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ATG Interviews Ann Okerson, CRL, and Alex Holzman, Alex Publishing Solutions

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ATG Interviews Ann Okerson and Alex Holzman

Senior Advisor, Electronic Strategies, Center for Research Libraries / President, Alex Publishing Solutions

by Tom Gilson (Associate Editor, *Against the Grain*) <gilson@cofc.edu>

and Katina Strauch (Editor, *Against the Grain*) <kstrauch@comcast.net>

ATG: Your study “*The Once and Future Publishing Library*” has garnered a lot of acclaim from a variety of sources. How did you all get involved with the project? What was your primary motivation for studying the topic of library publishing?

AO: Steve Goodall, a keen Charleston Conference supporter and representative of the Goodall Family Foundation, entered into a discussion with Katina about interesting studies that could be done for the benefit of the library and publishing communities. They then informally broadened the discussion; library publishing became of quick interest; and the rest is history! Or as some would say, “timing is everything!”

ATG: What differing models are libraries following as they embark on the business of producing scholarly content? Is there a common thread among them?

AO & AH: The primary model is open access, using mainly funds from the overall library budget. There are variations on this, even including end-user pays subscription models, but the open access model is most often funded by the library budget, though sometimes by the home institution out of a separate pocket or by outside foundations.

ATG: How many libraries are publishing original monographs and journals? Do most of the libraries you surveyed have the experience, talent and ability to take on high-quality professional publishing? How do they exercise the necessary level of quality control and peer review?

AO: If you mean libraries *per se*, then only small minority of the libraries listed in the *Library Publishing Coalition Directory*. However, now nearly 30 university presses report to university libraries, to a greater or lesser degree of integration, and certainly those are very robust publishers.

ATG: You say in your study that libraries are becoming the new “go-to” places when innovation in publishing or dissemination is sought. How so?

AO: For over 20 years, since ARL began its scholarly communications program (1991), academic libraries and librarians have become increasingly interested in how publishing works, how it affects the library, its faculty authors, and its readers. (We became interested, of course, in journal pricing long before that!) Librarians started to try to understand in particular how not-for-profit (society and university press) publishing



works, what are its challenges and futures. The publishing and library communities have had, during this time, a number of conversations and formal meetings on these topics. Libraries have invested in this learning, have done a lot of campus outreach formally and informally, and a number have created scholarly communications programs and staff. In the past decade, institutional repositories have taken root, mostly in library settings. Thus, the libraries have often become very visible and available on campus, in a way that presses probably are not supported to do in their professional missions.

AH: I think, too, that libraries, which enjoy larger discretionary budgets than most presses, have had the freedom to undertake some experiments, say in open source textbook publishing, that most university presses have not had the capital to undertake (or especially to risk in a project that fails). It is also a simple truth that every campus has a library, but many campuses do not have a press to go to even if they so desired!

ATG: Libraries and university presses have had an interesting relationship over the years. How would you characterize the current relationship between them?

AO & AH: It’s probably better than it’s been for a long time, in no small part because the number of libraries and presses with direct reporting lines has been increasing. The nature of the reporting differs, but the “forced” partnership has led to more and more dialogue, both within individual universities and at various conferences. Some granting institutions, especially the **Andrew W. Mellon Foundation**, have been encouraging various projects and meetings involving both communities, the **Library Publishing Coalition** also encourages more dialogue, and various annual conferences, including the **Charleston Conference**, provide additional opportunities to explore our respective worldviews. Presses and libraries have always respected each other while disagreeing on various fronts. But the dialogue today is much better than it was a decade ago.

ATG: Some have argued that scholarly publishing is a logical and critical function for the 21st century library. Does your research bear this out?

