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Both Sides Now: Vendors and Librarians--Learning How to Embrace the Concept of "Change"

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Both Sides Now: Vendors and Librarians — Learning How to Embrace the Concept of “Change”



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Most people have difficulty coping with “change” in their daily lives. I’m not referring to the amount of coins in everyone’s pockets and purses. What I’m referring to is coping with and understanding that there are changes taking place in our lives all around us. And if we don’t make adjustments to embrace those ever present changes in *both* our personal and business lives, we risk the non-attainment of our goals and objectives.

The only person who truly likes change is a wet baby. For the rest of us, we become far too comfortable in our personal environments. We complain about our job, yet we make no move to find another place to work. We know that there are certain lifestyle changes we must make for the betterment of our health and well-being and yet we postpone making those necessary changes because it makes us uncomfortable to be trying something new. It’s easy to grumble, not so easy to do something about the very issues that seemingly give us discomfort. We all need to get in the game and embrace “change.” Being engaged on the field of play is far more productive than booing from the stands!

Both salespeople and information professionals face a daily onslaught of changes in their individual professions. New sources of data for the salesperson to understand, demonstrate and sell; new technologies that need to be understood by all parties; new bosses at both our places of employment and a seemingly endless scheduling of meetings replete with power points, email references and spreadsheets that have become the new realities of the workplace.

We are fortunate to be in an industry that continues to reinvent itself, but with that is the reality that everyone must keep up with the changes or risk being left behind. I recently participated as a judge for the **SLIA 2016 CODiE Awards**. This competition brings to the foreground the cutting edge companies who are providing new technologies in the information industry. Naturally, having been acutely involved in the sales and marketing of information products sold to libraries for well over 35 years, I was chosen to be a judge for new sales management technologies that were demonstrated.

Not only was I blown away by the new technologies presented, I was duly impressed by the wisdom and professionalism of the people who showed those products to me. It was clear to me that these companies were more than embracing change, they were truly “change agents” which is where we all have to be in order to survive and thrive. Understanding how the concept of change relates to both our business and professional lives is crucial to our success.

How many times have you heard a person say that “this is the way we’ve always done it; and we will continue to do it this way for as long as I’m here?” The odds of that person’s business or personal life enjoying future success diminish exponentially as long as that attitude prevails. Even the name-brand items we have bought for so many years at our local markets constantly face challenges to their customer base as new companies introduce copycat brand offerings. Competition goes hand-in-hand with change. If you are doing business today the same way you did even six months ago, you are probably falling behind the curve.

Change Comes To Sales Organizations

Selling any product or service today in the library vertical requires an understanding of the prospects’ needs, a more than a casual understanding of the product/service to be sold and a thorough perception of who else is competing for that library’s budgetary dollars in that vertical.

There was a time when salespeople were hired in part, due to their rolodex. “Who do you know in our industry that you’ve previously sold to” was probably uttered by many an interviewer as each candidate for a sales position was considered for employment. Today, with easily referenced access to demographics, detailed budget numbers including a history of spending by public institutions, documents filed at the **SEC** by public companies and a detailed record of correspondence between the company and the customer, the rolodex question is not at the top of the questioning list. That data is available in many ways from a variety of sources both internally and externally. Companies like **SalesForce.com** have literally transformed the way salespeople interact with their customers and prospects. And that’s a good thing for both parties.

SalesForce.com is one of many software developers that offer a “Customer Relationship Management (CRM)” tool that is being used by a wide variety of companies in all industries. CRM therefore is a term that refers to practices, strategies and technologies that companies use to manage and analyze customer interactions and data throughout the customer lifecycle, with the goal of improving business relationships with customers, assisting in customer retention and driving sales growth.

Apps like **SalesForce.com** are leveling the playing field. Where once a seasoned salesperson would mostly rely on their rolodex for the “best leads,” now apps, much like the ones I saw at the **SLIA CODiE Awards** gives every rep from every company all the information they need to find the business, analyze the prospects’ needs for the product to be presented and then

efficiently close the sale. With the right CRM installed on their laptop, every sales rep in the information business (or any business) can become an expert. That is, they can be an expert if they embrace change and use the CRM tools at their disposal.

Change Comes To the Marketplace

The Internet has changed the environment for purchasers of eContent or any kind of product or service. Thanks to social media, strong networking and the ability to be acquainted with the strengths and/or flaws in the products of any seller of goods and services is the reality. This gives potential customers a significant bargaining edge over their sales reps at the negotiating table. Customers have the ability to tap into a treasure trove of global research to find the good, the bad and the ugly of the next product to be presented for possible purchase. Deliver a database with faulty or inaccurate information and the marketplace will know about it immediately. Create a platform that doesn’t work as advertised and the industry will buzz about it very quickly. And having a less than world-class customer service department will surely ensure a drop in revenue.

For every product/service presented for sale to libraries in the information industry, there will always be a handful of competitors who have similar products actively looking to see how they can unseat the competition. They will monitor journals, encourage customer observations and look to industry publications for the faintest sign of an opening to become the new provider of information to the library. In essence, today’s information marketplace is more transparent than it’s ever been. Competitors thrive on change. Their entire being is to present the best products possible and convince the library to abandon subscribing to the current publications in favor of theirs.

