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ATG Interviews Franny Lee, Founder of SIPX, and Kurt Sanford, CEO of ProQuest

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This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.
er. Aside from general information about titles, such as price and licensing, we find the most vital information is gathered into reports that one need only make a few clicks in order to acquire. EBSCO offers any number of easily accessible reports, so why not a report of new offers from publishers? One might imagine a process whereby the subscription agent would gather offers from publishers into one secure location and notify (or not, according to specified settings) the contact librarian about said offers. As is usually the case in databases like EBSCOnet, one can sort the offers by a number of variables such as price point, subject area, type of purchase, and publisher. Imagine how much more streamlined it would be, during times of unforeseen and increasingly rare end-of-fiscal-year budget surplus, to look through a report of this type, rather than go through emails and try to remember which vendor was offering that discount on a package of eBooks about some obscure topic two months ago.

The Future

How do we realize this new world of quiet telephones and manageable inboxes? In short, one must be willing to say no. Librarians have to be willing to tell publishers that communications, offers, and purchases must be routed through an agent or consortium. One must also be willing to allow their publisher communications to be controlled by a third party and the publishers would actually have to agree to this. Unfortunately, there would be a need for subscription agents and consortia to take on more work in order to field all of these communications, but they would also benefit from this arrangement in the form of additional sales. There would be far fewer direct purchases from publishers and vendors. There would also be more time for libraries, publishers, and vendors to invest in different ventures, perhaps even more collaborative development. Less time should be spent in the obligatory activities of the past and more time building libraries, resources, and infrastructure that will serve the needs of the future.

Bibliography


Endnotes

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ATG Interviews Franny Lee, Founder of SIPX and Kurt Sanford, CEO of ProQuest

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ATG: Some of our readers may not be that familiar with SIPX. Can you elaborate on what services SIPX provides? How do these services benefit libraries and their patrons? Do they compete with existing library services like online course reserves, open textbook programs, etc.? How do they differ from similar providers like the Copyright Clearance Center?

FL: SIPX is a perfect fit with Against the Grain readers because it empowers schools to leverage their own library content for digital course materials, works with open content initiatives, and simplifies the rights process for other content they want to use. It’s an easy-to-use cloud-based solution that can be connected into campus Learning Management Systems, library course reserves platforms and bookstore coursepack workflows. It’s even a natural fit for distance education, continuing studies programs and global Massive Open Online Courses.

SIPX is a nimble, innovative solution — we’ve always worked closely with libraries to shape its development and we remain deeply in tune with library perspectives today. Michael Keller, Stanford UL, was a board member since inception, and our early adopters and reviewers played a significant role in evolving SIPX’s mission and design — demo users coming back to us from the early days would see their feedback realized in a system that schools are delighted with today.

Educators, librarians and support staff use SIPX to set up course readings lists and then students use it to get the readings they need for class. What’s really great about the SIPX solution is that it always automatically checks to see if those works are available at no cost to students via library subscriptions or open sources. If they are, the faculty saves their students money and the library is the hero! When the selected readings are outside the school’s holdings, SIPX offers the instructor alternate open and royalty-free options that match the same search criteria. If that non-subscribed first choice is really what the instructor needs to share with their students, then SIPX simplifies all the complicated licensing, purchasing and invoicing processes. There’s an easy, seamless online transaction for the student, that the library can configure to be invoiced for if that’s the way things work on their campus, with no paperwork or permission payments for the library or bookstore to deal with.

SIPX is different from other providers in that we come at course materials from the perspectives of the instructor, the library and the student. We partner with many types of complementary third parties to combine products and services to create all-new solutions, including the Copyright Clearance Center. CCC is an important partner of SIPX and shares its robust copyright clearance and pricing information via a direct API to its database. However, SIPX also incorporates customers’ institutional holdings (including where a school has purchased CCC’s Annual Copyright License), open resources and other publisher sources to build an actionable reading list for students and satisfy the full user continued on page 27
need — we ensure users have a comprehensive content experience that operates in real-time, recognizing and applying users' access rights to save them money.

**ATG:** You both mention that SIPX is a nimble, innovative solution. A number of companies refer to themselves in those terms. What do you mean by nimble and innovative exactly? Can you cite a couple of examples that prove your point?

**FL:** Simply put we’re fast at responding and adapting to our users’ needs and our solution is the product of real user behaviors. SIPX lives by a hybrid agile development methodology, which means we develop our features on aggressive sprint cycles, release often, and iterate and adapt based on actual user behaviors to continuously improve our product. The proof of our success with this approach can be seen in many of the exciting product releases we’ve made just in the recent few weeks — enhancements to our linking technology to make re-running similar courses even easier, more options for seamless authentication across campus, and our integration with hundreds of millions of documents in ProQuest databases to make setting up a SIPX reading link even easier for everyone.

