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Both Sides Now: Vendors and Librarians--Value: A View from Different Angles

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Both Sides Now: Vendors and Librarians — Value: A View from Different Angles

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Over the last five years, I have had the pleasure to attend the **Charleston Conference** primarily as a speaker. Prior to that, I attended the conference for many years as both an exhibitor and an attendee while working as a sales executive for a number of information industry companies. I like being a speaker because it gives me the opportunity to interact with a wide variety of people from many types of libraries somewhat differently than trying to sell those same people a product/service.

I vividly remember the first time **Matt Dunie** and I spoke about “Negotiation Skills for Information Professionals” at the conference. **Matt** and I were accompanied at our session by a librarian, **Amelia Brunskill**. We asked her to join us because we felt that just having two sales and marketing guys presenting our views really needed the point of view of a library person to drive home our collective thoughts on how the vendor/librarian negotiation should essentially play out. Our goal was to speak about effective negotiation from the sales and marketing view and she was to talk about how the librarian works efficiently with the vendor.

I guess the **Charleston Conference** organizers were somewhat unsure as to how many people would attend our session because they scheduled us on a Thursday afternoon right after lunch in the back room of the restaurant located on the ground floor of the **Francis Marion Hotel**. That room was so remote and out of the way, that I didn’t even know it existed even though I had many a meal at that restaurant.

Earlier in the day I met my friend, **Russlene Waukechon** from the **Texas State Library and Archives Commission**. I asked her if she was going to attend our session. She said that she had planned on attending, but that a previously scheduled appointment might cause a delay in getting there on time. She was concerned that she would arrive too late to be seated. Being the eternal optimist that I am, I said that there would be plenty of room for her no matter when she arrived. She told me that she specifically knew of a number of people who had indicated to her of their desire to attend which meant to her that prime seating was going to be at a premium.

Matt, Amelia and I arrived a few minutes before the scheduled start of our session and very shortly thereafter, every seat was taken by an overflow crowd. People were standing in the back and by the door, not to mention a whole bunch of folks sitting on the floor. I knew immediately that the topic of “Negotiation Skills for Information Professionals” was of great *value* to all **Charleston Conference** attendees. After all, it’s a topic that has relevance for all librarians who interact with vendors at all types of libraries.

The following year, **Matt** and I were joined at our session by our mutual friend, **Carl Grant**, Associate Dean and CTO of the University Libraries at the **University of Oklahoma**. Instead of the back room of the restaurant, this time we were scheduled on a Friday afternoon at a ballroom located in the **Embassy Suites Hotel**, just a short walk from the **Francis Marion**. We stressed over the fact that “no one ever wants to attend a session on a Friday afternoon” of *any* conference. We arrived at the room to find that every seat was filled and over 100 people were there waiting for us to begin our session. We surmised that all those people were really there to see and hear **Carl**, but it was more the topic than **Carl, Matt** or me that drew the crowd. Clearly, those folks understood the *value* our topic represented for them.

At the 2016 pre-conference sessions that I recently participated in with my long-time friend, **Buzzy Basch**, I spoke about understanding the library market on Tuesday and on the following day, was panelist with a group of industry colleagues talking about negotiation skills for information professionals. As was the case from those sessions in the past, the popularity of the topic exceeded the space originally allotted which meant that the original room that was scheduled to host our talk had to be changed to a larger room due to the increased number of people paying money to hear us speak. Once again, the *value* of our session resonated with the conference attendees.

I am a firm believer in having a frank and honest exchange of ideas with the people that attend my sessions. My panel colleagues at the 2016 conference were similarly inclined. We all encouraged audience participation. At one point, a gentleman from the audience spoke about the librarian/vendor relationship. He stated to the group that it is of no *value* for the salesperson to travel to a library if the library does not have the money to pay for the product/services that the salesperson will undoubtedly attempt to sell. “You need to tell the sales rep upfront of your financial dilemma prior to making the appointment” he said. The salesperson should be aware of the financial situation of the library in relation to the possible purchase of any new materials. If the rep chooses to visit even after learning of your financial plight, then let the meeting begin.