AO: Yes, there’s a certain degree of unambiguous faith in that assertion being made by a number of library publishing advocates. Think, for example, of leaders such as **Paul Courant** (and see our bibliography for some of his excellent and influential work in exactly this area); there are many more who reason similarly. We know that library publishing can be logical and even critical, but that success depends on whether a given academic environment is open to such a development, whether its library leaders choose to take that path, and, if so, how carefully and strategically their organizations will pursue publishing. Some libraries, as we know, have charged in and become successful; others have taken aboard their campus press; others pursue the more modest repository path. And for some time to come, the library publishing space will be diverse in its ambitions and execution.

ATG: To what extent have library publishers been successful in reaching the goal of liberating academic publishing and making scholarly research more universally available? Have they had an appreciable influence on pricing?

AO: Risking the wrath of many readers, I’ll say that libraries have only *somewhat* made some scholarly research more univer-

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sally available, probably mostly through the institutional repository path. The influence on pricing has been minimal to zero, but the exploration into new ways of publishing and testing of new business models has been highly useful. Getting more librarians conversant with how publishing works and introducing new ideas into the field has also been a contribution. In addition, increasing library-university press collaboration has helped both partners think a bit harder about what constitutes success.

ATG: *Where do these libraries get funding for their publication efforts? What are their main sources of financial support? How would you rate the support of faculty, college administrations and other campus stakeholders for the role of library as publisher?*

AO & AH: Unless things have changed mightily since our survey, the leading form of support is the library budget itself. It's not entirely clear what this means in terms of sustainability, but time will tell. As we noted earlier, support also sometimes comes from the home institution (outside the library budget), grants, and other parties involved in a particular publication. Rarely, but occasionally, there are end-user payments.

ATG: *According to your findings only about 11% of the libraries you surveyed spend money on marketing. How do they get the word out about their publications?*

against the grain people profile

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Ann Okerson

BORN AND LIVED: Ukrainian ancestry; born Hallein, Austria; lived in Europe, Canada, and throughout the U.S.

EARLY LIFE: We emigrated to U.S. when I was in grade school.

PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES: Initially serials librarianship (**Simon Fraser University**, Canada); then worked for **ARL** (Washington, DC); **Yale**; and now **CRL**. Also an Associate for **INASP** (UK).

IN MY SPARE TIME: Adore and pursue fine dark chocolate and cupcakes.

FAVORITE BOOKS: For light reading, mysteries by **Donna Leon** and **Andrea Camilleri**.

PET PEEVES: Listening to people speaking loudly into their cell phones in public places. I do not wish to become part of their conversations or lives!

PHILOSOPHY: So much to accomplish, not enough time!

MOST MEMORABLE CAREER ACHIEVEMENT: At **ARL** in 1991, hosting the first ever invitational meeting to bring together editors of the new online scholarly and scientific journals when there weren't many of them in the world: we knew this would become big. As I like to say, "And all 9 of them came!"

GOAL I HOPE TO ACHIEVE FIVE YEARS FROM NOW: To be working on issues that haven't quite emerged today.

HOW/WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS: I hope we will have moved on from needing to talk endlessly about open access — there will be enough business models in place to ever increase openness. We will be focused on active, measurable support for research and student learning. We will be operating more successfully on collaborations "at scale," for example, by engaging in cooperative collection development (led by players such as **Hathi**); by creating viable print storage and service capabilities at a whole new level; by partnering (across sectors) to develop legal constructs for sharing, services that will obviate **SciHub** and other questionable information sources. 🍌

against the grain publisher profile

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OFFICERS: Alex Holzman

ASSOCIATION MEMBERSHIPS: American Political Science Association, American Society of Criminology. Fellow, Social Science Research Council. Coeditor, *Journal of Scholarly Publishing*. Consulting editor, Lynne Rienner Publishers. Board of Trustees, Transaction Books. Frequently attend various library and scholarly publishing meetings.

VITAL INFORMATION: Consultant, author, freelancer.

KEY PRODUCTS AND SERVICES: Provide consulting services in all aspects of scholarly communication on short- and long-term basis. Includes research, reports, outside evaluations, and recommendations. Able to facilitate, moderate, and present at conferences involving scholarly communication. Particular expertise in publisher-library-faculty relations, electronic publishing, new business models.