**ATG:** Franny also notes that at the beginning early adopters and reviewers played a significant role in evolving SIPX’s mission and design. What hurdles did they help you overcome? Are there specific examples that come to mind? What were the biggest challenges you faced when SIPX first entered the market? How were they overcome?

**FL:** The SIPX technology is very flexible and gives us the opportunity to let the market guide us on what they need most from us. Early on, we invited schools to be completely frank and fearless about sharing their needs, and we used that feedback to evolve SIPX into a tool that could be most useful and valuable to the market. We asked them about their biggest campus pain points — unaffordable textbook costs? Broken links? We focused SIPX on addressing those problems first.

Some issues were (and still are) big ecosystem questions that involve lots of different stakeholders — like determining the right privacy standards to put in place. For example, SIPX data can be used by schools and libraries to determine what content is actually being used in support of teaching and learning. That’s important information for making smart purchasing decisions — especially in a highly budget-conscious environment. Feedback from our early adopters helped us develop a system that ensures robust user protections while still enabling visibility into data that helps libraries adjust their collections to better serve classroom needs.

**KS:** SIPX is truly innovative and exceptionally timely when we look at the issues facing higher education. It saves money for students and schools, it eliminates redundant spending and it reduces administrative burdens. We’re impressed by all those things, but where SIPX most deeply aligns with ProQuest is that it connects the library into the day to day of students and faculty and exposes the value of the collections librarians are carefully investing in.

**ATG:** ProQuest recently acquired SIPX through its affiliate Bowker. That sounds a tad complicated. What is the relationship between these three companies? Where does SIPX fit in the mix? What about Bowker? How will SIPX impact the existing Bowker product lines? Is there potential for support and integration with products like Ulrich’s and BIP?

**KS:** The organization of SIPX within ProQuest’s affiliated RR Bowker unit is intended to start SIPX off with the ideal balance of independence and integration. SIPX will keep its development and service nimble and responsive like Bowker’s independent ISBN agency, while taking advantage of ProQuest’s scale in the library like Bowker’s Syndetics. We handle the back and forth behind the scenes with intercompany agreements, so that customers can fully enjoy the benefits of SIPX being part of ProQuest and SIPX can keep its fast-paced start-up speed.

As for where SIPX fits in the mix, there are many touch points between ProQuest and SIPX that improve the workflows of libraries, faculty, students, publishers and partners like bookstores. Just as you’ve suggested, support from Ulrich’s and Books In Print can enrich the metadata in SIPX. We also see opportunities to provide insight to libraries on content use in the classroom. The first connection is in the name, which is now ProQuest SIPX to firmly establish the service’s strong foundation with one of the market’s most enduring brands.

**ATG:** What touch points are you referring to exactly? How will ProQuest and SIPX complement each other to improve workflows for libraries, faculty, and students, not to mention provide insights on content use in the classroom? What specific plans are in place to make this happen? Are there examples of how these touch points are working?

**FL:** We’ve launched some wonderful integrations already. In August, ProQuest content was linked to SIPX. Now, when an instructor chooses a reading that’s available through the library’s ProQuest subscriptions instead of scanning and uploading the article or chapter they can simply use our pristine PDF. That’s a big quality improvement for the student and a big time-saver for faculty and administrative staff. And importantly it reinforces to all of them the value of the library in the classroom workflow.

You’re also about to see a SIPX reading list module as an add-on option for the Summon discovery service. Users will be able to search in Summon, save items and then build and organize their students’ reading lists directly in SIPX. You asked me earlier about why we describe ourselves as innovative and I think these integrations are great examples. This is a reading list solution that addresses everything the campus needs: all the content instructors want to assign — library AND open resources. It addresses cost issues that are so important, it folds into existing workflows, and it’s completely flexible to allow the library to bring benefits and grow their value and relevance across the LMS, the reserves system, in the bookstore, with MOOCs, and so forth.

**ATG:** What changes do you anticipate now that SIPX has been acquired by ProQuest? What benefits does SIPX accrue from the deal? Under the current arrangement how much independence does SIPX have? How will the current SIPX management team be affected? What will the overall organizational structure look like under the new deal?

