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ATG Interviews Tim Babbitt and Kevin Sayar

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SVP Platform Management, ProQuest and President & General Manager, ebrary

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

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

ATG: *Can you both tell us a little bit about yourselves and how you got started in the Research/information business? What is it about the business that keeps you so interested and involved?*

TB: I'm **Tim Babbitt**, Senior Vice President of **ProQuest** Platforms. I'm responsible for innovation in the content and tools **ProQuest** creates to support users across the entire lifecycle of their research. Before joining **ProQuest**, I was Chief Information Officer at **JSTOR/Ithaka**. That position prepared me very well for what I'm doing for **ProQuest**. While I was there, I oversaw the launch of the new **JSTOR** delivery platform across three data centers and re-engineered the data center infrastructure for improved reliability, security, and performance. My roots are in academics. I've been on the business school faculty of the **University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign** and at the **Rochester Institute of Technology**. I also taught at the **University of Pittsburgh** as well as the Management of Technology Organizations program at **Carnegie Mellon University**. That experience in teaching, research, and collaboration has been absolutely invaluable in my current role.

What keeps me interested is the evolving nature of research and teaching, and the way we can support and enrich both through our content and interconnections. We're moving into a time when the "container" the content comes in — the book, the newspaper, the journal — is no longer the focus. It's all the ideas in and around the "container" and the connections between those ideas that are becoming surfaced that's the key. My job is more interesting every day because I'm looking at how we make those connections apparent to the user.

KS: And I'm **Kevin Sayar**, President and General Manager of **ebrary**. I'm also its Co-founder and spent many years nurturing it from idea stage to what I can proudly say is its leading position in the industry. Prior to **ebrary**, I worked with **Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati (WSGR)**, considered the U.S. leader in high technology start-up representation. While I was there I provided legal research and analysis on corporate securities litigation, intellectual property, and technology transactions. While I always had an interest in the information industry, my work at **WSGR** really developed it.

However, it was while I was attending law school at **California Western School of Law** that I honed my skills in start-ups. While I was in school I acted as an independent consultant to businesses in early-stage development. I specialized in strategic market penetration, business development, and copyright issues on the Internet.

It's an exciting time to be in the business. The information industry is inherently interesting because it's continually changing and evolving, with social media, mobile, new ways to share and acquire information. For us at **ebrary**, we're in the middle of a market that is still very fresh — the majority of books are still only available in print.

ATG: *Can you give us a little of the history of how ProQuest's acquisition of ebrary came about? What were the driving factors that persuaded both companies to pursue the deal?*

TB: Speaking from the **ProQuest** perspective, we wanted to add high-quality eBooks to the range of content we're offering users. But, to be blunt, we didn't want just any eBook company. We didn't look to see which companies were on the market, but which companies could add the most to the **ProQuest** family. We wanted a partner that could add not only content, but just as importantly, a partner that would bring imagination and innovation. Clearly, **ebrary** was and is leading on all these fronts — high-quality content, user-oriented delivery models, and consistently superior technology.

KS: **ebrary** wasn't looking to be acquired — when you're achieving 30% year-over-year increases in revenue and usage, finding a buyer isn't the number one item on your to-do list. But, as we got to know **ProQuest**, the fit became more and more apparent. There are a lot of synergies between the companies because we're serving similar markets, but also our approaches to the business are similar: deep respect for the role of libraries in the process of research, continually innovate and invest, keep users in the driver's seat, make life easy for customers.

ATG: *What type research/information future does this point to for your different customer bases?*

TB: We worked very quickly to integrate **ebrary** content into the **ProQuest** research environment. In fact, it ended up being surprisingly easy, and we were testing linking technology between the **ebrary** and **ProQuest** environments within five months of the acquisition. It feels eerily like it was just meant to be. **Kevin** mentioned similar approaches to innovation and investment — we saw a very important synergy in our technological architectures. Both research environments are built for interoperability so that as new opportunities come on the horizon we can quickly embrace them. Because of that, connecting **ebrary** and **ProQuest** was simple and seamless.

KS: That's very significant for customers: bringing **ebrary** and **ProQuest** content together will reduce the "rigidity of format,"

which is more of an obstacle than it should be to researchers. We believe patrons are less concerned about format and more concerned about finding the most relevant combination of authoritative information for their research as simply as possible. This is our goal with the consolidation: We will provide the best available combination of *information* to patrons in a single environment.

