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ATG Interviews Fred Gullette, Publisher, Book News, Inc.

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ATG: Well, Fritz, you've run *Book News* for a long time. How long, and why?

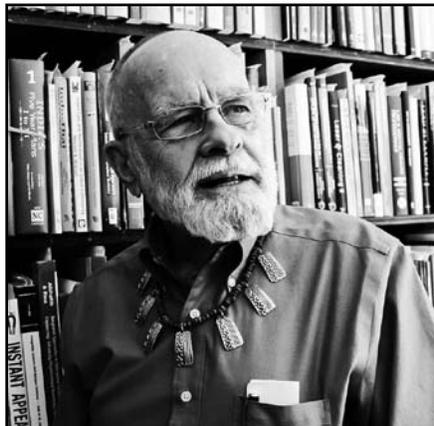
FG: *SciTech Book News* was started 36 years ago. *Academic Book Center*, only a couple years old, needed a boost, and I recalled **Lyman Newlin's** description of a **Kroch's** and **Brentano's** newsletter, *Book Chat*, in which he promoted new books in his department—technical books. I struggled with *SciTech Book News* for some years, while **Lyman ran Coutts'** U.S. office. When **Lyman** went independent we were among his first clients. He had great connections with sales and marketing executives at the major houses and opened a lot of doors for us. With the passing of years many of his friends had moved from sales/marketing to the corner offices—great connections that opened many doors.

ATG: What are the most substantial changes you have seen over these last 36 years? How have you adapted so well?

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to cover the six days (we are not open Saturday in the summer).

I am excited about the coming preservation of our eclectic print materials. We spent a great deal of time inventorying and cataloging old serials, so that this project could happen and grants could be written. I hate to see the soaring plane exhibit dismantled, but there are many new projects that will be possible because of it. As we get more in touch with our digital products and converting print to digital, other formats and diverse teaching methods will find their way into the library. We are beginning to share many products and the digital projects will avail us of connections with other schools who have complementary materials. We are about to realize a more complicated and important change for libraries than the Age of Computers. Let us think about that and smile! 🌱



FG: Changes—oh, woe. M&As, which I regard as “Mess-ups & Anguish,” have often corrupted scholarship while charming investors and afflicting those dealing with the resulting leviathans. Digitization has put many works out of our range—for now; it has been a pivotal benefit in giving us a massive increase in circulation. Book production has deteriorated with the adoption of cheaper manufacturing methods and materials [glued pages; ugly and ill-feeling plastic-over-boards instead of time-honored book cloth; offset printing instead of, admittedly infrequent, letterpress printing—in a word, business school ideals: profit, quick and abundant, over quality.

Adapting, thus far, hasn't been all that difficult largely because we're one of the very few media sources with an exclusive focus on scholarly and professional books. And *Book News*, unique among reviewing media, aims at a very high level of comprehensiveness. We're doing pretty much the same thing we were doing in 1980, and what we do continues to be useful even—or especially—in the new digital environment.

ATG: What strategies would you recommend to succeed in this constantly changing business? Any overarching attitude?

Unsurprisingly, the chief strategy I'd advance is meant for publishers—send all high-level new books for our treatment [**Irv Rockwood, CHOICE**, once observed that *Book News* provided a service that would reward publishers even without our reviews—the aggregation of some 20,000 scholarly titles each year is of extraordinary value to collection development librarians]. Attitude—now that's a poser, had never thought of it. I'd say it requires a certain knowledge of information needs in libraries [probably unique, is our display of thorough bibliographic detail]; a respect for real books [we're not into eBooks yet]; and, rare in reviews, we draw attention to the, also rare, aesthetic book—fine paper, good [Smythe-sewn] binding, book cloth instead

of the offensive slick plastic binding material, and respect for legibility [computer geeks will deliver a seven-inch long line of text instead of going double-column, and, too often, use cute, screwy (illegible) typefaces].

ATG: Do you not publish a few other titles?

FG: Spring 1986 saw the first issue of *Reference & Research Book News (R&R)*. I'd been selecting likely titles for *SciTech* from MARC proofslips. There I encountered a lot of interesting titles that could, under no pretense, be included among STM books; *R&R* was the answer. In the period 1989 through '92 we published *University Press Book News* and terminated it when too many presses declined to participate. We rolled those reviews into *R&R*. *Art Book News* pleased the art-loving editor but failed to ingratiate the treasurer.

ATG: Who does your reviews? Are they scholars with related subject expertise? Librarian/bibliographers? Do you require certain credentials before someone is permitted to review for *Book News*?

FG: Our writers all have a subject expertise, but they're all capable of writing about a wide range of related subjects. They're all required to write to purpose—that is, to deliver a clear and concise overview that carries information about the book's genesis, scope, authorship, and readership. The idea is to provide data that the book selectors need rather than critical analysis. We ask reviewers to refrain from criticism unless the level of research is obviously deficient, and we do mention defects in book preparation or production. To minimize error we allow publishers to fact-check reviews prepublication. Because our objective is to provide a concise overview of the contents of a book rather than a critical analysis, our writers are asked to refrain from expressing any personal bias unless the level of research is obviously deficient.

ATG: What brings review copies to you? Do you get much “dross”?

FG: The major (sagacious) houses send their scholarly titles upon publication. We continue to read MARC tapes to capture **LC's** bibliographic descriptions and to pick up the due dates from the **CiP** records. We solicit books from benighted publishers; from those houses publishing so broadly that a blanket order is unrealistic (we review neither those books you once succinctly denominated “works of the imagination” nor the mass of un-scholarly dross); from new publishers; and we query those books that seem overdue. Eager self-published authors do sometimes bother us with their (generally) regrettable offerings.

