

June 2012

Profile-Tim Coates

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Recommended Citation

(2012) "Profile-Tim Coates," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 24: Iss. 3, Article 21.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.6280>

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their rental plan work? Will libraries be able to rent T & F books for lending to students?

TC: We have been publicizing the **T&F** deal because they are the first large publisher to permit rentals of this kind. Most of **T&F**'s books are academic and of the kind that one would use at university — so this is a way of helping students to have access to books that normally they would only find in a faculty library. We anticipate that other publishers will begin to make the same facilities possible, and the range of books available will become much less specialized and of more general appeal to library patrons. This is what **Jo Budler** and I mean when we talk about taking one step at a time to get to where we want to be.

ATG: Currently, you can only purchase items from Bilbary if you are U.S. based with a U.S. registered credit or debit card. When will readers outside the U.S. be able to buy from Bilbary?

TC: The site should open to people outside the U.S. in June. We will gradually introduce languages and currencies as we go along.

ATG: You have opened with approximately 340,000 publishers' distribution titles. What are these titles, and what are the publishers?

TC: The distinction between “distribution” titles and “agency” titles has been in the press recently. If a publisher wishes to sell its books through an “agency” agreement, the retailer (ourselves, **Amazon**, etc.) acts as the publisher's agent. The publisher sets the price, and the retailers must all sell at that price. The alternative to the “agency” method is a “distribution” agreement in which the retailer acquires the right to sell the book from the publisher — and can then determine the price at which it wants to sell.

Most publishers use the distribution method. However, about six of the very large publishers, with the most popular titles have, for the last year or so, preferred to use the “agency” method.

Curiously, for us, the biggest difference is about how sales taxes are handled in the different states of the U.S. If we act as a publishers' agent we have to collect the sales tax on their behalf — which means understanding their own tax obligations, which can vary from state to state and even within states. It is complicated, and in order to do it properly we need precise systems. That is why we put up the “distribution” titles first and then followed with the more popular agency titles — it is about gathering taxes. Our tax-collecting system is being tested now, which means that the agency titles will come on the site in the next few weeks.

ATG: From what you are saying it appears that most publishers prefer using the distribution method and that the six major publishers are outliers preferring the agency model. Correct? Was this a problem before the advent of eBooks?

against the grain people profile

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Tim Coates

BORN AND LIVED: United Kingdom.

EARLY LIFE: Degrees from **Oxford University** and Masters from **Stirling University**.

PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES: International Bookselling and publishing for more than 30 years. I was CEO of **WH Smith** in Europe and CEO of **Waterstone's** book stores. I operated my own large independent book store in London and was General Manager of **YBP** in the UK. I have spent time writing and editing; author of several books and editor of a series of history titles. I have been very active in the design of public libraries and in campaigns for their improvement.

FAMILY: Married to **Bridget Cave**, we have two sons, **Sam** and **Oily**. **Sam** is deputy political editor of *The Times* in London; **Oily** has recently been named Royal Philharmonic International Young Artist of 2012 — he is a cellist.

IN MY SPARE TIME: I read and listen to music.

FAVORITE BOOKS: Thousands — but just this week *Dear Miss Landau* by **James Christie**.

PET PEEVES: Government officials.

PHILOSOPHY: “It probably doesn't matter.”

MOST MEMORABLE CAREER ACHIEVEMENT: My first book accepted for publication by **Bloomsbury**. And several professional programs and developments in bookselling.

GOAL I HOPE TO ACHIEVE FIVE YEARS FROM NOW: **Bilbary** to be a success.

HOW/WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS: The heart of the publishing industry is about writing (and reading). I don't think that will ever change. I hope there will be wonderful new writers, and I am sure there will be. Of course the industry is tumultuous — but it always has been — not because anything is wrong with it, but because writing is open to anyone to do; it costs nothing. Giant corporations scramble over each other to make their fortunes out of something that cost nothing in the first place. All the technology that surrounds us is wonderful, but it is not the essence of what we do. Even more puzzling is that the best writing isn't about anything — it can be about nothing. That is the magic of our medium — and that won't change in five years or fifty. 🌱



TC: As far as I know the agency model for book selling was only invented about 18 months ago when there was discussion about the price of eBooks and who should set it and at what level. This is the case that is being examined at present by the **Department of Justice** and has been widely written about in the press.

ATG: It appears that most of your titles are focused on the “popular market.” Do you have plans to expand into the academic/scholarly market? What about eBooks?

TC: We hope to be very active in the educational and scholarly book market and shall be launching student programs in the fall — we

think that is the area in which book rental will become a major feature. We will specialize in the kinds of books one would expect to find in a college or university library. Textbooks are a different subject — there are other people who specialize in school and university textbooks, and that won't be a priority at present.

ATG: According to a recent article in Publishers Weekly, “self-published titles will be limited” in Bilbary. If so, what are Bilbary's criteria for accepting self-published works?

TC: There was some confusion about this. What I meant was that we will accept any books — and I was referring to self-published

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