ATG: *Kevin, are you talking of the "rigidity of format" in terms of end product i.e., search results? Or will these advances in electronic publishing and delivery recast formats so they are indistinguishable at their inception? How far do you think the breakdown in format will go? Tim, what do you think?*

KS: Yes, users will find many ways to arrive at the content in terms of discovery, and putting information in silos — storing book content separately from, say, journal articles — adds no real value to the research experience. We add more value in the experience of reading and re-using the content. The fewer obstacles we put in front of them — like making them search formats separately, the more fluid the research experience becomes.

TB: I think it's both. I completely agree with **Kevin's** point, and at the same time see the exploding of content into its atomic parts as critical going forward. Doing so allows a number of things, including the enhancement of the parts, or recomposing the content for various devices and experiences. We ultimately need to make the content available when, where, and how the user wants it.

ATG: *In an early press release, former ProQuest CEO Marty Kahn said that the acquisition of ebrary would not only "enhance eBook discovery for ProQuest platform users," but will enable "imaginative technology mash-ups that will energize users and accelerate the knowledge industry." What type of imaginative technology mash-ups was he referring to?*

TB: There are a couple of levels of "mash-up" we will be enabling through the combination of **ProQuest** and **ebrary**. On one level, we continue to expand and bring together a significant corpus of primary and secondary sources. Here, we're making the transition from the focused discovery of "containers" of information — like books, monographs, and journal articles — to one that goes into the container and exposes the network of relationships inside and across those formats. An example of this is that we will show the intellectual genealogy of the ideas being articulated in our corpora through deep citational analysis. We'll also foster the research process by associating related data and artifacts to the final scholarly

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works. The bottom line is we'll surface more and more results for the users, always relevant, but previously hidden.

KS: On another level, we will be bringing together tools and workflows that support a new digital research environment. Capabilities of **ebrary** (like **DASH!** and **annotation**), **RefWorks**, **COS** and **ProQuest**, when brought together can enable mash-up opportunities driven by the user. This is truly exciting because it can change how the work of research is done in ways we never have envisioned. Using the term "Web 2.0" is passé these days, but the concept is not — putting the *users* in control is as fresh and essential as ever. Our role is to provide the tools that empower the users

ATG: *Tim, Can you clarify what you mean by "deep citational analysis"? Is it similar to what others refer to as semantic indexing? Kevin, what does DASH enable users to do?*

TB: Certainly! What I mean by "deep citational analysis" are the techniques that examine the citational relationships leading to the identification of things like literature streams, identification of incremental versus seminal works, the relationships of research streams, and the identification of "schools of thought." Scholars can often "connect the dots" on these patterns as they go through the literature, and these techniques can efficiently get them there.

KS: **DASH!** is available to librarians and is a tool that differentiates **ebrary** in the market. It allows libraries to easily upload, integrate, and share their own digital content. **DASH!** can be used to create highly interactive databases of special collections, government documents, reports, internal documentation, and literally any document in PDF or that can be turned into PDF. Once created, libraries can make these hand-crafted collections openly available or limit them to their institutions.

ATG: *That same early press release also noted that "ultimately, as part of the ProQuest family, ebrary will be positioned to drive new levels of eBook discovery and usage." How? When will this take place?*

KS: It's taking place right now — 70,000 **ebrary** eBooks from **Academic Complete** are now discoverable in the **ProQuest** environment. This pre-release capability is available to a set of libraries that have **ProQuest Central**, **ProQuest Research Library**, or **ProQuest 5000**. These are rich, cross-disciplinary products that **Academic Complete's** selection of eBooks — a critical mass of the most popular eBooks in academic libraries — can significantly enhance. The full product release will be available later this year, and it's really just the beginning.

TB: We know that libraries want to maximize the discovery and usage of their electronic resources by end users, so we are working to use the full range of **ProQuest's** products and services to drive awareness of a library's entire **ebrary** eBook collection. Over the last part of the year and into 2012, we plan to expand

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Timothy Babbitt

BORN AND LIVED: Born in Bloomer, WI and grew up in northern WI, as well as Buffalo, NY.

EARLY LIFE: Pursued degrees in theater, received undergraduate, masters in anthropology (focusing on central Mexican archeology), doctoral study from U of Pittsburgh in information systems.

PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES: B-School faculty for 13 years, consulted with Fortune 500 co's on IT strategy, including **Kodak**, **Bausch & Lomb**, and **Proctor & Gamble**.

FAMILY: Married, with 3 children: eldest son is 17, daughter is 14, youngest son is 11.

IN MY SPARE TIME: Home construction renovation, gardening, and skiing.

FAVORITE BOOKS: **Don Norman's** *The Design of Future Things*, **Michael Porter's** *Competitive Advantage*, and more recently *Design Driven Innovation* by **Verganti**.