Change Comes to Libraries and Librarians

Much the same as an app like **Sales Force.com** is used for sales organizations; libraries are creating programs that help them as buyers of information to know all the pertinent facts that will affect the intended purchase. For example, if the library gets funding through a variety of sources (capital budget, grants, alumni donations for specific subject areas, endowments, etc.). There are programs that can track every dollar that’s been spent and how much money is left in each category to spend. Those apps can also track every salesperson from every company doing business with the library. Contact information about those companies ranging from the sales reps’ contact information to the customer support group and

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all the way up to the President of the company are now easily accessible.

Each library, be it a University, Fortune 500 company, law firm, etc., have unique ways in which they interact with the sales reps and how an eventual order is placed. For even the most seasoned sales executive, navigating through the acquisitions process can be quite daunting. Sometimes a library's policies and methodologies for buying content can be a bit obtuse. In the interest of transparency, the **University of Tennessee** library in Knoxville has clearly placed on their website how a vendor can and must conduct business with the University. It's all spelled out and each vendor needs to follow those guidelines if they have any hope in selling their products to that library.

There are programs that tell Public Library administrators what items have received the largest numbers of holds-or reserves- from their patrons. By knowing this information, the library gains great insight into what their public is looking for. For example, if ten or more people are requesting a certain title, that means that there are probably another ten who would want the same title, but just didn't take the time to make the request. Libraries throughout the country are using this type of report to actually buy materials that their patrons really want.

Along with more sophisticated methods to understand the buying and selling process, the

emergence of eBooks further adds to a situation that demands the acceptance of change for every library throughout the world. One of my colleagues used to say "change is security and security is change."

The great **Buddy Miles** sang the song "Them Changes" and said "my mind is goin' through them changes." Recognizing that change is everywhere and understanding how to cope with it and ultimately manage those changes should be a part of everyone's individual goal for success. 🌸

*Mike is currently the Managing Partner of **Gruenberg Consulting, LLC**, a firm he founded in January 2012 after a successful career as a senior sales executive in the information industry. His firm is devoted to provide clients with sales staff analysis, market research, executive coaching, trade show preparedness, product placement and best practices advice for improving negotiation skills for librarians and salespeople. His book, "**Buying and Selling Information: A Guide for Information Professionals and Salespeople to Build Mutual Success**" has become the definitive book on negotiation skills and is available on Amazon, Information Today in print and eBook, Amazon Kindle, B&N Nook, Kobo, Apple eBooks, OverDrive, 3M Cloud Library, Gale (GVRL), MyiLibrary, ebrary, EBSCO, Blio, and Chegg. www.gruenbergconsulting.com*

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Y'all — I have to say that I get credit for the Conference when **so many more people deserve the credit**. Besides **Toni Nix** (above), there is **Leah Hinds** who can do everything, believe me, EVERYTHING without complaint. Add **Sharna Williams** and **Tom Gilson** and the **registration desk crews**, etc., etc. That's just the tip of the iceberg! Really! Thanks to each of the **Charleston Conference**

crews!!! And I cannot leave off the **Charleston Conference directors** and **Beth Bernhardt** and **Leah Hinds** who work tirelessly on the Conference program, room assignments, speaker bios, etc., etc. It does indeed take a village — a **Charleston Conference Village** to have a conference. Thanks to all of you!

And you know how we love new things. I have to thank **Ann Okerson** and **Steve Goodall** who had the marvelous idea of the very first **Fast Pitch competition!**

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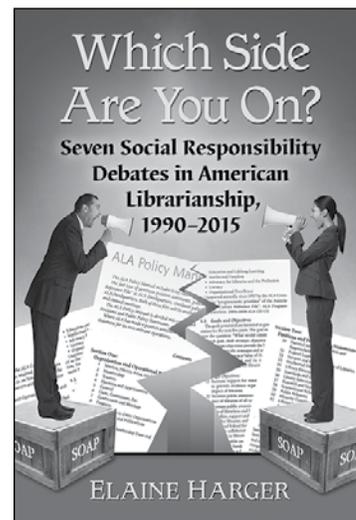
Charleston Comings and Goings: News and Announcements for the Charleston Library Conference

by **Leah Hinds** (Assistant Conference Director)
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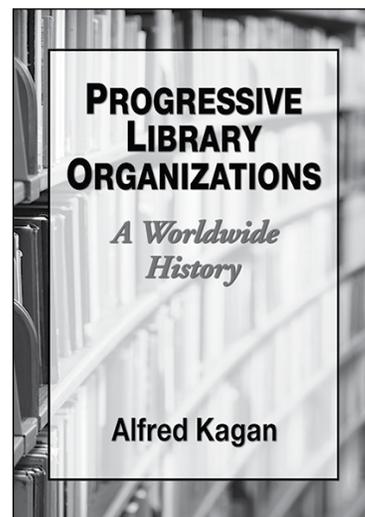
Welcome to the **Charleston Conference!** By the time this issue is distributed, the conference will be underway. Please be sure to check the **conference website** at <http://www.charlestonlibraryconference.com>, the **schedule** at <https://2016charlestonconference.sched.org/>, and **Don Hawkin's conference blog** at <http://www.against-the-grain.com/category/chsconfblog/> for all the latest news and announcements. We're looking forward to all of the pre-conferences, the Vendor Showcase, the thought-provoking presentations, the delicious local food and drinks, and networking with all of the projected 1,800 attendees at the conference. See you there! 🌸

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