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ATG Interviews Sam Brooks

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Executive Vice President, Sales & Marketing, EBSCO Publishing

by Tom Gilson (Associate Editor, *Against the Grain*) <gilson@cofc.edu>

and Katina Strauch (Editor, *Against the Grain*) <kstrauch@comcast.net>

ATG: You note in your press release that the “Wilson database products are known for their quality indexing.” Is that the main strength that Wilson brings to the table in this merger?

SB: Yes, if I have to name the single most important strength, it would be the quality indexing. Not only does Wilson have the highest quality indexing in some subject areas, they also have huge backfiles of indexing.

ATG: How about the content of their databases?

SB: If you are referring to the full text, yes, this is also an important part of this. Wilson has done a good job of licensing titles in specific subject areas that have not been licensed by the three largest aggregators.

ATG: Recent reports note the creation of seven super databases combining EBSCO and H.W. Wilson existing products. Can you tell us a little bit more about this?

SB: Yes, these are among the most exciting end results of the merger. In seven subject areas, there will be new “super databases” that combine all EBSCO & Wilson content in these disciplines. They include: applied sciences, art, biography, education, humanities, law, and library science. Some details are already available at: www.ebscohost.com/superdatabases

ATG: When will these super databases be unveiled? Is there a set timeline?

SB: Our goal is to release these super databases in early 2012.

ATG: Does this mean that the H.W. Wilson brand will disappear? Will any of the Wilson databases remain as standalones, or will they all be merged into these super databases?

SB: The H.W. Wilson brand and products will not disappear. For example, even though a new comprehensive database called Art Source will be created, we will continue to offer the individual components: Art Index (H.W. Wilson), Art Abstracts (H.W. Wilson), Art Full Text (H.W. Wilson), Art Index Retrospective (H.W. Wilson), and Art & Architecture Complete (EBSCO).

ATG: Pricing is always an issue for libraries. How will you price these new products to make it appealing to libraries/consortia to upgrade? How will this affect current EBSCO or Wilson standalone database offerings?

SB: There are two issues here, and I would like to separate them. First, there is the issue of the existing EBSCO and Wilson database subscriptions. For the overwhelming majority of worldwide customers, the pricing policy will not change. Second, with regard to the new super databases, they will cost more than their subsets (and will include additional



unique content), but we are very aware of the budgetary limitations that exist, and we believe libraries will find the products valuable enough to justify the pricing.

ATG: Is there anything else you can say about pricing to reassure existing customers?

SB: It is very rare for us to have uncharacteristic price increases for any company or database we acquire. A quick review of recent purchases by EBSCO should put the library community at ease. EBSCO acquired NetLibrary, and the markup has actually gone down slightly. OCLC transferred many of its First-Search databases to EBSCOhost and prices remained stable. EBSCO bought America: History & Life and Historical Abstracts from ABC-CLIO, and price increases have actually been reduced vs. previous rates. EBSCO purchased The Music Index from Harmonie Park Press, and increase rates did not rise. EBSCO acquired all of Sage’s subject indexes (Criminal Justice Abstracts, Communication Abstracts, Family Studies Abstracts, Peace Research Abstracts, Race Relations Abstracts, Urban Studies Abstracts, Violence & Abuse Abstracts, etc.), and increases stayed similar. The same is true for the NISC databases we bought (Family & Society Studies Worldwide, Gender Studies Database, The Left Index, Middle Eastern & Central Asian Studies, Women’s Studies International, etc.). The same was also true when we bought Salem Press (Critical Insights, MagillOnLiterature, Masterplots, Salem Health, Salem Literature, etc.) and Whitston Publishing. No matter how far you go back (e.g., CINAHL, SPORTDiscus, etc.), a large majority of customers can attest to the same thing. Our goal is to improve the

products we acquire, keep them affordable, and then succeed by signing up more customers than were previously subscribing under the prior ownership.

ATG: It sounds like the WilsonWeb platform will disappear once all Wilson databases are available on EBSCOhost and customers have been transitioned to EBSCOhost? How long do you anticipate that will take?

