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ATG Interviews Benjamin Shaw

Chief Operating Officer, Edanz

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

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

ATG: *Some of our readers may not be aware of what Edanz does. Can you give us a little background on the company and what services it provides? What drives Edanz to offer those services? What are Edanz's specific goals?*

BS: Edanz assists scholarly authors whose first language is not English in overcoming barriers to sharing their research findings. We do this through services such as language editing and independent peer review, as well as on-campus training workshops, e-learning courses, and also research productivity tools such as Journal Selector.

We began in 1995 offering language editing and have continually evolved as we learn more about the challenges facing scholarly authors in Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America. Today we're much more than an editing company. We run educational programs in 25 countries worldwide and have partnered with Springer to offer Author Academy, an e-learning course for young researchers. We have technological capabilities across cloud computing and semantic analysis, with teams that build tools to support authors. At our core we've kept our author-centric focus on finding new ways to support ESL researchers in communicating their findings globally.

ATG: *Where did the name Edanz come from? Does it have a special significance?*

BS: Company lore is that the name was actually given to us by an early customer in Japan. Way back in the mists of time – the early '90s — our name was “Education Australia New Zealand.” Many of our experts to this day are from ANZ, though of course we also have many from North America and the UK. In any case, one day the founder, **Kerry Greer**, answered the phone and thought the caller had the wrong number as they kept asking for “Edanzu.” He eventually realized they were shortening the rather long name and thought it had a unique sound to it. We've been Edanz ever since.

ATG: *We were particularly fascinated by the Journal Advisor service offered via your Website. Can you explain how that works? Are there any other goodies tucked away on the Website that our readers should know about?*

BS: Journal Advisor represents an early attempt to bring together our services with educational resources and tools into a structured framework for writing a paper. This has further developed into Author Path, a product we have under development for beta release in Q1 2014.

Author Path is a manuscript-writing platform combining our author services with educational resources and tools such as Journal Selector. Author Path helps an author write their manuscript online using a workflow that



is customized for their article type and field of research. The author starts by creating an outline, and we then guide them each step of the way as they choose a journal, write each section, collaborate with co-authors, submit, and respond to peer review. Along the way we offer educational content such as how-to videos as well as services from experts in their field. Tools such as the Journal Selector will help to automate some of the process. We also envision integration with third-party tools and services.

ATG: *Ben, you have been with Edanz since 2006 and were recently appointed Chief Operating Officer. What led you to join the company? What were your responsibilities when you first started? How have they evolved and what are your responsibilities now?*

BS: I joined Edanz after a brief stint at a market-entry consultancy here in Beijing. My first and last client as a consultant was Edanz. When the president asked me to help fill a sales and marketing position, he had my CV within 20 minutes. At the time my responsibilities were focused on China, and Edanz offered such an interesting window into developments here that I jumped at the opportunity.

When we opened our Beijing office in 2006 we had only six staff here and a similar number in our Japan office. We're now up to 25 in China and 30 in Japan. As we were a small but rapidly growing company when I joined I've been fortunate to wear a lot of different hats. Being able to work across commercial, editorial, and technology projects has been wonderful for getting to know the business and colleagues across all our teams.

Over time I became involved in our development globally, especially through our partnerships with leading publishers and also with projects like Journal Selector. In my current role I'm working with our teams and partners to tie together our services, education, and technology into Author Path.

ATG: *Your Website claims that Edanz can “significantly increase your chances of acceptance for publication.” How does Edanz accomplish that? What skills do your editors bring to the table that can help reduce barriers to publication for aspiring authors?*

BS: It's interesting that you mention this statement in light of a recent article in *Science* called “China's Publication Bazaar.” It exposed disreputable editing companies that act as brokers to sell authorship. I'd really like to emphasize for your readers the distinction between those companies and the reputable services such as Edanz, AJE, and Editage that follow ethical practices. Edanz is always careful to educate our customers that while we can remove language as a barrier to communicating their findings, it is the journal editor who makes the final publication decision. We are also an associate member of COPE and work to educate the author community through our training workshops and by translating EASE guidelines into Chinese. As a company that wants to be a constructive part of the advancement of knowledge, we welcome working more closely with COPE and other industry bodies to expand and strengthen ethical guidelines for author service companies and training or researchers worldwide.

