

2013

ATG Interviews Kurt Sanford, CEO, ProQuest

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Recommended Citation

Strauch, Katina and Gilson, Tom (2013) "ATG Interviews Kurt Sanford, CEO, ProQuest," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 25: Iss. 6, Article 19.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.7414>

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Chief Executive Officer, ProQuest

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

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

ATG: *When you accepted the CEO position at ProQuest in 2011, your predecessor Marty Kahn said that you had “the ideal background to take ProQuest to the next level.” What do you think he was referring to by “ideal background?” And what is the “next level?” Is ProQuest at the next level?*

KS: I think Marty was being very kind in his characterization. He was likely referring to my background running other information media businesses and my experience with large-scale technology functions. The “next level” is building the leading, global provider for the customers and markets we serve. We are making good progress on that front, and I’m confident we will get there in the future. We have our Board of Directors behind us, we have access to capital for investments and acquisitions, and we are now fully implementing our new Enterprise Strategy. Plus, we’ve added some talented folks to our team over the past 18 months, and along with the team we already had in place we are now well positioned to execute our plans.

ATG: *Kurt you just mentioned a new Enterprise Strategy. We get the sense that a big part of that means being a global provider of services, but what else is involved? Can you elaborate and explain the other components of this strategy?*

KS: ProQuest has a tremendous portfolio of assets — content, technology, expertise across all of our businesses — that is unmatched in the industry. Our Enterprise Strategy is focused on integrating and leveraging those assets to improve service to our customers and to power better research outcomes for users. We’re focusing on key areas, and I’ll give you a few examples.

We’re simplifying communication for our customers — a single account manager and a single customer service rep across the breadth of the enterprise. So, no matter what the question is — whether it’s on Syndetic Solutions, History Vault, or Academic Complete — customers know they can turn to one person to get it addressed. We’re, of course, surrounding those single contact points with access to experts, but the bottom line for our customers is that they don’t have to spend time wondering who to go to for an answer.

We’re working aggressively toward greater interoperability between products and services. The goal is to create a seamless research experience for users and greater efficiency for libraries. That means working within ProQuest, as we’ve done, for example, by automating holdings data for ebrary and EBL titles in the Summon service. It also means working with other vendors, as we did by automating that same eBook holdings data in OCLC’s WorldCat.



We’re also focusing on discovery and library management initiatives that can help drive the transformation of libraries. The Summon service launched the modern discovery movement in libraries and continues to blaze that trail, with advances that are designed to help users find and use the breadth of the library’s collection. The first module of Intota — Intota Assessment — has launched, and we’re excited about how it will enable libraries to make data-driven decisions about their collections. That’s a service that’s especially important when budgets are under such pressure.

These are just a few examples of our Enterprise Strategy in action. ProQuest is in a time of transformation that will impact customers in large and small ways, always with the underlying goal of improving the service and the research experience in the library.

ATG: *Prior to joining ProQuest you spent fourteen years at LexisNexis, serving most recently as President, Global Operations, for its global legal business. Can you tell us more about your experience at LexisNexis? And how it equipped you for your current challenges?*

KS: I spent nine years as a General Manager or CEO of various business units in the U.S. and Asia Pacific as well as forming and leading the LexisNexis Global Operations organization for an additional three-and-a-half years. The latter role included managing thousands of technologists, editors, customer support and back office staff and overseeing large-scale technology and organizational transformations. As well, when I was running business units I had the opportunity to work on many acquisitions, including integrating businesses.

ATG: *You have said that the opportunity “to build something” was a motivating factor in accepting the challenge at ProQuest. What did you mean by that? What do you hope to*

build? What have you built already? What is your training and background in this regard?

KS: I was referring to building the leading, global business in our markets. ProQuest has many premier solutions, brands, and assets around the world. I was being frank earlier when I said no one has its breadth of services. Before I arrived we tended to manage these separately, and we were missing, in my judgment, an opportunity to bring these together in a highly effective way for our customers so that all of their research-related needs could be met in a more seamless and valuable way. As I mentioned above, we are now in the execution phase of our new Enterprise Strategy, and our customers have already begun to see the benefits in the examples I mentioned, and I’ll add another: our new academic research platform is fully implemented, with satisfaction among users and librarians continually improving.

