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Is the Book Dead? Reminiscences from the Great Debate at the Exploring Acquisitions Conference

by **Sue McKnight** (Director of Libraries and Knowledge Resources, Nottingham Trent University, The Boots Library, Goldsmith Street, Nottingham, UK) <sue.mcknight@ntu.ac.uk>

As the adjudicator of the **Conference's Great Debate**, I realised that we had experienced a completely flawed scenario! There were passionate speeches on both sides, arguing positions on whether the book is withering and or withered, but we failed to define our topic.

What is a book? Does a book have to be in a print format? Is a book still a book when it is in a digital format? Is a physical book with additional digital resources available still a book? These fundamental definitional issues were not addressed in the debate. Perhaps, from the perspective that the debate was a form of entertainment, it did not matter. However, the confusion in definition helped sway the audience towards declaring the book as dead, because of the increasing use of digital resources.

However, taking a serious view of the issues, as a profession we ought to be careful

how we describe information resources in the future, so that there is no confusion about what we are discussing. Declaring that the book is dead will cause angst amongst readers who enjoy print books and authors who wonder how their thoughts can be made accessible to readers — not perhaps realizing that there are books, and there are other books. It will cause angst amongst publishers who contemplate publishing models and librarians who are challenged with questions about why libraries still need shelf space.

The **Great Debate** also failed to define the meaning of “dead” in relation to books.

Although the debaters who won, and very hand-somely I must add, claimed the “book is dead,”

the audience had physical books on their persons; were reading physical books in their hotel rooms; and, were buying physical books at **Blackwell's Bookshop** in Oxford. Hardly indicative that the book is dead!

The book is not dead! The book is morphing into new formats, which will increase access to some content for some people. Sometimes the older print will be preferred; sometimes a digitally-enhanced version will be a better fit for the reader's purpose.

There are very real challenges to be addressed. The **Great Debate** highlighted some of these.

May the debates continue! And, in retrospect, if we had defined what was meant by the term “book,” it might not have been such an interesting spectacle. 🐛

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engagement with **Blackwell Book Services**, he was Vice President of International Sales for **YBP**. His article on a demand-driven acquisitions experiment that allows patrons a choice of an eBook or print copy will appear in the next issue of the *International Journal of the Book*. **Robin** lives in Portland, Oregon, and **David** in Warner, New Hampshire. Both **Robin** and **David** bring a wealth of knowledge and experience in bookselling, library supply, and academic publishing. Congratulations to **David** and **Robin**!

www.blog.ebilib.com/

Remember when everyone in the book business had worked at one time or another for **Prentice Hall**? Well, you may be too young, but I sure do. Well, now, everyone in the book business seems to have worked for either **Blackwell** or **YBP**. There are exceptions, but ...

Speaking of which, the indefatigable **Steve Sutton** <swsreads@yahoo.com> (once of ... YBP!) has joined **On Demand Books** as **Vice President, Director of University and Library Sales** as of February 5, 2010. **Steve** will be working with the **Espresso Book Machine** to mention just a few of his duties. We are looking forward to our interview with **On Demand Books' CEO Dane Neller**, coming soon in this space.

www.ondemandbooks.com

More **Blackwell** movement. Long-time bookseller **Scott Alan Smith** is pursuing his MLS and is enrolled at the **University of**

Texas, Austin's iSchool. He's still working for **Alibris**, and continues to organize the **Acquisitions Institute at Timberline Lodge**, along with **Faye Chadwell, Oregon State University**, and **Nancy Slight-Gibney, University of Oregon** (for **Timberline**, see libweb.uoregon.edu/ec/aitl, and note this year's keynote speaker is **Katina Strauch**!). Email remains <scott.alan.smith@comcast.net>; snail mail to P.O. Box 7579, Austin, TX 78713. See **Timberline's** ad in this issue, p.61.

Listen up! **Ronald P. Leonard** has been named director of the **Network of Alabama Academic Libraries (NAAL)**, a member-governed consortium of Alabama's public and private non-profit four-year colleges and universities, which is based in the **Alabama Commission on Higher Education**. **Leonard** comes to Alabama from Decatur, Georgia where he was marketing coordinator of **DeKalb County Public Library**. Previously, he worked for more than 12 years at **LYRASIS**, a membership cooperative for libraries. During that time he worked with libraries throughout the southeast as trainer, membership and marketing coordinator. **Leonard** began a career in library science working in the **University of Kentucky's Agriculture Library** and the **Center for Applied Energy Research Library**, a special library affiliated with the university. He holds a Master of Science in Library Science degree from the **University of Kentucky** and a Bachelor of Arts degree in History from **Western Kentucky University**.

Surprising! The innovatively creative **Tom Sanville** will join **LYRASIS** as the new **Director of Licensing and Strategic Partnerships** in April 2010. He will oversee

all vendor licensing, programs, and strategic partnerships, including the management of the electronic resources portfolio and supervision of the implementation of database licensing and other related products and services, in support of membership needs. “Working with the **LYRASIS** management team and membership is a great opportunity to expand on my past experiences,” he said. “I will work creatively with the libraries and library consortia across the regions to enact even more cost effective licensing programs that expand information at sustainable costs; and promote other service and product opportunities to help **LYRASIS** members advance and remain vibrant information service providers to their communities.” **Tom** will serve on the management team of the **Member Engagement division**, which oversees membership structure, member communications, and consortial licensing, as well the product and service-consulting program. **Sanville** has been **Executive Director of OhioLINK** since July 1992. The program now serves 89 member and participating institutions with a union catalog equipped with a statewide patron-initiated borrowing system, over 100 reference and research databases, and cooperative statewide electronic centers for theses and dissertations, journals, books, and digital media. He is the 2007 recipient of the **Professional Achievement Award for the Association for Specialized and Cooperative Library Agencies**, a division of the **American Library Association**. He is active in the development of the **International Coalition of Library Consortia (ICOLC)**, **Libraries Connect Ohio**, and other library organizations. **Tom** was formerly Vice President of Marketing for **OCLC** where he worked for ten years.

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