *Seabird*, *Paddle to the Sea*, or *Minn of the Mississippi*, or all the *Babar* stories — I cherish these physical objects, have shared them with my children — have used them to teach them how we hold a book, how we treat it, how we turn pages....

Other, more grown-up material represent purposeful purchases. The *National Geographic Atlas*, the entire **Gabriel Allon** series by **Daniel Silva**, the **Scribner's** critical edition of *Moby Dick* — sure, there's **Google Earth**, and I've got eBook copies of both the **Silva** and the **Melville**, but there's still something about the big Atlas, or the nice hardbound edition.

But, blast it, it's also really nice to carry all this stuff — really, not just saying it — a

substantial personal library, in a single slim book-sized device. The exception remains the Atlas, for which I've yet to find a fully satisfying e-analog replacement: **Google Earth** requires a laptop at least, along with an Internet connection.

Indeed, maps, inserted graphics, and the potential for hyperlinks out of eBook content, pointing either to sources on the Web, or directly into other eBook content on your device itself — these all represent areas needful of invention and improvement. Why not have a book about music history with in-text links to MP3 content that comes along with the eBook, and loads along with the book as a single package?

And then there are Course Packs. If you want the **Poster Child** for the next step we all ought to figure out how to take, it's the Course Packs. For Heaven's sake! Much of this custom-printed content (maybe all, actually) begins as electronic content. We simply gather it up, pass it through **Copyright Clearance**, and then print it and bind it. Why? Why not go through the same process and create legitimate, copyright-cleared e-content?

Another development is occurring as well: organically, quietly, yet with growing momentum. Increasingly, teachers are producing learning material on the Web, or in wikis. I'm less familiar with the Middle and High School content, but can affirm that the Higher Ed content I've seen in this format is very impressive. Complete with color illustrations, maps, graphics, animations, these are a new form of teaching material, a step beyond what's currently done even in eBooks, let alone paper-published textbooks. And a label is being attached to some of these efforts, a label that will strike fear into the hearts of publishers and content sellers and have them reaching for their phones to call their lawyers — that label is **Open Source**....

We're at a crossover time in publishing, in reading, in teaching. While still (and continually) trying to get a handle on future directions, I can tell you this much with certainty: there will be no going back. The Rubicon is behind us.

We're in that moment I once described at a **Charleston Conference**, some several years ago. The Dinosaurs have ruled the Earth for a long, long time. They coexist with one another, albeit with the occasional outburst of lethal violence, "...red of tooth and claw."

At their feet scurry strange little creatures. They wear fur. Rather than laying eggs requiring long incubation, they give birth to live offspring. Their whole approach to things seem quite different from the way the Dinosaurs have been doing things — but it is not a matter of concern for Those Who Rule the Earth: these new creatures are very small. It's little wonder the Dinosaurs looks down at the new arrivals and say, "No problem: those won't amount to much..."

Do a **Google** search on "**Schwalb**: Ending Textbook Tyranny," from the *Yale Daily News*.

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guidelines with caveats were accepted by my colleagues and put into place immediately.

The opportunity to revise the gift procedures was a gift in itself as it provided me with a clear task to tackle immediately after starting my job. These changes in procedure are still new and will be subject to tests over the coming months. I can see already that gifts vary significantly in their requirements so there will be exceptional cases that won't fit into these guidelines. However, so far the feedback has been positive from staff and librarians both. Free can be a very good price, if managed efficiently. We have received wonderful material through library gifts, and I'm looking forward to refining the process further to make gifts even more of a benefit than a burden. 🐾

Biz of Acq — The Getting It System Toolkit (GIST) and Changing Workflow in Acquisitions and Collection Development

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What is GIST?

The Getting it System Toolkit, or “GIST,” is a system designed to change library workflow. It started with an enhanced interlibrary loan and acquisitions request system, integrating two formerly disparate workflows and allowing for user-driven selection. Utilizing API technology, JavaScript programming, and customizing the OpenURL Web pages of the interlibrary loan software ILLiad, the GIST interface enables effective, data-driven decisions at the point of request. Because the user now has price, holdings and delivery estimates, book reviews and ratings, and full-text availability options at the request interface, they can easily make decisions about the item they want, and give feedback about what items they need, why they are using the material, as well as how the library can deliver requested items. Beyond the user interface, GIST is a new request workflow system for Acquisitions and ILL. GIST streamlines the once manual process of mediating and processing purchase requests and allows the ILLiad software to automate those processes by routing requests customized for the library. With GIST ILLiad addons, automatic searches of your favorite book suppliers and other acquisition services can be custom tailored and embedded into your workflow.