SB: This is accurate. WilsonWeb customers will be transitioned to EBSCOhost once their databases are available via EBSCOhost. We expect this to occur on December 31, 2011.

ATG: Besides being enhanced to take advantage of Wilson subject vocabulary, indexing, and relevancy ranking algorithms what other advantages will end users find when searching the “new” EBSCOhost platform?

SB: WilsonWeb has a great feature that will be added to EBSCOhost, which will benefit all of our customers. WilsonWeb keyword searches match against their controlled vocabularies and return results from “use for” terms. For example, a keyword search for “Burma” also returns results on “Myanmar,” because “Myanmar” is a “use for” term for “Burma.” This functionality is being added to EBSCOhost, not only for all Wilson databases, but also for all EBSCO-owned databases. We expect this to improve search results in a meaningful way.

ATG: What is happening to the nonprofit part of H.W. Wilson?

SB: Both EBSCO and The H.W. Wilson Foundation have a long-standing tradition of providing financial and other support for libraries and library organizations. The H.W. Wilson Foundation plans to continue its commitment to its mission of supporting libraries and librarianship, as evidenced by its numerous grants and longstanding support of the John Cotton Dana Award.

ATG: While the two companies have had separate, distinctive histories, they also have separate, distinctive corporate cultures. Are there specific steps being taken to merge these corporate cultures?

SB: We are proud of the proactive, growth-oriented corporate culture in place at EBSCO Publishing, and we are committed to continuing to operate with this same culture in the future.

ATG: What about personnel? How many Wilson sales and support personnel will be retained? Will they keep their current home bases?

SB: Given the transaction occurred less than a month ago, we are still in the process of

continued on page 46

getting to know employees and making decisions regarding the future. We will be bringing product support into our Ipswich operation. As decisions are made, we will be communicating appropriately.

ATG: *Is EBSCO contemplating any other ground shaking mergers that you'd like to give ATG the scoop on?*

SB: EBSCO believes strongly that the best possible search results come from a relevancy ranking algorithm built on searching a combination of full-text and high-quality subject indexing from controlled vocabularies. This means we will continue to be the leader in licensing full text and in acquiring subject indexes. Other than **H.W. Wilson**, I don't have any I can report today, but it's safe to say that we are interested in talking to any provider of high-quality subject indexes or any other publisher of valuable research databases. 🐼

Rumors from page 34

Librarian at **Purdue**) are planning to guest edit the February 2012 issue of **ATG**!! They are planning this in between having babies and all that! Both **Mark** and **Charles**. **Charles** and his wife **Heather** just welcomed **Alexander** and we hope to hear about **Mark** and his wife's new addition soon! Oh! And, my husband and I gave both of our children three names instead of two, that's in addition to the last name and, boy, have they complained about it. So — I was gratified to learn that **Charles** and **Heather** gave their child three names — **Alexander Lloyd Duncan**. And **Charles** has three names as well — **Charles Thomas Godfrey** as does **Anthony** — **Anthony Richard Kirk**. It's tradition! And **Charles** says that he's trying to "keep everyone [in the family] happy." Is that a future **Charleston Conference** theme?

Met one of the most energetic people that I have ever encountered the other day! **Ava Jordan** of **BookConsignments.com** based in my back yard — Summerville, SC. **Ava** is planning to attend the **Conference** both as an exhibitor and an attendee which is great. She says that she got so many suggestions that she attend from librarians in South Carolina and everywhere! Like Wow! Thanks, Guys and Gals!

Speaking of the **31st Charleston Conference**, the registrations are rolling in! More than last year even! Surprising! We are planning for a third overflow room (if possible) for Plenary Sessions in the **Francis Marion** and several of my go-getter co-workers are looking for bigger venues in downtown Charleston.

Just heard that **Mark Herring** is planning an article on **QRcodes** for the November issue! It will only be available at www.against-the-grain.com/. That **Mark**! Hard to keep up with all his ideas! Stay tuned! www.against-the-grain.com/

Returning to new jobs, **Elisabeth Leonard**, once Associate Dean for Library Services,

continued on page 50

against the grain people profile

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Sam Brooks

BORN & LIVED: I was born in Stamford, CT and have lived most of my life in Boston, MA; I have also lived in New York City and several parts of California.

PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES: I've been in charge of the worldwide sales and marketing efforts of **EBSCO Publishing** since 1991. I'm also heavily involved in gathering market research and ensuring that it impacts the company's product development efforts. I helped build and maintain our 17 long-standing advisory boards and numerous focus groups. I've also considered it important to be active in library science literature, and have written papers in major library science journals, e.g., *Serials Review*, *The Library Quarterly*, *Portal: Libraries and the Academy*, *Information Technology and Libraries*, *Journal of Academic Librarianship*, etc., as well as the library publications of more than a dozen countries, including *Hungarian Journal of Library & Information Science (Hungary)*, *KLC Journal (Kazakhstan)*, *EBIB (Poland)*, *Librarianship (Russia)*, *Journal of Educational Media & Library Sciences (Taiwan)*, and many others. I co-edited a book for **The Haworth Press** (now **Taylor & Francis Informa**) entitled "Library/Vendor Relationships," published simultaneously as an issue of *The Journal of Library Administration* (Vol. 44, Nos. 3/4.). I have participated in panel discussions or appeared as a speaker at various library conferences, including **ACRL Chapter Meetings**, **IFLA**, **The Charleston Conference**, **ALCTS Networked Resources and Metadata Committee Meeting**, **International Congress of Information, LITA Technology and Access Committee Meeting**, **NLA Tri-Round Table (Technical Services, Information & Technology)**, etc. I'm a member of the **EBSCO** Founder's Club, and after 20 great years with the company, I can't imagine working anywhere else.

MOST MEMORABLE CAREER ACHIEVEMENT: I guess I need to give you two answers, because one is personal and one is professional, but both are career accomplishments. From a personal standpoint, it is not even close. I've traveled to 92 countries with **EBSCO**, and much of that travel was to developing nations. We sought and gained special permission from publishers to make extraordinary offers to governments in emerging countries, and then we traveled to meet with ministers of education, science & technology, etc. to attempt to convince them of the value of national licenses for full-text journal databases for their universities and hospitals. This was hugely successful, and today, **EBSCO** has more than fifty national licenses with most of those being developing nations. From a purely professional standpoint, I believe it would have to be participating in the decision to listen to our advisors and put an unprecedented investment in time and funding into **EBSCO Discovery Service (EDS)**. We started development as early as other discovery services, but made a conscious decision to delay the release so we could incorporate content and features that would give our service tremendous long-term advantages over those other services. It was a risky decision, because it gave our competitors the ability to get a head start in selling their services, but I believe strongly that it will prove to have been the right decision for **EBSCO** and for libraries.

HOW/WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS: Libraries (and library vendors) are competing with **Google** for the attention of end users. This is perhaps the most important mid-term and long-term issue facing our industry. Libraries and library vendors have many things that are not available free on the Web, but perhaps the two greatest differentiators are valuable full-text sources (such as journals, magazines, and books) and high-quality subject indexing from controlled vocabularies. It is the segmentation of library collections, and the abundance of platforms, that makes it difficult for end users to realize the true value of the library (and its vendors). I believe that within five years, the majority of academic libraries will have a discovery service — in an attempt to address this issue. The service that does the best job of leveraging the strength of the library collection (for-fee, full-text sources and high-quality subject indexing) will be the one that is prevalent five years from now. In addition, I think we will see a big shift from print books to eBooks (hence **EBSCO's** acquisition of **NetLibrary** and development of eBooks on **EBSCOhost**), and I believe we will see an explosion of usage of library resources via smartphones, e-readers and tablets. The **EBSCOhost iPhone** app has experienced a remarkable number of downloads, and we are working on an **Android** app that we also expect to have massive usage within five years. Libraries and their vendors must embrace all of these changes, as they will make us more relevant, rather than less relevant, if we handle them properly. 🐼