My prior roles helped prepare me for the nature of the changes we have been making at ProQuest.

ATG: *ProQuest is a key player in the library market, but that market continues to evolve and change. From your perspective, what are the most formidable changes facing the market? What strategies will ProQuest employ to adjust? In short, what does the future hold? What are your short-term goals? Long-term?*

KS: Well, let’s start with continual and rapid technology evolution as a given and that being flexible, adaptive and quick is — and will be — standard operating procedure. Beyond that, the continuing shift from print to “e” presents an important challenge for libraries. Just five years ago, 50% of the average academic library materials budget was spent on print resources. By next year, it will be less than 30% and by 2020, we’re predicting it will be about 5%-10% of the budget. But despite that dramatic change, library workflows and systems are still predominantly designed for a print world. We see real opportunity to improve efficiency and service to patrons by reinventing the library management system. ProQuest is developing Intota in partnership with libraries to do exactly that. Intota Assessment, a books and serials analysis system and the first module of the system, is available in beta, and we have an aggressive schedule for subsequent modules to create a single, centrally-provisioned solution that supports the entire resource lifecycle — from selection and acquisition to cataloging, discovery, and fulfillment, no matter the format... electronic, print, video.

We see Intota as a key tool for off-loading clerical tasks from librarians so they can focus on larger issues, and that’s key for navigating

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the dramatic disruptions to higher education. MOOCs, distance learning, pressure on affordability... these are trends that will impact purchasing and consumption across the university and certainly within the library. Librarians need to be freed of the mundane so they can monitor the big picture and respond to opportunities.

Another challenge we see specifically in Higher Education is the explosive growth of scholarly content being generated in places like Brazil, the Middle East, India and of course, China. China now produces more dissertations each year than any other country. That's a huge shift in scholarly output. We see opportunity in several ways — we're adding sales and marketing teams where we see universities growing, but we're also tuning up acquisition of important content coming from these areas. Researchers are working globally, so not only are we building access to content, but we're also providing tools like **RefWorks Flow**, which enables collaboration no matter where the collaborators are located.

One more important market change is the growth of the Open Access movement, which is quickly gaining more high-quality, peer-reviewed content. A good example is the **University of California's** decision to make all its research open access. We have explicit plans to integrate open access content in our solutions. While the world is actively embracing the growing open access movement, open access content is scattered, and providing a central discovery point that brings it together with proprietary content is essential for research efficiency.

On the flip side, **ProQuest** is also helping to support the development of open access institutional repositories (IR). When we ingest dissertations through our Digital Archiving and Access Program, with the author's permission, we share digital copies with the university. So, it's available in our dissertations database for broad discovery but is also openly accessible within the university's IR.

ATG: *Are you planning new products to tap into the explosive growth and shift of research content to places like China and Brazil? Will you focus on dissertations? How will e-journals and eBooks figure into the equation? A similar question applies to open access content. Will OA content start appearing in existing ProQuest databases or might we see ProQuest develop databases that offer access to OA titles exclusively?*

KS: Dissertations are, of course, an important source of emerging research. As areas such as China, Brazil, and India increase their graduate output it becomes more essential to capture it for global access. The way **ProQuest** is making that content easy to search and discover is by teaming with university consortia. For example, last year, we teamed with the **China Academic Library and Information System (CALIS)** to abstract and index dissertations from 80 Chinese universities and make them

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Kurt Sanford

EARLY LIFE: I was born in Texas but my family traveled non-stop as my father, a career military officer, was transferred from post to post. I have lived in a dozen states as well as in Germany and Singapore.

PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES: My career started in the U.S. Military where I served five years on active duty in the U.S. Army as a Captain and member of the Judge Advocate General's Corps. I then spent five years in operations and legal roles in a diversified financial services company, followed by two years at **Bain & Company**, a global strategy consulting firm. Prior to joining **ProQuest**, I held various positions during my 14-year tenure at **LexisNexis** including President, Global Operations for the global legal business, President and CEO of U.S. Corporate and Public Markets, CEO of **LexisNexis Asia Pacific**, as well as other business unit and strategic and business development roles.