Getting to the question of what we do for authors; our more than 300 freelance editors have English as their first language, have authored peer-reviewed articles, and the majority hold a PhD. They undergo a vetting process and ongoing training on how to edit. Their editing skills, combined with expertise in a field allow them to untangle language knots. When they're finished the customer's article will be in clear and concise English that is easy to understand at peer review. The article still has to pass peer review, but the author, referees, and journal all benefit from writing that can be easily understood. Clear writing also helps referees and journal editors identify flaws that need to be addressed before eventual publication.

We offer services beyond editing that raise authors' chances of publication. One of these is “expert scientific review,” which is an independent peer review service that I believe we were the first to offer. Some companies call this “portable peer review.” One of our most popular services is a “point-by-point check” where we ensure the author has responded sufficiently to all peer review comments, and that the changes explained in their response letter are reflected appropriately in the revised manuscript. The quality of peer review comments is generally good, but the “user interface” of the communication mode hasn't kept pace. Authors often have difficulty in understanding peer review comments and figuring out how to

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revise their manuscript and then explain their changes. We're able to help them overcome this barrier.

ATG: *Your client base appears to be scientists and science researchers, particularly in China and Japan. Are there other parts of the scientific community that Edanz considers part of your market?*

BS: Many of our clients are in the increasingly important East Asian markets of Greater China, Japan, and South Korea. Reflecting the global nature of STM publishing we also have a significant client base across Asia-Pacific, the Middle East, and Latin America, with some African and even European customers. The non-China/Japan segment of our business is the fastest growing with predominant markets comprising Brazil, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Italy, and Malaysia.

ATG: *Are there specific scientific subjects that Edanz focuses on in offering your services? In what subject areas have you been most successful in helping authors? How do you measure that success?*

BS: We offer services to authors in all scholarly fields with most customers coming from the natural sciences, as these receive the lion's share of funding in the markets where we're active. It can be difficult to measure the success of our clients as our services are provided before submission for peer review and much can change by the time the author is eventually published. Changes like those to the manuscript title or target journal make it difficult to track what happens to a manuscript after we've handed it back to the author, so we tend to look at our return-customer metrics as an indication of how well we're doing.

Even though we're growing rapidly most of our volume actually comes from repeat business. More than 1,600 of our return customers have used us for editing more than 10 of their papers, over 500 have used us for more than 20 papers, and we even have 135 return customers who have sent us 40 papers over their career. **Edanz** only charges the customer after editing is complete, so we have to keep authors happy or we wouldn't get paid.

ATG: *What can authors expect in terms of fee schedules, turnaround times, etc. from Edanz?*

BS: Fees vary depending on length, but an average charge for a typical article of 3,500 words is under USD 350. We're unique in that authors don't choose the amount of editing they want us to perform. Our clients trust us to bring their paper to the accepted standard regardless of starting point. That means a minority of authors with particularly difficult languages end up paying more to reach a high standard, but on average fees are still at the \$350 I mentioned. We complete the first round of editing within three business days.

Many editing companies apply additional charges for a second round of editing. As our service is designed to be author-centric, we offer unlimited rounds of revision so that

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Benjamin Shaw

BORN AND LIVED: Born in the U.S., have lived in London and Beijing.

IN MY SPARE TIME: Checking out the Beijing dining scene, reading.

FAVORITE BOOKS: *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet, Shogun, Siddhartha, The Death of Vishnu, The Mongoliad, The Scarlet Pimpernel, His Majesty's Dragon.*

PET PEEVES: Pandas.

PHILOSOPHY: Cooperation is an evolutionary advantage found at all levels in nature. Various types of cells and organs 'cooperate' to sustain life; species cooperate among themselves and other species. Humans have organized into increasingly large and sophisticated groups. Humankind must better cooperate to solve the existential challenges facing our species.

MOST MEMORABLE CAREER ACHIEVEMENT: Having the vice president of the Chinese Academy of Sciences mention **Edanz** in a video interview was humbling and fulfilling.