The information industry salesperson has to constantly make *value* judgments as to the wisdom of planning a trip, completing that journey and ultimately reporting to management on the possible outcome of those visits to prospects and current library customers. Salespeople (especially the successful ones) don’t just wake up one morning and decide which libraries they are going to visit that day. Their sales meetings are always carefully planned. Visits that

involve planes, rental cars and hotels need prior attention so that the best rates are obtained so that the company travel budgets are spent wisely. Moreover, agendas of purpose for the meetings need to be sent in advance so as to make sure that all parties are on the same page with mutually understood goals and objectives for their meeting. It is of no *value* to attend a substantive meeting at a library without careful prior preparation by both parties.

The *value* for a sales rep is knowing that through careful preparation that there will be a receptive audience waiting to hear about a product/service/technology that will ultimately be beneficial for the library that ends up as a sale. The *value* for the library is knowing that the salesperson has carefully researched the library’s needs and is recommending a product/service/technology that will save the organization time and money while at the same time provide users with a valuable resource.

For both parties, *value* is in the relationship that builds trust. “People buy from people; they don’t buy from companies.” What this simply means is that whatever the purchases, we always feel more comfortable with a salesperson that is a known entity. “Yes, I’ve known Kevin for years and he’s always been honest” a customer may say to a colleague prior to Kevin calling on the library. That is a huge *value* for both the customer and the salesperson since they have established a mutual trust over a number of years of working together.

There are, of course, many hidden *values* for both the information professional and the sale rep. In the case of the salesperson, a sale may mean a significant commission which may help in reducing some personal financial burdens. The sale could have *value* if that sale gives the salesperson added bonuses and/or job promotion for achievement. On the other hand, a major library purchase may mean that the salesperson simply hits their sales goals and objectives for the year thus guaranteeing continued employment.

For the information professional, the *value* of the acquisition of a new resource may lift the burden of having to spend extra time in the library researching topics that now could be more easily found in this proposed new database or technology. Perhaps the librarian is stressed because the extra time spent researching interferes with coming home each night at a reasonable time. Having the ability to spend more quality time with the family for the information professional because the library purchased a significantly better database resource constitutes a clear *personal value* that cannot be minimized.

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Interview — Stephen Rhind-Tutt
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If I look back over the past 15 years or so I see that most of the big improvements in our field have been driven not by libraries or traditional publishers, but by organizations like Google, Facebook, and Wikipedia. Over the next 15 years we can do better, by focusing harder on what our users' needs really are. The most important of these for me is to untie the business of tenure and credentialing from old formats like books and journals. Websites, indices, video, software, 3D models, and countless other forms of expression are making definitive scholarly contributions and receiving substantial usage. We have to develop mechanisms to have their authors receive academic credit. In doing so we'll become less tied to journals and books, and we'll innovate faster and more effectively.

ATG: *Stephen, this must be an exciting but exhausting time for you and Alexander Street. Are you able to make time to relax and re-energize? What activities help you make that happen?*

SR-T: I just took two weeks of vacation in Greece. Costa Navarino. Beach. Kids. Reading *Ministers at War*, a great monograph that explores in depth what a tough time Churchill had keeping his team in check during World War II. Visiting Olympia and seeing the original stadium and ruins. I didn't check email. It was GREAT!

However, towards the end, leaving the beach for the hotel room in 95-degree heat with that saltwater sticky feeling one gets, I couldn't stop myself looking forward to engaging on those swirling issues like open access, outbound discovery, open linked data...

ATG: *Thank you so much for taking time from what must be a chaotic schedule to talk to us.*

SR-T: Thank you for interviewing me. 🐼

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So *value* is not only measured in the contents of the product/service/technology purchased, but also in the *personal value* that the purchase represents to both parties. A significant commission payment, a possible promotion, keeping one's job can all be counted as *values* coveted by the sales rep. For the library person, the *value* in the purchase may represent an upgrade to the library's collection and reputation, recognition from the Library Director acknowledging the wisdom of the librarian for the purchase or just the ability to get home each night at a reasonable hour due to using a new resource.

In 1981, the great **Phil Collins** released his first solo album after many years with the group, **Genesis**. Most reviewers at the time called *Face Value* an honest album.

In the world of negotiations, honesty by both sides goes hand-in-hand with understanding the *value* each party will derive by completing the buying and selling process in an open and forthright manner. 🐼

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 iBooks, OverDrive, 3M Cloud Library, Gale (GVRL), MyiLibrary, ebrary, EBSCO, Blio, and Chegg. www.gruenbergconsulting.com