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Publisher Profile: SkyRiver

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President, SkyRiver Technology Solutions

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

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

ATG: *Leslie, can you talk about SkyRiver for our readers who may have heard the name but are a little vague about what you all do?*

LS: **SkyRiver** is a full-service bibliographic utility for cataloging. By “full-service” we mean that, over and above a robust database of MARC records for downloading into a local library system, we provide associated services. To mention a few, the database has a powerful discovery layer which gets catalogers to the records they need quickly; there’s a service that matches vendor manifests against the database to provide corresponding MARC records; and there’s a unique record requesting service if the record you’re looking for happens not to be in the **SkyRiver** database. Another way to describe what we do is simply to say that we are in direct competition with **OCLC**’s online cataloging service, the fundamental differences being our open data use policy and significantly lower prices.

ATG: *Tell us about your background and what first got you excited about SkyRiver.*

LS: Since the **ATG** profile provides ample background, I’ll just recount how during the spring of 2009 (three years into my retirement from **Innovative Interfaces**) **Jerry Kline**,

Innovative founder and chairman, called me, told me that he wanted to create a bibliographic utility, described how it would fill an expressed need in the library community, and asked me to help him start it up. It was all very compelling despite some real ambivalence about coming out of a happy retirement. I think that what excited me most was the prospect of building a brand new company that could matter a lot to libraries — the mission. In addition, I’d be able to put all of my past experience to good use, even going back to my years as a cataloger in the ‘60s.

ATG: *Given your former association with Innovative Interfaces, some may think of SkyRiver as a spinoff or subsidiary. What is your current affiliation with Innovative Interfaces?*

LS: From the start, **SkyRiver** has been a separate company from **Innovative**, with a formal licensing agreement for some of **Innovative**’s technology and a maintenance agreement for that technology. Having said that, our presence in the same building (we rent the space) fosters informal relationships that help in many ways. From the other direction, **Innovative** is licensed as one of **SkyRiver**’s market-

ing and sales partners, as are **MCLS (Midwest Collaborative for Library Services)** and **LYRASIS**. As for me, I’m employed solely by **SkyRiver**. **SkyRiver**’s separateness continues under agreement with our new investors, which is further described below. We actually have the best of both worlds — independence, yet strong external support as needed.

ATG: *Along with Innovative Interfaces, SkyRiver just received a strategic investment from Huntsman Gay Global Capital. What will this mean for the company? Will it translate into new services for your customers? Does it give Huntsman Gay an ownership stake?*

LS: There are no structural or operational changes — if there’s any change it’s that we can say with even more certainty that **SkyRiver** is here for the long run. Our new investors see the potential for a lot of growth and have strongly expressed their willingness to invest in this growth. I think that will translate into continued aggressive product development as well as a much higher profile for **SkyRiver** in the marketplace. **Huntsman Gay** and **JMI** join **Jerry Kline** as co-owners.

ATG: *As the first president of the company, what was your role in the start-up phase? What were the biggest obstacles that you had to overcome? What did you find most rewarding?*

LS: My role involved soup to nuts, as with typical start-ups — from choosing a logo, Web domain, and Website design, to hiring staff, helping to train customers, writing press releases, and presenting **SkyRiver** at conferences. There were some early frustrations such as learning that the Web domain we wanted was not available and not for sale (though *theskyriver.com* has worked out well), the discovery that our newly-printed envelopes weren’t acceptable to the U.S. Post Office because of where we placed our return address, the fact that the bank would not issue a general corporate credit card to us because of our size — growing pains like that. The biggest reward has been participating in the birth of something that now is a going concern.

ATG: *According to your Website “SkyRiver holds as a guiding principle that bibliographic metadata exist within the public domain.” What does that mean exactly? And why is it important?*

LS: This is important in the context of **OCLC**’s historical stance regarding **WorldCat** records. While **OCLC** backed away from its highly restrictive 2008 draft data use policy, **OCLC**’s revised policy of 2010 still infers ownership of bibliographic records. **OCLC**’s highly publicized incursions into

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against the grain publisher profile

SkyRiver Technology Solutions



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AFFILIATED COMPANIES: Sales/marketing partners are **Innovative Interfaces**, **LYRASIS**, **Midwest Collaborative for Library Services (MCLS)**

OFFICERS: Chairman, **Jerry Kline**; President, **Leslie Straus**; VP Operations, **Georgia Fujikawa**.

ASSOCIATION MEMBERSHIPS, ETC.: Library of Congress Program for Cooperative Cataloging and **NACO** Exchange Partner.

VITAL INFORMATION: Key products and services: full-service bibliographic utility for cataloging, including vendor data integration (**SkyMatch**), record requesting (**SkySearch**), and record notification (**SkyWatch**)

CORE MARKETS/CLIENTELE: academic libraries, public libraries, library consortia

NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES: 5 FTE; 3 part-time staff

HISTORY AND BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF YOUR COMPANY: Established in late 2009 with a handful of development partner installations and a database of 20 million records; now about 70 installations serving several hundred libraries and a database of 40 million records. 🌱