GOAL I HOPE TO ACHIEVE FIVE YEARS FROM NOW: Remove as many of the barriers facing ESL scholars as possible so they can communicate their research findings on a level playing field.

HOW/WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS: Power, within our industry and in general, is shifting toward the producers and consumers of content. "Non-traditional" markets such as those in Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America are playing an increasingly important role in research and scholarly communication. The successful industry players five years from now will be those who have a deep understanding of their end users. By adopting the "lean" philosophy found in modern software development, they will provide value by increasing research productivity. Non-traditional markets will serve as a useful testing ground for new services and products that can be applied to traditional markets. 🐼

all customer manuscripts can undergo two or more rounds of revision. The meaning of some particularly difficult sentences requires clarification from the author, so multiple rounds of editing ensures all language problems are fixed. We're also unique in that fees are not due until after editing is complete. Authors are able to claim reimbursement through their grant funding or to have their university pay directly on their behalf.

I mentioned before that we cannot guarantee publication success, and it should be a red flag if an author comes across an editing service that does.

ATG: *It was reported that during your presentation at the annual Fiesole Retreat in Singapore you argued that journals should emphasize an author-centric perspective and work hard to deliver a positive experience for authors. What do you mean by that? Are there particular publishing requirements that you think foster a negative climate for your clients?*

BS: Being author-centric means putting the scholarly author and communication of their findings at the center of decisions regarding everything from peer review to submission systems and APC payments. This could take the form of relatively simple projects like streamlining Instructions for Authors and

translating them into local languages or making a video Aims & Scope.

There are also difficult issues that need to be tackled, like improving the value of peer review. Authors almost universally accept the scientific rigor that peer review brings. What they're often frustrated with is the inconvenience and glacial pace, and what I call "user interface" problems. One of the biggest user interface problems is the lack of clarity in comments from referees and journal editors. Strikingly, in a survey we recently carried out in China, 90% of respondents said they have been confused by the response letters that journal editors sent them on their recent submissions. It is often unclear to authors whether a journal editor is rejecting a paper or is open to considering it after further revision. The authors who participated in this survey had a lot of ideas on how their experience could be improved. For example, 89% said they expect journals to provide comments to help them improve their article even if they're being rejected. Unfortunately, only 18% of authors say they typically receive comments when being rejected. Additionally, authors would appreciate a recommendation for an alternative, perhaps more appropriate journal when receiving a rejection letter.

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In general, these Chinese authors told us they feel they are not provided enough information during the peer review process to make informed decisions about their submission, and how to proceed after a round of review. They would like journals to provide more details, such as typical times from submission to publication, specific instructions on how to approach referee comments, and the expectations of editors in responding to comments.

ATG: *Is Edanz trying to transmit these concerns to journal editors? If so, how have they responded?*

BS: This is important as journal editors are in a position to be either obstacles or agents of change. We try to get the author-centric message across whenever we meet with people in STM publishing. Most journal editors react positively and have been forming similar thoughts on their own. There are of course sometimes cynical reactions from people who have what I call a “hordes at the gate” mentality and who might wish they could stem the flood of papers rather than taking on the often challenging constructive steps.

The overwhelming majority of journal editors, anyone in STM publishing for that matter, genuinely want to improve the authorship experience as they see how that advances knowledge. I'd say that applies equally to those at commercial publishers as it does to those at society and mission-driven publishers. It also crosses the open access divide. OA publishers have probably been better at experimenting with author-centric policies and features as they have more of an author-centric outlook built into their model, but being author-centric isn't something that inherently has to be the exclusive domain of OA publishers, nor is an OA journal automatically author-centric.

The sincere hope of all of us at Edanz is that we can raise awareness of the challenges ESL authors face. We want to play a positive role in the scholarly publishing community by advancing concrete ideas that benefit all stakeholders.

ATG: *Is there a role for libraries in making journal publishing more author-centric and positive for authors?*

BS: Absolutely. Librarians are well placed to be a voice for researchers and to provide broad support to scholars at their institutions in communicating their findings. The entire STM publishing ecosystem will be better off with increased involvement from libraries in creating a positive authorship experience.