FAMILY: I have been married to my wife **Lisa** (an architect) for 19 years, and we have a 16-year-old daughter and 14-year-old son.

IN MY SPARE TIME: I enjoy attending my children's sporting events, reading, and travel. My most recent vacation with my family was to Turks & Caicos, which I highly recommend to anyone who has not had a chance to visit this island.

FAVORITE BOOKS: Too many to mention.

PET PEEVES: Whiners who have no ideas on how to address their complaints.

PHILOSOPHY: Be decisive and take calculated risks. It's more fun and always easier to seek forgiveness than permission.

MOST MEMORABLE CAREER ACHIEVEMENT: Hope it hasn't happened yet!

HOW/WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS: I expect to see technology continuing to drive change, and in some cases disrupt, the way in which Higher Education institutions teach, do research, and run their operations. Our strategy is to react to this change by continuing to be innovative, flexible, and adaptive. In this industry, you do this or get left behind. Scholarly research is also growing in new markets, and we will respond to the expansion of education and support collaboration in these markets. 🌳

accessible through *ProQuest Dissertations & Theses*. But that's not the only content front we're working on. We just launched *ProQuest Indian Journals*, which aggregates about 200 premier scholarly journals published in India. It's a resource that scholars in India specifically asked for. We're also digitizing Chinese newspaper archives, opening a path to tremendous historical resources. Our goal is to meet the needs of researchers and librarians, no matter the type of content. With **ProQuest's** expertise in aggregation, eBooks, A&I, dissertations, and digitization, we're uniquely suited to create scholarly research resources that allow access to all kinds of information.

As for open access, we're already including some in our databases and expect to accelerate our offerings. At this time, I don't anticipate sources with only OA content. The value for researcher would be integrating it with proprietary data for a truly comprehensive search.

ATG: *And of course there is always competition for market share. Who do you see as your main competitors? What does ProQuest offer libraries that the others don't?*

KS: There are many providers serving our customers, and I'll leave it to you to decide who the main competitors are. Our key measurement for how we're doing comes from our

customers. We're working hard to provide a better overall experience for them and for their users. That means improving the interoperability of our various solutions that users and librarians employ while doing their research or managing the institution's holdings, whether that is in discovery and management solutions, aggregated databases, eBooks, workflow tools, or identifying funding sources. **ProQuest** has the broadest breadth of offerings, and we aim to provide the most comprehensive and valuable end-to-end solutions to our customers.

ATG: *Is the feedback that you get from customers anecdotal or do you have formal structures like user groups and forums that let you know how you are doing? If so, what are these formal structures?*

KS: We very much value the face-to-face sessions we have with our customers, but we also have a variety of formal structures in place to get feedback — user groups, discussion groups, forums, et cetera. Our products and services are developed in conjunction with library partners. For example, Intota has six development partners that span all types of libraries. They play an essential role in helping us get our products honed before they're released broadly. Another good example is

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the development of our new eBooks platform that will integrate EBL and ebrary. These are beloved platforms and we want to ensure that we preserve the functions, tools, and reports that our customers value. So, our customers are the touchpoint and we actively solicit their input as part of our product and platform development processes.

We also have formal programs for exploring end-users' needs. The Summon service was an outgrowth of behavioral research ProQuest conducted on students' research habits, their perceptions of the library, and the barriers they experienced. We explore scholars' needs, as well. We're particularly interested in the types of content they find valuable and where there are information gaps.

We've also found Foresee, an analytics service that surveys the user experience in our Websites, to be very valuable. We can hear directly from students and other researchers as they're completing a session in our products. It's tremendously helpful for tuning our products to make them easier to use and more productive for researchers.