ATG: What do you mean by syndication exactly? In any case, it sounds like your business is moving online. Do you have any

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projections as to how this will impact your bottom line? Do you see a time when you will forgo print altogether?

FG: Syndication — selling ... to other media for regular inclusion in their periodicals. Yes, digital is where our growth has been for a decade. The **Book News** syndicate comprises 50 entities with more on the way. (Don't you think "syndicate" lends a compelling touch of dash and brigandage?) On the future of our paper edition — much as I personally hate screen-reading, the paper version of **Book News** is under assault. Ask in a year.

ATG: *What's your turnaround time?*

FG: Until the end of 2010 it ran from (rarely) four weeks from the book's receipt to sixteen weeks for the review that just missed a deadline. To shorten the maximum lag we've just rolled both review journals together under the *R&R* title and publish bimonthly, so, presently, four to twelve weeks.

ATG: *And the volume of reviews?*

FG: Eighteen to twenty thousand annually. The current year will comprise 18,500 reviews (at the present rate). My goal is to double the title count and put us in the league with ELAPs.

(Remember our initialism for English Language Approval Plan? Remember the wag that urged that we offer the Foreign University & College Unlimited Plan? Probably **AI May**.) We are already around three times the coverage of each of the main alternatives — *Booklist*, *CHOICE*, *Doody's*, *LJ*, *PW* (in **Book News** there are no overlaps). On 1 September '11 we've checked in our 379,000th review copy.

ATG: *These are all scholarly books?*

FG: None of the books we've covered would embarrass a university librarian; probably 10% would attract some use in a respectable secondary school library. Our migration to licensing (as against paper subscriptions) has encouraged/enabled review of more books for the serious lay reader. We know public library selection offices are now reading **Book News** content.

ATG: *You organize reviews by LC class?*

FG: Right; we sort by LC class to the decimal point and appreciate LC's MARC and CIP services to establish these classes. Many books reach us without pre-pub bibliographic data, requiring us to assign classes and author citations. (Remember the avalanche of catalogs from which you excavated books for the **Reed Co-op** back in the late '50s?). We are getting more review copies without cataloging as we pursue more English-language books from foreign countries — more work, but it

makes a notable contribution to the selectors' fodder.

ATG: *How are your subscriptions holding up?*

FG: Years ago we gave over hustling conventional subscriptions in favor of licensing reviews to entities needing online content. Large users are **Books in Print With Book Reviews Online**, **Majors** (medical), **Title Source (B&T)**, **EBSCO**. [I've sent **Amazon** packing "cause they wanted perpetual use upon licensing the database for a single year" — told 'em I didn't have to go all the way to Seattle if I wanted to be mugged.] We do have a few hundred subscriptions. Our recent issues are free at www.booknews.com. Syndication is our future: vastly wider dissemination than one could dream of with a literal journal; one needs not deal with the USPS; renewal and collection are limited and more likely; and the growth in numbers and geographical origins of reviewed books attracts libraries (always our idealized clientele) whence the interest of the aggregators.

ATG: *Any coda?*

FG: Only that annotating books and assembling bibliographies are almost as old as writing itself. It is a crucial service to scholarship. I expect the sort of work **Book News** has done for decades will remain valuable in whatever form information and wisdom may be transmitted. 🌿

ATG Interviews Sven Fund and Michiel Klein Swormink

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by **John Long** (John Long Associates) <JohnLong429@gmail.com>

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

To follow is a conversation (by phone and email) between John Long and Sven Fund and Michiel Klein Swormink of De Gruyter.

JL: *De Gruyter encompasses a remarkable span of history beginning in 1749 to our contemporary e-everything environment (De Gruyter's innovative one platform, 500 paid and open access journals, 800 new eBooks published each year, 40 large d-bases). Could you take a few moments to comment on that?*

SF: It's true, **De Gruyter** and its preceding publishers have an impressive legacy. Today, we strive to live up to this tradition and work

hard to transform our traditional strengths into the digital age. Even if the medium changes more and more from print to electronic, values like quality of content, the ability to discover and broaden trends in research, and the international span of a publishing program prevail.

JL: *I am fascinated by the scope of your publishing program and, of course, you are a truly international publisher: humanities & natural sciences, theology & philosophy, biology & chemistry, linguistics, literature, mathematics, physics, history, archaeology, law and medicine — it all began in the humanities!*

SF: Yes, still today, **De Gruyter** is a universal academic publishing house. We virtually publish in all fields — from Algebra to Zoology — and in three product types: journals, books, and reference works. The breadth of our portfolio is not without the risk of overexpansion, and we constantly and carefully evaluate our publishing programs. Today we focus ever more on what we feel makes most sense to support science and research: important monographs and series, authoritative and state-

of-the-art reference content, and high-quality journals. And we have just added open access as an important publishing model.

JL: *I understand you have exciting news for our ATG readers regarding De Gruyter and Harvard University Press; in addition, could you talk about your partner, TriLiteral, and its 155K sq. ft. distribution center?*

MKS: Yes, exciting news, indeed. Beginning this year, **De Gruyter** will distribute **Harvard University Press'** eBooks to the institutional market worldwide. Our programs largely cover the same subject areas and are complementary in terms of content. We believe that the combined offering of both our lists on one and the same platform through **De Gruyter's** library-friendly and proven business model for eBooks will be a very attractive proposition to the market. We like to call this partnership an "alliance" the sum of which is larger than its parts; for libraries, end-users, authors, and **De Gruyter** and **HUP**. At the same time, we are moving our physical distribution and the invoicing of all our

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