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The Scholarly Publishing Scene — Finding Stuff Out

Column Editor: **Myer Kutz** (President, Myer Kutz Associates, Inc.) <myerkutz@aol.com>

Back in the day — a little over 30 years ago — when I took over as chair of the Executive Council of the Professional and Scholarly Publishing Division (PSP) of the **Association of American Publishers (AAP)**, I did two things immediately. I reinstituted the PSP annual conference, after several years when the **AAP** hierarchy decreed that the conference be curtailed and folded more or less into an **AAP** annual meeting. (The late **Brooks Thomas**, head of the trade house, **Harper & Row**, disparaged the PSP conference as nothing more than a few days when people networked for jobs.) The other thing I did was start a quarterly newsletter, the **PSP Bulletin**, which I've edited for the past decade or more. The main reason I made these moves was to improve communication for and between PSP member companies.

The **AAP**, a trade association with publishing companies as members, was started by **Bradford Wiley** and associates in the early 1970s. When I joined **Mr. Wiley's** company as an acquisitions editor in 1976, I was invited to attend the annual conference, which was held in the winter back then at Absecon, a posh watering hole favored by actress **Grace Kelly's** patrician father for its proximity to his Philadelphia home base. The conference, still held in early February but now in a Washington, DC hotel, features numerous speeches and panel sessions over an afternoon, a full day and the following morning, is still going strong. There's even a preconference session, which goes through lunch on the first day. Over the years, I should note, as the number of executives and managers as well as technical specialists have proliferated throughout publishing houses, the composition of registrants has changed, and I don't think that more than a very few editors get to attend.

Budget constraints have forced a recent cut-back in the **Bulletin's** publication. Still, PSP, led by its executive director, **John Tagler**, remains committed to communication. In addition to the annual conference, PSP holds numerous executive council and committee meetings with guest speakers, educational workshops and boot camps, which offer training for young staffers in the business of publishing books and journals. **John**, with the aid of PSP colleagues **Sara Pinto** and **Kate Kolendo**, publishes his own email news service called **PSP... Links A periodic alerting service leading you to information relevant to the professional and scholarly publishing industry**. He's sent out 192 of these emails, including the one on this past January 15, the latest as I write this column. His Table of Contents typically is: 1. What's New on the AAP Website?; 2. PSP Education and Training Programs; 3. Other Programs of Interest; 4. New Job Postings; 5. Suggested Reading. **John** will link to articles of interest

with regard to **AAP** affairs, copyright, digital piracy, eBooks, higher education (my old associate, **Allan Wittman**, used to call PSP "highest education publishing"), libraries, open access, professional and scholarly publishing and some miscellaneous links. The email contains a thorough alerting service; the January 15 email lists nearly four dozen websites and articles of interest, with most of the listings annotated. And yes, these emails do offer up details of current open job openings in the PSP industry. While the job postings are no longer of any interest for me, I find the rest of the compilations very useful as one way to stay in touch with an industry with which I'm still very much involved.

Recently, I asked a few colleagues where they get PSP industry information. Here are their responses:

A senior editor at a major university press, who recently stepped down from a management position, writes: "I get a lot of useful information from Scholarly Kitchen, one of the most reliable websites (especially in a post-truth era) out there. It is slanted towards STEM publishing, but it is still useful for me, a humanist, to read just about every blog entry that is posted, as well as the comments. (I do this every day as my mid-morning break from the usual madness.) I also get some information from a list serve that deals with issues in the humanities. Prior to my return to the editorial fold, I attended the **Charles-ton Conference**, which was always stimulating and enormously useful, especially regarding digital matters and evolving acquisitions practices."

A medical doctor and professor with a connection to PSP writes: "I am the odd duck out since I work for academia in a standard tenured professorship. My only contact with publishing is when I publish a book or edit a journal. So, my insight into what is going on in the industry is largely based on conversations with the editors with whom I am currently working and discussions at the PROSE contest meeting. For example, I had no idea until I heard it last week that textbook publishing was taking a big hit during the last two years."

I want to note here that the main stream media (msm) covers the publishing industry almost exclusively with regard to trade publishing. The few times that the msm's interest has been piqued in recent years have involved scandals or crises, such as the revolts over STM journal and college textbook pricing, academic fraud, or predatory journals.

An experienced publisher writes: "Monthly meetings of the PSP Books Committee (we invite whomever strikes our fancy and have license to be completely inquisitive) and AAP monthly and annual stats, plus all the usual assns: Authors Guild, PEN, etc. And various industry newsletters like Outsell."

And finally, the head of a university press located far from America writes: "My experience may be a bit different from most people's because of distance, but I get 80% of my information about what's going on via web newsletters. The exception, of course, is what I pick up at meetings and book fairs. I regularly go to: PSP Meeting (somewhat useful); AAUP Meeting (somewhat useful); Frankfurt Book Fair (very useful); London Book Fair (somewhat useful). My main online sources are: PSP... Links (very useful); AAUP Director's mailing list (somewhat useful); Scope eKnowledge (daily — somewhat useful); Scholarly Kitchen (occasionally useful)."

For my own part, in addition to relying on **John Tagler's** PSP Links emails, I, too, consult the Scholarly Kitchen regularly, and I cover the PSP Annual Conference as a journalist for the **PSP Bulletin**. My articles on the conference may be written from a personal perspective and have a journalist's gloss, but they're based on extensive notes. So I do have to stay awake at all the sessions I attend.

One communication mode none of my correspondents mentioned explicitly was schmoozing with fellow workers around the water cooler or with associates from other companies on the phone or in person. You know, industry gossip, in addition to any other information from one set of lips to another set of ears. Should I have found the omission a bit odd? When I used to do market research into where engineers got information, "Joe down the hall" was always among the top sources. The name survey respondents used was always "Joe," by the way, although it would as likely be "Jane" nowadays. But like the rest of us, I'd guess, these days engineers turn to screens before they pick up the telephone or venture out of the office. For better or worse it's the way of the world now.

One more thing: the topic of industry statistics, e.g., sales. I'll get into this topic in a future column. 🐼