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## Mark Sandler Profile

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I have repeated, too many times, “that libraries need to become the cosmetic counters of the campus.” By that, I mean they should be big, bright, welcoming spaces where people go to overcome their insecurities; where they believe that staff know more about selecting and applying make-up than they do; and those cosmetologists are willing to give their personal attention to overcome whatever shortcomings they are trying to address or cover up. You can sit home and order the make-up online, or pick it up at a corner Walgreens, but the cosmetic counter stays relevant because it offers expertise and personal attention. Well, on campuses, everyone, at every level, is fighting the belief that they may not be smart enough to achieve their academic goals — i.e., to get into medical school, to get tenure, to get published, to get a grant, to finish a dissertation. Going forward, the big opportunity for libraries is not to be handing people books or articles, or pointing them in the direction of a bank of computers. The big opportunity — the competitive advantage, if you will — is using proximity and expert staff to help users overcome their fears and inadequacies. That’s a real value proposition libraries need to be exploiting.

**ATG:** You also noted that libraries would need to undergo some significant transformations to make such “high-touch services” possible. What transformations do you see as essential? How well are libraries positioned to make these transformations? What barriers need to be overcome?

**MS:** If, as I said above, the goal is to develop a dedicated or loyal clientele, libraries need to hire people who are appealing to users; they need to provide these appealing staff members training and oversight and feedback; they need to reward successes and address failures. In our campus libraries, we have many smart people with the desire and attributes to build mentoring relationships. For the most part, however, they don’t have measurable or achievable goals; there aren’t management structures in place to direct their work; nor are there budgets or infrastructure in libraries to facilitate what businesses call “customer acquisition.” So, for all their good intentions — and lip service about liaisons, outreach, and embedded librarians — I believe our libraries will continue to flounder until they jump the shark and shift their focus and budgets from acquiring heaps of inventory to the work of becoming high-touch service providers.

**ATG:** What place do you see for consortia like the Committee on Institutional Cooperation in such efforts? Is there a role for consortia in enabling such transformations within member libraries? How about in the implementation of these changes?

**MS:** Well, consortia are not in a position to deliver high-end services to users of public or academic libraries, so we can’t be much

## against the grain people profile

### Mark Sandler

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**BORN & LIVED:** Born and grew up in NYC (Queens). Attended **City College of New York**.

**EARLY LIFE:** Was a long time ago.

**EDUCATION:** Ph.D. in Sociology from **Michigan State University**; MLS from **University of Michigan**.

**FAMILY:** My wife **Claire** runs a very successful instructional support unit at the **University of Michigan** (the Science Learning Center) which provides peer led study groups and tutoring to over 3,500 students per semester.

**PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES:** Worked for twenty years in a variety of collections related positions at the **University of Michigan**, the last being Chief Collection Development Officer. Some good things happened at **Michigan** during my time there — **JSTOR** was founded there; we created a lot of SGML (and eventually XML) encoded texts, and the systems to read them; the Making of America Project was an early mass digitization initiative; we spent two years in secret conversations with **Google** before the **Google Print** partnership was finally announced in 2004; the Text Creation Partnership was initiated by — and hosted at — **Michigan**; the Scholarly Publishing Office came to fruition and reported through Collections. Lots of good people and digital library energy during my years at Michigan.

**IN MY SPARE TIME I LIKE:** To write profiles about myself.

**FAVORITE BOOKS:** *American Pastoral* (**Roth**); *Ragtime* (**Doctorow**); *Something Happened* (**Heller**); *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (**Thompson**); *A Fine Balance* (**Mistry**); *White Noise* (**DeLillo**); *The Signal and the Noise* (**Silver**).

**PET PEEVES/WHAT MAKES ME MAD:** Boring presenters; eBook ILL; Kansas.

**PHILOSOPHY:** I was an undergraduate philosophy major — this should be easy. Um... um... The peloton always catches a lone rider (except when it doesn't). 🌲

help there. What we can do, however, is clear away some of the other work that engages so much of the time, staff, and money at our libraries. There are a lot of activities carried out in our individual libraries that should be done at scale — regionally, nationally, or internationally. I would argue that 80, 90, 95 percent of selection, licensing, preservation, cataloging, storage, systems (e.g., ERMs, catalogs, enhanced discovery layers, acquisitions), ILL, etc. could be managed off-site. I can’t say for sure that all of these things could be done better in one or several central places than they are being done in a thousand individual libraries. It’s inescapable, however, that all of the redundant, back-office work being carried out by our libraries undermines their ability to focus on relationship building with users, and the costs of this redundancy will eventually erode the confidence our funders — taxpayers, city managers, provosts, students — have that they are receiving a good return on their investments. A faculty member once said at a meeting about digital humanities, “consortia are good at doing the stupid things.” I think he was right — let us relieve libraries of the mundane tasks so they can double-down on enriching the lives of the people they serve.

**ATG:** What impact will this focus on “managing relationships” have on the future of collection development? Where will collections fit into the future of library services?

**MS:** I’ve been a collections librarian for my whole career, but I see now that the landscape has changed. Collections aren’t an end unto themselves — these investments only make sense in the context of serving user needs. Connecting a reader with the right resources is invaluable (at least to that reader). Hoarding ten million volumes for the sake of climbing up some ranking scheme is not going to cut it in a world where the emphasis on analytics is less about inputs and much more about outcomes — i.e., what difference did it make? Somehow, the symbiotic relationship between libraries and vendors is going to have to extend the loop to account for library users, and the difference we’re making in their lives.

**ATG:** In a recent Webinar you also noted that in order to compete in a climate where scholars have multiple options in finding information, libraries should seek out strategic partnerships with publishers who are invested in demonstrating the value of their products. What form should such partnerships take? Are there any specific examples where this has resulted in successful outcomes for both library and publisher?

**MS:** This is a space where publishers and libraries share common ground. Publishers want to show that the content they produce is valuable to users, and libraries want the same for the content they purchase. Now

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