ATG: *Expanding markets is a key to growth. Do you see any opportunities to go outside the library market? Perhaps selling directly to interested businesses or to the end user?*

KS: Yes, and what we've found is that reaching new markets doesn't necessarily mean going outside the *librarian* market. For example, we've recently launched **ProQuest Dialog**, which reinvents the iconic Dialog service. That service is aimed at researchers principally in Corporate and Government markets — a user group that comprises a spectrum that ranges from novice searchers to corporate librarians. The challenge in reviving Dialog was to address the needs of novice users without dumbing-down a service that many information professionals rely on for intensive, precision search. We accomplished that with an innovative interface that accommodates three search modes — from simple Google-like to command-line searching. We're seeing high user satisfaction — very high satisfaction, actually — with **ProQuest Dialog**, and we will put more focus on growing this corporate business once we have completed the migration to the new platform.

ATG: *ProQuest describes itself as an "energetic, fast-growing organization." Can you talk about the corporate vision that governs that energy and growth? How does it fit into the overall vision of the Cambridge Information Group your corporate parent?*

KS: We are a company that has been formed by many acquisitions over the past 10-plus years, and each of these was a pioneer or innovative leader in its own category. Together, we are working on how we leverage these strengths and get teams around the world working together to solve tough customer problems or invent new solutions and not just on how we can make a particular solution or

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ProQuest

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AFFILIATED COMPANIES: ProQuest encompasses affiliated company **Bowker** and businesses such as **Dialog**, **ebrary**, and **EBL**.

OFFICERS: **Kurt P. Sanford**, Chief Executive Officer; **Jonathan Collins**, Chief Financial Officer; **Rich Belanger**, Chief Information Officer; **Kevin A. Norris**, General Counsel and Senior Vice President, Global Content Alliances; **Kellie Teal-Guess**, Senior Vice President, Global Human Resources; **Michael Gersch**, Senior Vice President, Global Marketing, Sales, and Customer Experience & Service; **Simon Beale**, Senior Vice President and General Manager, ProQuest U.S. Government, Public Library and Schools; **Kevin Sayar**, Senior Vice President and General Manager, ProQuest Workflow Solutions; **Rafael Sidi**, Senior Vice President and General Manager, ProQuest Information Solutions; and **Tim Wahlberg**, Senior Vice President and General Manager, ProQuest Dialog.

KEY PRODUCTS AND SERVICES: Notable research tools include the Summon discovery service, the **ProQuest** Flow collaboration platform, the Pivot research development tool, and the Intota library services platform.

Via **ProQuest**, researchers can access the world's largest collection of dissertations and theses; 20 million pages and three centuries of global, national, regional, and specialty newspapers; major European rare book collections such those of the national libraries of France, the Netherlands, and the Library of Florence; and archives that provide unique counterpoints — the records of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, personal notes from AP reporters on the front lines of Vietnam, Queen Victoria's personal diaries, and plantation records from the Slave era in the Southern U.S.

ProQuest's aggregated content covers the spectrum of publishing: humanities and arts, business and industry, science, technology, medicine and health, news, and popular culture. This extraordinary volume of information is made easily navigable through expert editorial management and continually evolving technology. The company's renowned abstracting and indexing enables every user to be an expert searcher by expanding the breadth of content a single keyword can uncover and by guiding users to relevant sources they may have never known about.

CORE MARKETS/CLIENTELE: 26,000+ Libraries, in 152 countries; including Academic, Community College, Corporate, Government, Law, Medical, Public, and K-12 libraries. **ProQuest** products and services are used in 100% of Top 400 Institutions listed in the Times Higher Ed and 100% Top 400 Institutions listed in the U.S. News & World Report.

HISTORY AND BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF YOUR COMPANY/PUBLISHING PROGRAM: ProQuest connects people with vetted, reliable information. Key to serious research, the company's products are a gateway to the world's knowledge including dissertations, governmental and cultural archives, news, historical collections, and eBooks. **ProQuest** technologies serve users across the critical points in research, helping them discover, access, share, create, and manage information.