ATG: *Have you seen examples of this type of library/librarian involvement?*

BS: I don't get a chance to spend as much time with librarians as I'd like, but we do see this happening. When we give an author training workshop for example it is often organized by a dedicated librarian who is addressing the needs of their patrons. All stakeholders in scholarly communication can do more to improve the authorship experience. Publishers are already putting a lot of effort into this and would welcome librarians playing a stronger advocacy role.

against the grain publisher profile

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ASSOCIATION MEMBERSHIPS: COPE

KEY PRODUCTS AND SERVICES: Assisting scholarly authors whose first language is not English in overcoming barriers to sharing their research findings.

Author services — Language editing. Independent peer review. Journal selection. Point-by-point response check. Cover letter development.

Education — E-learning courses. On-campus training.

Research productivity tools — Author Path. Journal Selector.

CORE MARKETS/CLIENTELE: Scholars worldwide whose first language is not English, especially in Asia-Pacific, the Middle East, and Latin America. Examples of primary markets:

China, Japan, South Korea, Brazil, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, and Mexico.

NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES: 55+ full-time, 350+ freelancers as of Nov 2013.

ADDITIONAL ITEMS OF INTEREST TO ATG READERS: Edanz welcomes anyone passing through Beijing, China, or Fukuoka, Japan to arrange a visit. 🌍

ATG: *How do open access journals fit into the equation? How will they impact the need for your services in the future?*

BS: Interesting question. Non-Western and Western stakeholders, for lack of better terminology, come from different traditions of scholarly communication. I'm not talking here about cultural traditions like the differences between Confucianism and Western thought but the different ways research programs have developed. Non-Western countries are in a more dynamic stage of development and sometimes have a different emphasis in their approach to scholarly communication. The wider scholarly community has much it can learn from its peers outside of Europe and North America. Something that needs strengthening in Asia and the Middle East in particular is greater emphasis on sharing findings with peers and the importance of discourse for advancing the field. Encouraging a positive scientific culture that values global discourse is a powerful way to address challenges faced by all stakeholders in scholarly publishing. I feel that open access has the potential to encourage researchers to place greater value on sharing their findings.

That said, stakeholders outside Europe and North America take a very pragmatic view of OA. While there is growing awareness and

support, you won't find much of an ideological flavor. The great opportunity for OA in Asia and the ME is that it will be judged solely on its merits and benefits to authors, the institution, and national research objectives. My personal feeling is that this pragmatic approach is one of the things those in Europe and North America could stand to learn from their global peers.

From the Edanz viewpoint, regardless of how the publishing landscape develops, we see a bright future as long as the communication of research continues to be important.

ATG: *There seems to be a growing awareness of the need for author services with the emergence of other providers like Figshare, Mendeley, etc. What do you think of these efforts? Do you recommend such services to your authors?*

BS: Mendeley and Figshare are both fantastic, and there are numerous others to add to the list: Papers, ImpactStory, LabGuru, Kudos, SSRN, Utopia Docs, not to mention the author-centric innovations that publishers are developing, and things like ORCID and CrossCheck that can also be put in the author-centric basket.

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These are all valuable but along with legacy systems have left the ecosystem somewhat disjointed. It's easy to lose count of all the systems and tools a scholarly author would use starting with submitting a grant proposal to the time they have a published paper and want to track metrics. The multitude of author services is great, but the lack of cohesion between the various components robs all stakeholders of value. Our vision is that by addressing how authors actually write their manuscripts the Author Path will become a platform for supporting the publisher-author and library-author relationship. We also picture it serving as a connector for other author-centric tools like those mentioned above, as well as the systems underpinning the ecosystem like Editorial Manager, ScholarOne, ORCID, and CrossCheck.

ATG: *It sounds as though Author Path might provide a clearinghouse for such author-centric tools. Offering guidance to author resources is something librarians often provide. Did you have librarian involvement when you were developing Author Path?*

BS: These tools obviously already work well on their own, and many authors will continue using them as stand-alone functionality. Author Path can help unlock value by connecting and promoting these tools, including those that benefit library stakeholders. Our

focus for the beta launch has been authors, and as part of that learning and validation process we have had librarian input, and have even come up with ideas about features for librarians that I'm excited to share with *ATG* readers in the future.