PET PEEVES: Treating the symptoms not the problems; not presenting options to solve problems.

PHILOSOPHY: I try to challenge assumptions as I work to build new products and processes and also as I create strategy; focus of the innovations are dependent of the deep understanding of the activities that need to be supported. I am decidedly not incremental.

MOST MEMORABLE CAREER ACHIEVEMENT: Having dinner with **Carl Sagan**, but more recently the launch of the new **JSTOR** of 2008.

GOAL I HOPE TO ACHIEVE FIVE YEARS FROM NOW: To have guided the evolution of **ProQuest** products to a higher position in the competitive landscape.

HOW/WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS: We will have markedly moved away from a focus on fulfillment of information objects to a set of services that support the workflows at a deep level among our end users. It's not just the book or the journal article but how all the ideas work together. It's the information and ideas. This is what we see in the way that humans think about it, and as an industry we will be working towards that goal. 🌱

eBook discovery more broadly throughout the **ProQuest** environment and across the family of **ProQuest** products, from **Serials Solutions** **Summon** service and 360 products to **Bowker's Books In Print** and **Syndetic Solutions**. We also plan to create a number of new products in the coming year that will offer eBooks alongside other **ProQuest** content to create new solutions for academic researchers.

ATG: *Can you explain the "nuts and bolts" of how ebrary will integrate into ProQuest? Are we talking about some form of federated searching or real integration where searchers are searching one mega-database?*

TB: **ProQuest** acquired **ebrary** because of the strength of its products and its technology. We feel that our integration approach should take advantage of the best of **ebrary**

and the best of **ProQuest**. This means real integration and one unified search: one search leads users to **ebrary's** eBook content side-by-side with journals, newspapers, and other **ProQuest** documents. From there, users can view the book, take notes, or make highlights using **ebrary** tools or take advantage of **My Research** and the social networking tools from **ProQuest**.

KS: Over time, we'll bring together research tools and user accounts between the two environments. Your readers are probably already thinking about how neatly **ebrary's** popular **InfoTools** and **DASH!** capabilities will fit with **ProQuest** content sets. In fact, look for some upcoming announcements about the new products that will use **ProQuest** content together with **ebrary** research tools.

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ATG: How will the acquisition affect the existing corporate cultures of the two companies? How will personnel be affected? Will the staff of ebrary maintain a separate identity? Overall will staff be added? Let go?

KS: As we mentioned earlier, we found a lot of synergies between the companies and certainly a lot of shared values. There are some cultural differences, but we feel the cross-pollination of the two cultures will benefit everyone.

TB: ProQuest greatly values ebrary's entrepreneurial spirit and agile approach to its business — that's what has allowed the company to move quickly in an exceptionally dynamic market. We don't want to change that. In fact, we will look to apply some of these best practices more broadly across other parts of the ProQuest businesses. The ebrary brand also has a very positive association with customers and end users. It is important for us to continue to evolve and leverage this brand strength. While associations with ProQuest will deepen, ebrary staff will continue to focus on the ebrary goal to become the predominant supplier of eBooks to libraries.

KS: And, we'll continue to leverage and connect the companies in ways that take advantage of the best of what each has to offer.

ATG: Other than eBook content what strengths does ebrary bring to the table? What about strengths from the ProQuest side of the equation?

TB: The companies have a lot of strengths in common — talented employees, strong brands that are respected by customers, a commitment to technological innovation and investment, and that's certainly helped the companies mesh neatly. But, acquisition is about adding complementary strengths on both sides of the equation. ebrary brings strong technical expertise and knowledge of the eBook business. It offers some new and exciting business models for content such as patron-driven acquisition and its new short-term loan model. The company also has some great tools like InfoTools and DASH!

KS: ProQuest brings scale, a well-established customer base, an extraordinary breadth of content, and a large international sales force (that's now selling ebrary products, by the way). This is a particularly strong match between companies. And, I want to reiterate what Tim said, this is about bringing complementary strengths together; we're in this to leverage what we know from our particular experiences and use it in new places. We're driving to the inevitability of true value.

ATG: Serial Solutions is also part of ProQuest. How does their Summon Discovery system fit into all of this?

TB: ProQuest is committed to building a research environment that connects users with the right information — no matter where it resides — quickly and accurately. The Summon service is our most profound expression of that commitment. It's absolutely content-

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BORN AND LIVED: Born in Upland, CA (November 20, 1967). Lived in Southern CA until age 5 while my father completed his Masters at **Cal Poly**, Pomona. Moved to Tehran, Iran, in 1972 (Age 5). I am the oldest of three. I have a sister and a brother. As dual-national children my parents enrolled us in a private bi-lingual school where we learned to speak Farsi. We Lived in Tehran until 1979 (Age 12) and left the country after the Iranian revolution. We moved back to California and have resided in the bay area since.