**FL:** It’s been a very smooth transition and it’s really an exciting time at SIPX. We see the connection with ProQuest as accelerating our ability to connect more library holdings to course materials workflows on campus and beyond, and to reach many more schools with our good news story. The full SIPX operating team has moved over to ProQuest SIPX so our vision and mission to improve education and save students money remains consistent. Concurrently, we are also exploring what next steps ProQuest and SIPX can take together from a product and content partnership perspective. Organizationally, I am VP & General Manager and run the SIPX business as an independent unit. Because content and copyright are such essential parts of the SIPX story, we are strategically positioned with ProQuest’s SVP of Global Content Alliances & General Counsel, Kevin Norris.

**ATG:** We’ve read that ProQuest plans use its resources to increase the availability and richness of SIPX’s services. How so? On the other hand, what is in it for ProQuest? Why acquire SIPX? Why now?

**KS:** Our job at ProQuest is to create an environment that allows SIPX to grow. We take on their back-office work — let Franny and her team focus on developing the service while ProQuest adds value with accounting and HR and all the other things that a larger company can do for them at scale. There’s also the immeasurable benefit of joining a larger, very creative environment. They can brainstorm with our other experts and avail themselves of R&D and other very specialized support for integrating with schools’ diverse systems and new content formats. SIPX brings ProQuest a unique technology and proven success in navigating at the forefront of some very exciting market changes with big challenges.

**ATG:** How does the ProQuest acquisition enhance SIPX focus on “making access to course materials as affordable, simple and transparent as possible”? What benefits will libraries see due to the acquisition? How about students and faculty? Are there any possible negatives? How will it impact your pricing structure?

**FL:** Our acquisition by ProQuest enables SIPX to grow and be adopted by more schools. That’s good news for libraries. Let me explain. When SIPX is implemented at a school, the library’s collection immediately becomes more visible and useful across the campus, showcasing the value of the library to the institution. Libraries also gain new insights that can continued on page 28
inform collection development decisions and point to ways they can contribute to teaching and learning activities that don’t traditionally happen in the library. SIPX supplies opportunities for libraries to get involved and stay relevant to their campus. That’s especially critical in a time where the nature of teaching and learning in higher education is undergoing rapid and fundamental changes.

It’s good news also for faculty, students and schools who can expect to see substantial savings in cost and time. Students save money because the cost of course packs drops dramatically when SIPX is implemented—an average of 20% to 35%. Faculty and administrators save time through new automated processes for gaining compliant access to the quality content needed for successful learning outcomes. If they pay permissions on behalf of students through services like library reserves, the library saves over 50% on their permissions budgets!

There really aren’t any negatives, though at the beginning of SIPX’s life as a commercial service in 2013, we got strong feedback from schools to really think hard about the level of privacy we needed to provide to students and schools. We took that to heart, and as a result, we developed strict policies and are committed to ensuring personal protection while providing institutional transparency. Overall, we see SIPX helping libraries to evolve campus and content workflows in ways that address critical points of friction in higher ed.

**ATG:** As you note, privacy is an essential concern for libraries. What is unique about SIPX’s approach to protecting user privacy? Can you be specific as to how SIPX offers greater protection for instructor-identifiable data than traditional coursepack providers?

**FL:** We listen to our community to build a system that combines both robust institutional reporting and complete respect for our customers and their students’ privacy. SIPX does not disclose any personally identifiable information—we have always been FERPA compliant. In fact, SIPX provides greater protection for instructor-identifiable data than traditional coursepack channels, as SIPX does not provide instructor details such as name and contact information. The information disclosed to publishers is industry standard: to report the amount of their content that has been sold and the amount of usage of the subscription products they’ve licensed to the library.

**ATG:** According to a recent article by Nancy Herther posted on the ATG NewsChannel, one early potential customer expressed concern about some of SIPX’s practices. They claimed that student data was being loaded but never removed from the SIPX system; SIPX was loading library content on to their servers and storing it permanently; and data on usage was not “the library’s” but belonged to SIPX. Can you clarify if this was a misunderstanding? How is student data currently treated in SIPX?

**FL:** Yes, there are significant misunderstandings and I appreciate the opportunity to clarify.

First, SIPX doesn’t load student data into the system. Users create their own accounts just as they would in most Web services. Student data is only disclosed in anonymized, aggregated form to give meaning to the usage analytics.

Second, SIPX doesn’t load library content onto our servers. Sometimes SIPX doesn’t have a PDF of a reading article from a publisher partner, so an instructor might upload their own copy into the system to contribute to students. However, we’re not trying to collect these copies. Our preference is actually to harness this insight to reach out to the publishers of those copies to set up a technical connection, so that it saves our instructor users from having to take extra steps. It also gives students a more legible copy of the reading than the typical photocopy of a photocopy that the instructor has uploaded.

Finally, all our customers have free rein over their usage analytics. We devote significant resources to making sure they have intuitive, real-time tools to get data anytime, anywhere they need it as well as helping them compile statistics and reports if they want more formal outputs. We work very closely with our customers to figure out what kind of data is useful to them, so that we can build even better tools.

