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State of the "Big Deal"

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Against the Grain

"Linking Publishers, Vendors and Librarians"

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State of the "Big Deal"

by **Matthew Ismail** (Director of Collection Development, Park Library, Central Michigan University, 250 East Preston Street, Mount Pleasant, MI 48859; Phone: 989-774-1029) <ismailmd@cmich.edu>

I can still remember the time that, as a Graduate Research Assistant in the Department of History at the **University of Chicago**, the professor I was working with asked me to search *Historical Abstracts* on CD-ROM. It was 1993, and while I had been using print indexes for years, I had never searched a CD-ROM index before. I had to ask a librarian for help, and I got a rather perfunctory, "Look, you just type the search term in this box and use these limiters to refine your search. Then you hit enter. Just ask me if you need more help." And with that he left me floundering around for a while before I became frustrated and went back to the print version of the index.

It's hard to imagine now that searching such a simple electronic index could be so unfamiliar and befuddling! It's also hard to imagine today seeing piles of bound periodicals

stacked around the photocopiers, students and faculty copying articles and checking to be sure that they copied the whole image, student workers removing cart after cart of these bound volumes to a massive sorting area where they worked in shifts to shelve them...

We are, in so many ways, in a different age. The World Wide Web and electronic resources have transformed the work of research and learning in ways that render 1993 quite distant. And nothing tells us more about the changes in libraries than does the Big Deal, a publisher's strategy for delivering packages of electronic journal content to libraries that would not have been possible without both the WWW and ejournals.

The purpose of this special issue of *Against the Grain* is to present different perspectives on the Big Deal in this digital age. Our purpose is neither to condemn nor to cel-

ebate the Big Deal, but rather to understand its impact on various libraries and publishers since it emerged in the late 1990s.

Elisabeth Leonard begins our issue with "The Big Deal and SAGE," discussing how SAGE adapted its distribution and publication strategies in the early 2000s in response to changes in the scholarly communication market, driven by the emergence of the powerful online STEM publication field and the Big Deal. **Leonard** emphasizes that SAGE has always viewed the Big Deal as one option among many to distribute content and that SAGE is no more wedded to the Big Deal than they are to other models.

Sven Fund, on the other hand, brings the perspective of an independent publisher to the conversation in "Choosing Independence or Feeding the Beast? The Big Deal and Small or Society Publishers." **Fund** suggests that

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If Rumors Were Horses

Hello all! 2017 has started off with a bang!

Just heard that the incredible **Lenny Allen** (long known as Mr. Oxford) has joined **Bloomsbury Digital Resources** as global sales and marketing director. Hundreds of apologies that it took me so long to tell you! **Lenny's** new email address is <lenny.allen@bloomsbury.com> and it's very active! Congratulations, **Lenny**!!!

Pictured are **Hwee Ming**, Librarian at **Singapore Management University**, and **Leah Hinds** at the **2016 Charleston Conference Closing Session Poll-A-Palooza**.

And another apology to **Bob** the wonderful **Nardini** who sent me the **Lenny Allen** news that I just found in my old email. My excuse: Moving is a difficult thing after 40 years! We loved living on the Citadel campus around all the cadets. I especially miss the bugle calls throughout the day. But it's done and we are happy in our new digs. PO Box 799, Sullivan's Island, SC 29482. House address is 1712 Thompson Avenue. Come by and visit any time!

Like I said, moving is no picnic. Another email lost in my move! Just learned that long-time friend **Ian Singer** has taken leadership of **Credo Reference** as general manager. **Ian** had been chief content officer at **Credo** since September 2015. Before joining **Credo**, you will remember that **Ian** served as Vice President, Group Pub-

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Rumors *from page 6*

Erin is now Director of Collection Services, **Eric V. Hauser Memorial Library, Reed College**, <gallagher@reed.edu>. She says she arrived in Portland right before the worst winter storms they'd seen in 40 years, so she got a real baptism by snow. In fact, her first day at **Reed** didn't happen because they had to close all the schools due to freezing rain. **Erin** says she is getting into the swing of things, but she's really missing **Rollins** and Florida, (could it be the weather?). **Erin** will rejuvenate **ATG Hot Topics** from the West coast. Have y'all seen the **Penthouse Interviews** that **Erin** participated in during the **2016 Charleston Conference**?