EARLY LIFE: I was really into sports as a kid. I played soccer until I discovered Water Polo and that is where I became friends with **Christopher Warnock** — on our high school Water Polo team. I started my first business venture right after high school. It was a furniture import business that I operated while attending **Foothill Community College**. The business was very profitable, and I saved enough to cover my expenses for college. I transferred to **University of California, Berkeley**, where I earned a BA in English and a minor in Philosophy.

PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES: I Graduated in 1990 during a recession and tried a number of different Tech industry jobs. Pursuing an interest in law, I started with a temp job at a major technology law firm. After several years of working on high-profile litigation and corporate security transactions as a legal assistant, I confirmed my interests. I obtained a JD from **California Western School of Law** in San Diego in 1996. I returned to Silicon Valley and went to work for the high-tech law firm that I worked for prior to law school, **Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati**. I was able to gain experience in securities litigation, corporate securities, and technology transactions. In 1999, I connected with **Christopher Warnock**, and I was trying to help him form an entity to pursue a contract to digitize a special contract at **Stanford University**. After learning more about **Christopher's** vision and a few beers we decided to co-found **ebrary**.

FAMILY: 1999 was a big year. I met my wife **Alison** in law school and we have been married for 12 years. She started her own practice almost 10 years ago and practices Special law, primarily representing children with Autism. We are lucky to have two daughters, **Emmatisse**, 8 and **Daniella**, 6. They are both into soccer, swimming, and spending as much time on any beach as possible.

IN MY SPARE TIME: I'm still pretty active outdoors. I'm always trying to find time to surf and snowboard. Otherwise, I love traveling with **Alison** and the girls.

FAVORITE BOOKS: As a kid I liked the *Lord of the Rings*, **J.R.R. Tolkien**. In high school it was *Catch 22*, **Joseph Heller**. In college my favorite book was *Henderson, The Rain King*, **Saul Bellows**. More recently, I really liked *Cutting for Stone*, **Abraham Verghese**, and *Outliers*, **Malcolm Gladwell**.

PHILOSOPHY: People who care make things happen.

MOST MEMORABLE CAREER ACHIEVEMENT: Closing the round of financing from the publishers, **Random House**, **McGraw Hill** and **Pearson** for **ebrary** — when eBooks were still untested in the market. That was by far the hardest achievement.

GOAL I HOPE TO ACHIEVE FIVE YEARS FROM NOW: Fulfilling our vision of providing technology that is critical to global research. 🌱

neutral and is the digital doorway to virtually everything in the library. **Summon** continues to expand with all sorts of publishing partners, and now we're integrating **ebrary** content so that these 450,000 plus eBooks are discovered from the front door of the library and

integrated with all the other relevant content in the library's collection. Our first step was to index at the metadata level, and we're now indexing the full-text, just as **Summon** is doing with the **HathiTrust** collection. Can you

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imagine how that opens eBooks to use? The ability to search within books just as you would search a journal article, all within a sweep of the breadth of the library's collection, is a big leap forward in responding to user needs.

ATG: *On an even broader scale, how will all of this work with Serials Solutions' web-scale management solution, which is currently in development?*

KS: We've talked a bit about the extraordinary research environment that's being built by **ProQuest**, and that effort is being supported with services that enable libraries to manage their resources, particularly the growing dominance of e-content. **Serials Solutions'** comprehensive knowledgebase is the core of support across the entire continuum of library services — from improving access and use of collections to easing librarian workloads, and ultimately to reducing operating costs. The new web-scale management solution is aimed at redefining how libraries manage operations, eventually eliminating the need for the ILS as we know it today. It will be a single, unified management solution for libraries that frees staff from low-value tasks and enables them to do the real work of librarians. In the broadest sense, web-scale management supports the researcher because it supports the library workflow — the researcher's key partner.

ATG: *Are there any new developments that you feel at liberty to give ATG a scoop on?*

KS: Sure, we always have some interesting next-steps up our sleeves. We mentioned new products that will integrate **ProQuest** content with **ebRARY's** research tools. We're really excited to see what researchers can do when they're armed with journal and newspaper content powered by **InfoTools** and **DASH!**. And more, watch for a mobile app for **ebRARY**. Students will be able to work with eBooks right in the classroom from their smartphones. That's a powerful way to embed research right in the workflow. I guess from the students perspective it's also good cover when they want to update their **Facebook** status in class.