The company's cloud-based technologies offer flexible solutions for librarians, students, and researchers through the **ProQuest**, **Bowker**, **Dialog**, **ebrary**, and **EBL** businesses — and notable research tools such as the Summon discovery service, the **ProQuest** Flow collaboration platform, the Pivot research development tool, and the Intota library services platform. The company is headquartered in Ann Arbor, Michigan, with offices around the world. 🌍

service a bit better. Our corporate parent is highly supportive of our efforts.

ATG: *ProQuest has a record of expansion and adding key nameplates like Bowker, Dialog, ebrary, Serials Solutions, and most recently, EBL. Can we expect to see that record of aggressive acquisition continue? What factors are at the forefront of your decision making when considering such an acquisition? Are there any in the offing that you can discuss?*

KS: You should expect us to continue to make acquisitions. We are looking for assets that fill in gaps we have identified or broaden the breadth of solutions we can provide to our customers, especially in the Higher Education sector. For the usual reasons I can't comment on any specific future transaction.

ATG: *In November of 2011, soon after you arrived, ProQuest moved to a new structure consisting of six strategic business units. We*

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understand you are restructuring yet again? Can you elaborate?

KS: I mentioned earlier that the environment we operate in demands that we be flexible, adaptive, and quick. The changes we made at the end of 2011 were to consolidate some similar functions and business activities that I felt were too dispersed. The changes we made at the beginning of 2013, which were the result of the development of our Enterprise Strategy, further consolidated our business units — we now have just four — and shared service functions so we could improve our speed to market and focus on our customer segments and overall execution.

ATG: *ProQuest has repurposed its platform and searching several times but the platform is still very much a “silo” to search different databases. Is there any plan to change/integrate the searching of the various databases?*

KS: Let’s talk about where we are today: the new **ProQuest** research environment is in place, and it allows discovery and cross-searching across a wide swath of **ProQuest** content — newspapers from any era, journals, reports, et cetera — plus, users are supported with workflow tools. It’s also interoperable with the **ebrary** platform, which allows simultaneous discovery of **ProQuest** content and eBooks.

But that’s truly just the beginning. Our mission, pure and simple, is to help users research better and improve their outcomes. Whether it’s writing a better undergraduate paper or solving problems at their jobs, our goal is to empower researchers and librarians in their daily workflow. That’s going to be an ongoing journey of working with our users to learn, experiment, and iterate, honing our solutions so that our users are getting ever better outcomes.

So, can you expect to see integrated searching of the various databases? Yes, and you can expect to see a lot more. We’re focusing on continual performance improvement for our research solutions and, as I mentioned earlier, richer interoperability that extends beyond **ProQuest** products to encompass the external products that our researchers are using. We want the experience to be seamless, but we also want to get our users to the best tools for working with content. So, in many cases, integration with other content will be through indexing and linking out to an environment that has the best tools for the research job at hand.

ATG: *Recently ProQuest has made a number of upper-level hires. It appears that there a bit of a shake up going on. Does this portend a new direction for the company? If so, how will it translate into better service to libraries?*

KS: We’ve steadily added new members to our team over the past 18 months at the same time we have promoted from within. Basic-

ly, once we got our strategy in place we were able to identify where we would benefit from some additional experience and expertise and improve our ability to implement our plans. The bottom line is that we are working hard to improve how all of the various solutions and services we provide to our customers work together more seamlessly and complement each other. Making the back office and billing simpler is also an important. Our goal is to innovate in a way that makes libraries shine within their institutions and also be a company that’s easy to work with.

ATG: *Running a large and complex company like ProQuest must demand a lot of personal attention and energy. How do you recharge your batteries? What do you do to kick back and relax? Are there any activities outside of work that you really enjoy?*

KS: I’ve got a lot going on in my family, and I really enjoy attending my children’s sporting events that now seem to be year-round. We also like to plan interesting vacations and travel to new destinations. Other than that, a good book is always relaxing, and I enjoy going for a run whenever I can make the time.

ATG: *Kurt thanks for being so generous with your time and agreeing to talk to us. It’s been fun and we’ve learned a lot.*

KS: You’re welcome, **Tom** and **Katina**. I appreciate the opportunity to share some of my thoughts with you and your readers. 🐾