www.charlestonlibraryconference.com

WOW! Can you believe it? **Elsevier** has acquired **Plum Analytics** from **EBSCO Information Services**. It is stated that the acquisition will enable **Elsevier** to significantly expand access to **Plum Analytics'** altmetrics to more researchers and more institutions. **Plum Analytics** was founded in early 2012 and was a pioneer in altmetrics, helping tell the story of research and researchers by revealing interest and usage beyond traditional measures. **Plum Analytics'** metrics will be incorporated into **Elsevier's** research products — **Menedeley**,

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State of the "Big Deal" *from page 1*

the conversation around the Big Deal has revolved mostly around cost efficiencies for libraries and the strategies of large publishers, but "What has been largely overlooked is the impact the Big Deal has on both the portfolio of publishers offering it as well as on partners that work with these publishers." **Fund** hopes that small publishers and librarians will both see the value in not being rolled up into Big Deals, offering more freedom and more variety in offerings as a result.

Susann deVries brings an economic perspective to bear on the Big Deal in "**The Economics of the Big Deal: The Bulls, the Bears and the Farm.**" Perhaps the central focus of **deVries'** article is on an accounting principle called the Triple Bottom Line, "an accounting basis that has gained significant attention in the business sector. Whereas the traditional, single bottom line only focused on profit, the TBL approach differs from profit-based or financial outlook to include social and ecological measures for assessment." **deVries** suggests that libraries need to think beyond the traditional financial bottom line — what's the cheapest option? — and begin to "take into account our social obligation to our patrons' research needs, and we must develop a long-term sustainable approach to access when analyzing the pros and cons of purchasing any Big Deal. Multiple dimensions and perspectives have to be taken into account."

Jonathon Nabe's "After the Big Deals Are Done" brings the perspective of a librarian at a research university who has overseen a divestment from Big Deal packages because his institution no longer found them sustainable. When **Nabe** published "Leaving the Big Deal: Consequences and Next Steps" in 2012, it was quite astonishing to think of any research library *not* subscribing to Big Deal packages. **Nabe** states in 2017, however, that "All evidence indicates that subscriptions to entire publisher portfolios are not essential to the functioning of a modern research university."

Doug Way's "Doubling Down on the Big Deal in Wisconsin" describes the varied career of the Big Deal at a library that was initially quite opposed to them. Having to present the wide-ranging pros and cons of the Big Deal to a skeptical audience was important to **Way**, as it is for the Triple Bottom Line championed by **deVries**, because he was able to subscribe to some Big Deals precisely because he was able to justify the financial bottom line as a compelling reason.

Steve Sowards, similarly, presents the relationship of his institution to Big Deals in "**The Big Deal at Michigan State University.**" **Sowards** presents the many compelling reasons for maintaining their Big Deals, both financial and based on their compelling support for research.

Finally, in our concluding article, "**Managing the Big Deal,**" **Monica Moore** presents a perspective not often heard in these discussions: that of an Electronic Resources Librarian who has to implement and maintain these Big

Deal packages and the ramifications of this maintenance for the library and its staff. "Any time libraries buy or lease something in bulk, it requires translation into the infrastructure that we use to manage our library collection. This includes our integrated library system (ILS) and our discovery systems, and any type of knowledge base that includes the holdings information for the journals in a deal. There is a significant amount of staff time and resources involved with these efforts, not only for the initial acquisition, but for the ongoing management of this bundled content."

What we can see from these varied and interesting perspectives is that the Big Deal is neither going to remain as ubiquitous as it was nor is it necessarily going away. The Triple Bottom Line approach, a version of which is often present in libraries' decision-making whether they call it that or not, will doubtless encourage libraries both to continue their Big Deals, as at **MSU** and **Wisconsin**, or to discontinue them, as I recently did for most of them at **Central Michigan University**.

This is an important discussion and I hope these articles enlighten readers to the various perspectives on the Big Deal and the direction of conversations at various publishers and libraries. 🌸