Publisher Profile--Committee on Institutional Cooperation (CIC)

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we’re in a space where libraries buy stuff and then direct blame at the publishers if use falls below expectations. It’s actually a two-way street; the content has to have inherent value, and it has to be positioned in ways that users can find it. So, libraries need to do their part to actually promote what they buy, and publishes can and would help with that. A journal publisher can see a lot about who is using their content, and how they are accessing it. When analyzed in the context of hundreds of other libraries, they can start to see patterns related to the more or less effective ways that libraries position content.

As to who is actually doing this, I know that Springer has a group dedicated to this kind of analysis, and Gale has — or at least used to have — a “post-sales” group that could help with issues like content promotion. I’m sure other publishers also have programs, or provide ad hoc assistance, if asked, but I think the point I’d make is that librarians seldom ask (note: some interesting exceptions might include John McDonald at USC, Michael Levine-Clark at the University of Denver, Jason Price from SCEL, and Doug Way from Wisconsin). Most libraries and librarians seem to resist the notion that publishers have a role in leading users to content: “that’s what librarians do.” The fact that we might be doing it poorly, or, if you prefer, “not optimally,” seems easier for them to accept than the thought of bringing vendors in to advise on building user relations, or organizing content in ways that optimizes its visibility.

**ATG: What other strategies can libraries employ to gain a competitive edge in attracting and retaining users?**

**MS:** That’s easy. They can hire and retain staff members who are irresistible to library constituents. They can marshal persuasive data that they have and will deliver tangible benefits to users. They can create relationships with potential users — social media, luncheons, events — that build trust, before trying to preach the library’s message. And, like with any other successful business, they can deliver the services that people want, at the time and place of need.

I know — this sounds like a lot to ask. But libraries have a lot of strategic advantages that could help to secure their future:

- Most people are positively disposed to libraries.
- Their goods and services are largely free.
- They have substantial infrastructure — space, inventory, personnel — to share.
- They are part and parcel of the communities they serve.

That’s a pretty good basis for entering a competition. As they say in the sports world, “it’s their game to lose.”

**ATG:** Mark, you seem to be incredibly busy with your work at the CIC. How do you maintain such a high energy level? Are there some specific fun activities that you enjoy that help re-energize you? Do you have any hobbies that help you relax?

**MS:** Well, truth be known, I work from home so am more sedentary than the majority of the working world. One of my few daily goals is to make sure that I shower before my wife gets home from work. I do run regularly, and I really enjoy the 6:30 a.m. fun run at the Charleston Conference (thanks Mitchell Davis, et al. for organizing that). As for sources of energy, I’d venture that consortia leaders interact with more colleagues than most librarians working in a single library, or even vendors with a targeted customer base. There are 1,800 librarians in the CIC libraries, and while that might sound like a nightmare, it’s actually very energizing to have all these touch-points with all of those smart people — librarians and vendors alike.

**ATG:** It’s been great talking to you. We’ve really enjoyed getting your perspective on these key issues.

**MS:** I don’t read a lot of print media anymore — I just promiscuously flit from blog post to blog post — but I do read and appreciate Against the Grain. I think you guys do a great job, I think Katina has built something amazing and impactful in Charleston, and, as a shout-out to one of our CIC members, I really appreciate the efforts of the Purdue University Press to promote and archive the proceedings and publications coming out of Charleston. I’m glad for the opportunity to give credit where it’s due. Thanks for reaching out to me.