We hope librarians will play an important role in getting the word out about Author Path, and have plans to more actively engage librarians. We'd like to form an advisory group for Author Path and look forward to having representatives from the library community.

ATG: *When you look into your crystal ball, what changes/developments/enhancements do you see in the future for Edanz and the scholarly communications industry?*

BS: I think the industry has a tendency to get overly caught-up on single hot-button issues like OA, post-publication peer review, or MOOCs. I suppose author services provided by companies like **Mendeley** and **Edanz** is another issue coming to the fore. These are all important and interesting, but what gets lost is meaningful discussion on the deeper underlying trends. I think we can boil down many developments into three reinforcing trends:

Shift of power to producers and consumers of content. The growing power of authors, readers, and funding bodies — which have a hand in “producing” content — is leading to new opportunities and means the industry must develop its expertise of end-users.

Increasing research leadership of Asian and non-Western nations. Everyone is familiar with the increased output and commercial opportunities from these markets. The industry tends to look at this as a double-edged sword as they also have to deal with the challenges brought on by the explosion of research output. What has perhaps been overlooked is the opportunity these markets present for a leap-frog effect. It's my guess that researchers and institutions outside of Europe and North America are more willing to experiment with new models and innovations as they're less invested in the traditional way of doing things.

New workflows to increase productivity. This is a trend that many are already pursuing, for example with new concepts like consortia for portable peer review across publishers. I think there are still a lot of opportunities for better matching this with the above trends.

Edanz will be addressing all these trends with the upcoming release of our Author Path product.

ATG: *You've been telling us a lot about Edanz. How about yourself? We understand that you live in China. What is it like living in Beijing? What do you do with your free time? What would our readers be surprised to learn about you?*

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ATG Special Report — Thoughts on the AHA Statement on Embargoes and Dissertations

by **Steven (Steve) Escar Smith, PhD** (Professor & Dean of Libraries, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN 37996; Phone: 865-974-6600) <stevensmith@utk.edu>

T rue confession — when I finished my dissertation back in the bad old days of red-lined paper and buckram bindings, I asked for an embargo on its distribution by microfiche. The **American Historical Association**, based on its recent statement, thinks that today's young scholars should have the option of doing likewise, only for longer than I could, and microfiche distribution is not the concern (<http://blog.historians.org/2013/07/american-historical-association-statement-on-policies-regarding-the-embargoing-of-completed-history-phd-dissertations/>).

The **AHA's** worry is the availability of dissertations in university-hosted digital repositories for free. The monograph, the argument goes, is still the main form of scholarly communication in the profession. As such, tenure and promotion committees routinely require the publication of a book for tenure. Apparently some editors of scholarly presses have expressed reservations about publishing work derived from dissertations and theses that are openly available on the Web. These circumstances place young scholars in a tough spot. By putting the fruits of their graduate work online, students handicap their chance for tenure down the road.

The **AHA** solution — give students the option to keep their dissertations offline for up to six years, long enough to allow for the publication of their first book. I should add that the **AHA's** concern is exclusively with the online environment. The statement recommends that students who opt for the embargo should deposit a print version of their dissertation with the library for distribution through interlibrary loan or microfiche. The difficulty here is that

print dissertations (along with the infrastructure that existed to support them) have largely gone the way of the typewriters on which they were written.

I now realize my decision to exempt my research from the journeyman distribution network of the day was wrong. Granted, my PhD is in English, but my topic was a work of literary history. The embargo did absolutely nothing to improve my chances of sharing my findings or promoting my scholarship. My fear of a publisher declining my work because it might have been available elsewhere was a boogeyman. And despite the vast difference in broadcast power between microfiche and the Internet, I believe this concern is as specious today as it was in my time.

