2016

Back Talk--A Gooey Petri Dish

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A few weeks ago, for an upcoming issue of *ATG*, the editors asked a number of folks: “In 500 words or less, please give us your take on the future impact of consolidation (10 years out) on the industry. Concerns like competition, pricing, the growth of start-ups, etc. are all grist for the mill.” After some thinking, I didn’t respond—I’m not informed enough on such matters, and the question felt narrowly focused. Why not write 1,000 words for “Back Talk” instead!

I’ve no soothsayer qualifications. Upon reading the press release about an acquisition or merger announcement related to the library or information industries, many of my chums and colleagues say, “Ah, yes, I expected that one!” or, “Sure, it was bound to happen!” Many seem to know that AAA, BBB, and CCC are ripe for the taking. “Yes, DDD has been all along planning vertical integration.” For my part, I usually read such a release with wide-eyed wonder and say, “Gosh, who would have thought?” The only exception for me is when a larger publisher acquires a smaller one, sometimes strengthening their current portfolio or at other times branching into new disciplines.

There are specialists in the M&A space, but most of us are not. My tribe assumes that the pace of consolidation in library-related space is picking up rapidly, perhaps more so than in many other fields. Of course, we can list many notable acquisitions or mergers over recent years, but I would welcome some hard and objective data on this topic, before fully agreeing that our industry is experiencing a specially high rate compared to others. And, if it’s true that our field is experiencing even more consolidation, then isn’t it the case that we’re also experienc-
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BORN AND LIVED:  Born in Shanghai, China.  Current Place of Residence is Agoura Hills, CA.

EARLY LIFE:  I was born in the city of Shanghai, China

PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES:  I currently hold the position of a digital systems librarian at the Payson library in Pepperdine University. Some of my research projects include the linked data and tracking our faculty research activities. I also like to work on the different systems’ integration.

PET PEEVES: Smoking cigarettes and/or e-cigarettes in libraries or around non-smoking people.

PHILOSOPHY: As long as one does not intrude on others and do not threaten others’ wellbeing, one should be free to believe and choose their own creed and religion.

MOST MEMORABLE CAREER ACHIEVEMENT:  I designed and developed the CONULEXID system which was the largest bilingual lexicon database system in China. This system was launched in 1997.

GOAL I HOPE TO ACHIEVE FIVE YEARS FROM NOW:  To build links between the data in our Pepperdine systems and the data in our library systems. To find or develop some type of tool or system to track our faculty’s teaching and research activities. To let our faculty know how much attention their research areas have gotten.

HOW/WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS:  My research shows me the traditional library services will be undergoing many big changes. Academic libraries worldwide will be paying more attention to the teaching and research areas support to their faculty and students.

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- Quite apart from all that, people are questing for information and libraries are becoming sexy!

I believe that libraries, by definitions new and old, will thrive and prosper. However, most of us librarians are not skilled enough in the supporting industries to make accurate predictions about how they will look and perform ten years out — a lot the same, some different, but all morphing over time.

The information industry players we most admire are known for their savvy, strategic thinking and planning. In our space, what we library folks must bring is our own version of savvy strategic thinking, to provide the best information future for our readers, at the same time working with and influencing the constantly shifting business environment of which we are part. My rambling end point is that the consolidation issue we’re uncomfortable with is only a piece of the action. There are many balls in the air — we have to pay attention to them all.

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We are excited to have many preconferences this year and all preconferences had excellent attendance, more than ever! I want to focus especially on the Legal Issues in Libraries preconference which the multi-faceted Ann Okerson arranged. But someone who deserves a special shout out is Will Cross who is currently on paternity leave. He just welcomed their first child and will be in Charleston.

Looking forward to it all!  GULP!  Sooner than I thought… Travel safe, everyone! Yr. Ed. 

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