TB: The **ProQuest** research environment is going to bring users in further with capabilities that allow for content creation. We're already exploring this with some of our vertical social networks, such as **EEBO Interactions**. We have scholars submitting updates to the database that are vetted by an advisory board of other scholars. This process allows for continual improvements and expansion that are directed by the user.

ATG: *Thank you both for taking the time to talk to us. We appreciate your thoughtful responses to our questions.* 🐼

ATG: *If we're not mistaken you got your start in electronic publishing with Gale and then with Chadwyck-Healey. Can you tell us a little bit about that?*

SR-T: I began my publishing career at **Abt Books**, an offshoot of **Abt Associates**, one of the world's largest consulting companies. **Clark Abt**, the founder, believed that CD-ROM had the potential substantially to help the developing world because it would allow for easy dissemination of Western knowledge. I found that more inspiring than selling Hellman's Mayonnaise — which is what I'd been doing previously! We produced some pretty varied CD-ROMs that were ahead of their time (the **National Portrait Gallery**, a multimedia criminal justice database, and real estate data sets).

From there I was lucky enough to work at **SilverPlatter** (then the largest vendor of CD-ROM in the world), where I ran their Health Sciences division, on to **IAC** (now **Gale**), and thence to **Chadwyck-Healey** (now **ProQuest**). I've always published for libraries.

ATG: *What gave you the inspiration to start Alexander Street Press? What were your first products like?*

SR-T: I'd learned the value of controlled vocabularies at **SilverPlatter** and the value of full text at **Chadwyck-Healey**. I thought they could be put together far more effectively. I'd been reading **Tim Berners-Lee** about the semantic Web and **Ted Nelson** about the deficiencies of HTML and TCP/IP. It was the height of the dot-com era and everyone was trying to get rid of human intelligence. I thought we might go in the opposite direction and use librarian cataloging skills to build semantic tags.

I realized that letters and diaries were in essence personal snapshots in place and time — and that with semantic indexing they'd become much more useful.¹ And so I had the idea for a large collection of letters and diaries, indexed so that you could see what was written in a particular place at a particular time. *North American Women's Letters and Diaries* was our first product — it had important content, unavailable elsewhere in electronic form, with unique functionality and lots of input from librarians. We've tried to keep to that recipe ever since.

ATG: *Since starting the company, you have expanded and now offer a variety of media to the library community. Was that in the plan all along? Or has it been a process of adjusting and taking advantage of new opportunities? Have there been any surprises along the way that have caused you to adjust or change course?*

SR-T: There were big surprises. I didn't see **Google Books** coming — I thought libraries would do that themselves. I didn't think discovery services would get such traction. But in both

cases we've adjusted — by publishing much more rare, hard-to-find and in-copyright material and through alliances with the discovery service vendors. In almost all cases we've stayed true to our mission. Our goal has always been to provide the best we can within disciplines. Video performances were a natural extension of drama texts. Oral histories were a natural extension of letters and diaries. When we acquired **Classical.com** it became evident how we might do this at scale.

ATG: *Up to this point Alexander Street Press has focused on the humanities and social sciences but with your new product Nursing Education in Video you seem to be branching out into the sciences. Is this something we should continue to expect?*

SR-T: Absolutely. Expect titles in business, law, architecture, medicine, and many other areas. We like to enter new disciplines with a must-have landmark collection. There's been a lack of large, definitive, well-indexed video collections for libraries, so that provides us an entrée into many new disciplines.

ATG: *What elements go into your decision-making process when you decide to bring a new product to market?*

SR-T: Simply put, our mission is "to make silent voices heard." This is a way of saying that we look for content and voices that need to be amplified and made public. A good electronic publisher also looks for ways to add functional value by making these content and voices easier to discover, analyze, annotate, search, and understand.

We aim to stay within specific disciplines because that lets us understand and respond more effectively to what academics and librarians need. We think that librarians already have an abundance of choices, so we try not to duplicate resources that are already out there. This is what leads us to collections as disparate as *Underground and Independent Comics*, *Counseling and Psychotherapy Transcripts*, and *Nursing Education in Video*.

Librarians are essential in this work. They've suggested and helped us find rare material, whether it's unusual newsreels or previously unpublished drama.

ATG: *You are an advocate of semantic indexing over traditional forms of indexing. Can you explain the difference? Is semantic indexing used in Alexander Street Press databases? How does it benefit users?*

SR-T: Semantic indexing has a broad range of meanings. My preferred definition is to tag "the conceptual content of a body of text by establishing associations between those terms that occur in similar contexts."²

It's much more than a fancy way to describe subject indexing. It includes the addition of

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