As others have already pointed out, there's little evidence that editors are behaving in the way the **AHA** describes (<http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2013/07/youve-spent-years-on-your-phd-should-you-publish-it-online-for-free/278024/>). But even if they were, the logic of the proposal is flawed. If I am frugal enough to forego purchasing the printed monograph in preference for the online thesis, why would I not just wait out the embargo? If the self-imposed ban lasts six years because that's how long it takes to achieve tenure and publish one's first monograph, I would not have to wait that much longer to read the dissertation online anyway. And considering the challenges of publishing anything in physical form these days, the electronic version still might beat the print book to the street.

The **AHA** proposal acknowledges that the dissertation and the book that derives from it are supposed to be very different things. But this is one of the points that call its recommendation into question. If a dissertation is not substantially revised for monographic publication, the author **SHOULD** have a hard time finding a publisher, whether or not an electronic ancestor lurks online. The dissertation is the result of a journeyman apprenticeship; the first book is the product of a credentialed professional. It's expected that elements of the former have evolved and even changed for the latter. Any editor that would publish a work that is not only much different from but much better than the dissertation should probably not be in the publishing business. Furthermore, scholars are trained to use sources responsibly and critically, so any historian who is content to draw on someone else's dissertation to the exclusion of the monograph needs to repeat his own apprenticeship.

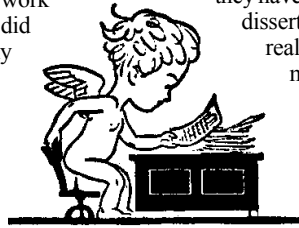
The **AHA** solution also ignores or misunderstands the realities of the current academic publishing market. Libraries are still the major

market for academic historical monographs, though granted not on the scale of yesteryear. Where a university press print run might have been 1,500 copies two decades ago, something along the lines of 200 or fewer in many fields is more likely today. But these smaller print runs have more to do with shrinking library budgets; they have nothing at all to do with electronic dissertations. And this point gets at the real problem that the **AHA** statement misses, and that is that the market for publication is increasingly difficult because presses are not able to publish as many books, largely as a result of fewer library dollars being available to purchase them.

A better way of helping early career scholars over the tenure bar has already been suggested by the **AHA** — more than once. In 1993 the association argued for a more capacious definition of scholarship in response to concerns about the devaluation of teaching and service (<http://www.historians.org/pubs/free/RedefiningScholarship.htm>). A very strong statement in support of digital forms of scholarship was made by the association in 2001 (<http://www.historians.org/perspectives/issues/2001/0110/0110pro1.cfm>). And in 2005 the **AHA** along with the **National Council on Public History** and the **Organization of American Historians** stated flatly that the "current standards for evaluating historical scholarship for tenure and promotion do not reflect the great variety of historical practice undertaken by faculty members" (<http://www.historians.org/governance/pd/EngagedHistorianReport-June2010.pdf>).

The **AHA** has a long and admirable record of encouraging a broad understanding of historical practice. It should continue this tradition by standing up for articles, essays, blogs, digital archives, scholarly Websites, presentations, excellent teaching, impactful service, and other evidences of academic and intellectual achievement in addition to the book. It should emphasize the rigorous review of content, not a preference for one kind of research expression. Keeping dissertations under wraps for long periods of time is a solution that misses the real problem, encourages the perpetuation of a system that is indeed increasingly difficult for young historians, and is, ironically, at odds with the association's own history. 🍀

Note: Steven Escar Smith is Professor and Dean of Libraries, University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Further disclosure — most of his dissertation was later published (in revised and he hopes improved form) in two articles. The long-awaited third and final article has suffered under the embargo of procrastination.



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BS: I've been in Beijing since early 2005 and consider it home. I was originally here studying Chinese full-time for ten months, though I'm still a lifetime away from reaching my language goals. Beijing can be a challenging place to live, but those who come to love it are rewarded with a dynamic city full of interesting people. Readers who haven't yet visited might be surprised to learn that Beijing has a diverse food scene. I spend much of my free time scouting for, eating at, and talking about the many great restaurants here.

ATG: Ben, thank you so much for talking to us. You've been both forthcoming and informative. We really appreciate it.

BS: Thanks for the opportunity, and a big thanks to your readers. 🍀