Why GIST?

In many libraries, the acquisitions request system is simply inefficient. Requests are handwritten on slips of paper, buried on hard-to-find Web forms, pieces of torn publisher catalog pages or post-it notes on someone’s desk. All these systems have the potential to lose requests, and become a “black box” to users. Using automated software to manage the request process is one step in creating more efficient workflows in acquisitions.

Secondly, with decreasing budgets and a recognized need for more user input into collection building and use, it makes financial and practical sense to make the user’s request part of the decision-making process. Student-centered and other user experience services are a popular trend in libraries, so collaboration with collection development is a logical next step. Patron-driven acquisitions should truly *be* patron-driven, augmented by data that helps the patron and library evaluate requests rapidly.

Third, more collaboration with ILL makes sense. Instead of looking

at ILL data after the materials have already been requested and received, why not use a request-driven system to route requests to acquisitions at point-of-need? Good workflow design can improve a relationship that is needed in many libraries to streamline services. Also, this collaboration has the added benefit of automating formerly time-consuming processes in many acquisitions departments. No need for manual emails to be written each time you order or receive material and notify the patron. Because of the robust ILLiad request system, all requests are handled internally to the system, where staff from either department can view requests which have been routed back and forth between ILL and acquisitions staff (see Figure 1).

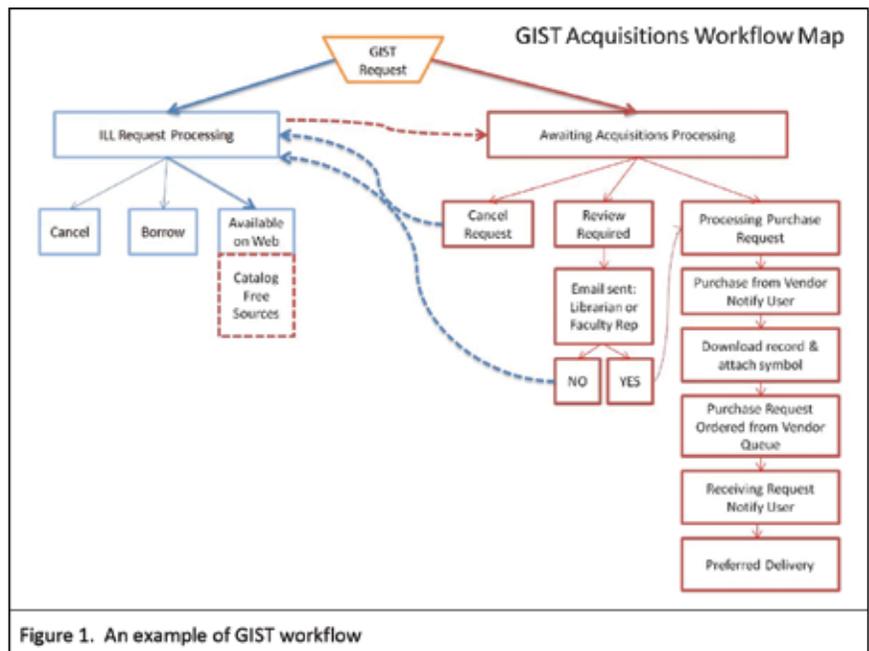


Figure 1. An example of GIST workflow

Fourth, we need to make data-driven and effective decisions at the point-of-request. If the 80/20 rule still applies in libraries,¹ then we are making ineffective purchasing decisions with money that we can’t waste. On the other hand, ILL requests cost money and doing more interlibrary loan borrowing also increases costs at the expense of collection building.²

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This article, by **Nathaniel Schwab**, goes to the heart of the matter in the Higher Ed realm. The entire worldview held so comfortably by the publishers and the book sellers is under assault — and I mean **determined assault**. Some publishers and book sellers are trying to ride the

wave — Leadership in the style of “Find a parade and try to get in front of it...”

Let’s be frank. The multiplicity of devices that can download and render e-content has grown faster and developed further and in more diversity than any of the commercial e-content offerings.

We’ve got DRM’d eBooks, music, movies, in which the publishers or sellers struggle to bind the content to a particular, known user

or set of devices — but a far greater body of content — content these devices can already access — is already out there, and out of the publisher’s or content seller’s hands. Some of the recent attempts to reign things back in, such as **Apple’s** shameful grab to take a 30 percent cut on in-app purchases, represent either greed, desperation, or both.

Whistling while walking past the graveyard.... 🐼