CORE MARKETS/CLIENTELE: Scholarly publishing community. 🍌

AO: This seems to be the greatest weakness of libraries where they act as stand-alone publishers. We don't know much about marketing channels, we're not budgeted for marketing, and many don't even think marketing matters — for in an age when you make your documents discoverable, won't people just find what they need? One hears this a lot. And coming from librarians, who know just how important and tricky library discovery is, it's a kind of incomprehensible position!

ATG: *Are library publishers having a discernible impact on spreading the open access movement? If so, in what ways?*

AO & AH: It's very hard to say. There's probably some impact, given how prevalent the commitment to open access runs, but libraries generally have not been pulling journals (or books) from publishers with subscriber or end-user pays models. They've been more focused on smaller, often new journals, frequently with a tie to the local institution. It's not clear how many of those — especially new ventures — would

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have gone to publishers charging end-users. On the other hand, our definition of library publishing included institutional repositories and perhaps in the long run these will help increase open access.

ATG: *As you mention in your study, some library publishing initiatives have “faded away without marked success.” What lessons can libraries aspiring to developing a publishing program learn from them?*

AO & AH: Several. When the failure involves money, there’s often a discovery that the costs involved in quality publishing, while not necessarily large, are real and persistent. Sometimes the depletion of initial funding without sufficient planning for subsequent cost recovery has led to hard lessons learned for the next project. Other than the financial, there can be lessons learned about the difficulty in maintaining editorial excellence when engaged in projects that usually involve parties outside the library. There have been lessons about what authors need from a project if they’re to be successful in their pursuit of career advancement. One very big lesson that has clearly been learned is the need for community, a sharing of what works and what doesn’t among a larger group than just one library. The **Library Publishing Coalition**, dedicated as it is to specifically library publishing, is evidence of that.

ATG: *What was the most surprising thing that you discovered in the course of your research?*

AO: I was surprised that libraries were players in publishing starting many years ago, and that (according to the *LPC Directory*) so many institutional repositories run with what appear to be very limited resources — i.e., how inexpensively this can be done.

AH: I was quite surprised to learn that a significant number of the people who responded to our survey expressed a preference that a project shut down rather than impose even a modest end user fee. The breadth of library publishing across subjects and formats was surprising and impressive.

ATG: *Where do you see library publishing in five years? Ten years?*

AO & AH: Our remit didn’t cover future-telling! As we learned from a review of the professionalization of university presses (and how much elapsed time that took), it will take time for library publishing to find its spot in the eco-system, though with the rise of the *LPC*, there is early on a fostering organization. I don’t think we will have a definitive answer in five to ten years. This is a very diverse space in which, for some time, we will find many flowers blooming — that would be a good outcome. If the energy around this area fades or is absorbed by other players in publishing, that would be less fortunate. In any event, there will likely be a range of outcomes.

ATG: *On a more personal note, what do you all do to relax and get ready to write the next award winning study?*

AO: I track down some great dark chocolate or cupcakes (Charleston is one of the places where you can do exactly this) and curl up with the latest *Inspector Montalbano* (**Andrea Camilleri**) or *Inspector Brunetti* (**Donna Leon**) mysteries! Next best thing to being in Italy!

AH: I’m with **Ann** on the chocolate and cupcakes! And on meetings like Charleston and others. Anybody who knows me knows I use baseball as relaxation therapy and a place for engaging in conversation with friends and colleagues. But my greatest source of relaxation and inspiration is watching my great nieces working and playing so passionately as they discover their world. 🌳

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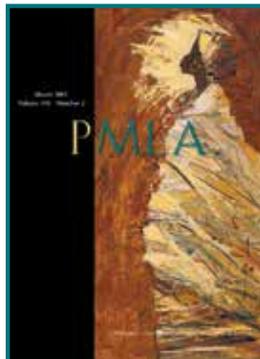
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