**ATG:** One of the rationales for SIPX agreeing to the ProQuest acquisition was that it better positioned SIPX to continue working with valued partners and customers. How? In what ways?

**KS:** The breadth of partnerships ProQuest has with content providers is extraordinary—from Summon to our aggregated journal content—the benefits of introducing SIPX to these partners is valuable to growing the service. And that’s the tip of the iceberg. ProQuest’s partnerships encompass very diverse content types, which matches trends in the types of content faculty are choosing to assign to their students.

**FL:** I’m so excited to be able to blend SIPX’s Silicon Valley DNA with the increased legibility copy of the reading than the typical takes extra steps. It also gives students a more responsive, and exceed expectations.

**ATG:** What about open educational resources (OERs)? Do they play a role in the course materials SIPX provides? If so, what is it? If not, will they play a role in the future?

**FL:** You can’t read a newsfeed these days that doesn’t mention the rising costs of education, so supporting schools’ and students’ needs and pressures to lower the cost of education is a core mission of SIPX. The system already makes academically relevant open and public resources available within SIPX display results. Being part of ProQuest now gives us access to make more efficient and robust connections into more open resources, such as with open access publishers, OER or institutional repositories, or public resources like HathiTrust that are already indexed by ProQuest’s services.

**ATG:** What marketing strategies will ProQuest employ in promoting SIPX? Will educational institutions still be your primary target? And how do you convince institutions
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with robust licensing arrangements with key publishers that they need SIPX?

FL: ‘We’re still focused on higher education and enhancing schools’ efficiency and effectiveness for the benefit of students. Even libraries with robust licensing arrangements like Stanford benefit greatly from SIPX because it exposes these rich collections more widely to faculty and students. This generates a greater return on investment. For schools without many library resources, SIPX offers easy transactional access to quality and open content, so that students can still connect to what they need for an effective educational experience.

ATG: Since we live in a global market, can you tell us what plans you have for international expansion? Will these plans be impacted by the extension of U.S. copyright protocols through TPP (Trans Pacific Partnership)?

FL: SIPX already services global MOOCs where we might interact with students from dozens of different countries per course, and with ProQuest’s impressive global reach, international expansion of SIPX as an institutional service is coming soon! We recognize that different countries have unique workflows and needs, and we’re fine-tuning to make sure SIPX can be configured to be useful and valuable wherever it’s used. We expect no direct impact between SIPX and TPP, however, I do think that technologies and solutions like SIPX can be a way to demonstrate to policymakers the changing needs and behaviors of users and provide guidance on current and/or healthy market practices.

ATG: How do you see the ProQuest-SIPX relationship evolving? What are your goals for the next year? How do you see the market for your services changing? What will SIPX services look like in two years?

KS: Looking at the upcoming year, our immediate focus is on giving SIPX the rooms and resources to grow. SIPX will stay nimble and be powered by the same entrepreneurial drive, but be much more robust with the resources of ProQuest to rely upon. That said, we’ll see the touch-points I mentioned between SIPX and ProQuest start to spark change both within ProQuest and in higher education generally, to bring benefits and new opportunities to our customers, partners and everyone. We want to keep ProQuest and SIPX adapting and always open to finding new ways to provide value, which is especially important in the dynamic market we’re in. We will constantly change to meet the customer needs and user behaviors.

ATG: Franny and Kurt, thank you both for taking time from your hectic schedules to let our readers know how things are evolving between SIPX and ProQuest. We really appreciate it!

Rumors

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Training the new Acquisitions Technician. As many of us know, there are fewer and fewer people with library acquisitions experience.

Speaking of which, Stacey has a feature article in this issue about Improving Customer Service, p.20. In fact this entire issue of ATG is about communication between librarians and scholarly content providers.

From James Joyce to Critical Insights about comic books (p.66) we librarians are trying to keep up with the present at the same time we respect collect, and digitize the past. A tall order to be sure.

Did anyone besides a few of us hear Bill Hannay’s session in Charleston 2015? He was speaking about the recent U.S. Court of Appeals case between Google and the Authors Guild. Google Books: It Ain’t Over ’til the Librarians Sings is the topic Bill spoke about during a concurrent session that was attended by librarians, many of whom bemoaned the fact that the digitization of books by Google had ceased. Bill wants to hear from librarians about Google Books, because in the end, the essential question to be answered is whether the Google Books project has been worth all the effort to create it (and to fight about it). Speak up! Be Heard! Email Bill Hannay about this! <whannay@schiffhardin.com>

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