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Publisher Profile--Information Today, Inc.

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Information Today, Inc.

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EXECUTIVE TEAM: Tom Hogan, Sr. (CEO), Dick Kaser (VP, Content), Bill Spence (VP, IT), Bob Fernekees (VP, Sales), Tom Hogan, Jr. (VP, Marketing and Product Development), John Yersak (VP, Administration), Roger Bilboul (Chairman).

KEY PRODUCTS: Magazines, Websites, directories, books, and conferences in various information technology sectors, including library technology, knowledge management, customer relationship management, content management, database management, and streaming media.

CORE MARKETS: Libraries, customer relationship management (CRM) executives, knowledge management (KM) practitioners, database administrators, online video developers.

NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES: 100 spread across 7 offices in the U.S. and 1 in Oxford, U.K. 🌱

DTH: *What about the European branch?*

TH: That is **Information Today, Ltd.**, which is a very small office of three or four people in Oxford, U.K. who have followed on the coattails of what we have done here. Among other things, they manage our **Internet Librarian International Conference** in London every year.

DTH: *What about Internet Librarian, the conference typically held in Monterey, California?*

TH: As I mentioned earlier, we had **CIL** which had become very successful. The first year after we acquired it, the attendance almost doubled, mostly because **Mecklermedia** was not paying much attention to the library world any more. So I said, “We must capitalize on this; let’s do something on the west coast.” My daughter **Kathy**, our meeting planner, and I went to the west coast to look for a venue. We were looking at Santa Clara, San Jose, and San Francisco, when she said, “Why don’t we pop down to Monterey and see what they have to offer?” I was reluctant because I thought that it would be too hard to get to, but we went anyway. We fell in love with the city. We went into one of the hotels there, asked what they had to offer, and before we knew it, we were signing a contract.

DTH: *I have always said about that conference that if I was doing some indexing and putting keywords on it, you could not have had better ones: “Internet,” “Librarian,” “Monterey,” and “October!” You can’t lose with that combination.*

TH: The reason it became **Internet Librarian**, incidentally, was that there was a column in *CIL* magazine called “Internet Librarian.” We brainstormed it, and my partner Roger suggested that might be a good name for the conference. We were originally going to call it “Computers in Libraries West,” but since the Internet was all the rage at that time, we decided to go with “Internet Librarian.”

DTH: *It has certainly been very successful, and personally it is one of my favorites. Monterey is a very nice place.*

Let’s talk about the marketplace as a whole. Many companies have discontinued printed magazines and journals. You have not. Why?

TH: That is a good question, and we constantly face that issue. Our feeling is that the printed magazine serves as a reminder to people that we exist. People still like having the print in their hands. We have Websites that correspond to each of the magazines, and we capitalize on those Websites by selling advertising on them, as we do with the printed magazines. But we are still pretty convinced that the printed magazine business is important. We have no plans to discontinue any of our print publications.

DTH: *Another thing that many people think is that with electronic publications, there are many costs that do not exist with print, such as printing and distribution, so*

therefore electronic publications should be a lot cheaper. What do you think?

TH: There is a certain truth to that, but the problem is that in any intellectual endeavor like publishing a magazine, you have people costs. So you do not get rid of the expense of producing the content just because it is available in electronic form. As you say, you do save on the printing and distribution costs, but they are relatively trivial compared to the cost of acquiring and producing the content itself.

DTH: *And many people do not realize that.*

TH: Of course not! For example, in the book world, they think that an eBook should cost \$3 versus \$30 if it is in print. But out of the \$30 you might spend on a print book, probably only about \$5 is the cost of printing it. That is something that people definitely do not understand, and **Amazon** has gone a long way to convince people that books should be really cheap, and I think to a certain degree, they have done a disservice to the publishing world.

DTH: *Turning to libraries, what do you think their role is in today’s digital world?*

TH: First, I hope that libraries never go away. I think that of all the human institutions we have created, with the possible exception of hospitals, libraries rank way up there at the top. The idea that we don’t fund libraries sufficiently is to some degree a national disgrace. I do understand why some people think that libraries don’t have a role any more, but I think that is wrong. There are lots of things that libraries can do, and the main thing is that librarians themselves are important in helping people find things. People love that search box on Google, Bing, or Yahoo, but they do not necessarily realize what they are missing or where the real information is.

DTH: *I thoroughly agree. Some people think that libraries are a dying market, but I don’t think so.*

TH: It has certainly been a challenging market, which is evident in our corporate strate-

gy and why we needed to diversify. Most other publishers that focused on the library market, like **Online, Inc.**, **Mecklermedia**, and a few others, have either gone out of business or have morphed into something else. We are somewhat like a “last man standing” in publishing about information technology for the library world, outside of the associations themselves, such as **ALA** and **SLA**.

DTH: *What strategies do you think that libraries should follow in today’s market? Certainly the area of looking up facts can be done well by Google, so many people say, “I can find everything I need on Google.” If all you are doing is looking up facts, such as dates when somebody was born or died, that’s true. But what do you think libraries can do? I hear people getting up at CIL conferences, for example, and bemoaning the fact that everybody wants to just find information on Google.*

TH: Yes, Google is fine if all you want to know is the name of an actor in *Gone With The Wind*, but it is not necessarily the case when you have a much more sophisticated problem to research. In our world, directories have been challenged for the same reason. People think they can just get information online, but the fact that we have aggregated all that information in one place and vetted it is the contribution that directories make. And by extension, that is much of what libraries do.

DTH: *What do you see for the future of information delivery?*

TH: The term “disintermediation” is one that I fear describes much of the future for information delivery across many media types. Will book authors find ways to reach their audiences without benefit of publishers? Will scientists communicate directly with their peers rather than through scientific journals? Will researchers do their own investigations without the use of skilled information professionals?

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