

September 2017

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Recommended Citation

Parker, David (2017) "Blurring Lines-When all the Lines Blur... the Patron, Publisher and Librarian All Win," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 29: Iss. 4, Article 68.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.7917>

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Blurring Lines — When all the Lines Blur ... the Patron, Publisher and Librarian will All Win

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During the **2016 Charleston Conference**, **Rick Anderson** and I presented on a hypothetical future in which a demand driven platform would emerge where publishers and patrons would meet, “eBay-style” to virtually negotiate terms of access (triggers, length of term of access and price) and in a multimedia environment. Why access eBooks and video, for example, across different DDA platforms from the same provider? Taking this line of thinking to its logical conclusion, one might posit a universal, multimedia platform for all content types from all publishers wherein real-time data about usage and price paid inform what the publisher proposes as a fee and what the library/patron are willing to pay in response. Of course, this is a vast hypothetical and **Rick** was charged with presenting three factors impeding this future state and I presented three factor impelling us toward this future state.

I find myself frequently returning to this thought experiment as we at **Alexander Street** have been involved in a grand transition from delivering our streaming video via subject and publisher-based collections to delivering our video content via multi-disciplinary aggregation with a parallel DDA offering; all while integrating our products and services into the larger **ProQuest** suite of solutions. Where might the “thought experiment” take us when journal articles, musical scores, video, eBooks, archival documents, musical tracks, newspapers, datasets, and photo images are all extant, in one home, with powerful platform technology at hand?

As information suppliers, we are constantly operating in three distinct but intertwined activities: securing and delivering content, providing a powerful platform solution and developing services that enrich the experience of content and platform. And, I often argue, we are navigating these three intertwined activities during an evolution in our operating environment that is defined by three irreversible trends. Though they are advancing in fits and starts, the trajectory is clearly forward, they are open access, demand driven acquisition, and data informed decision making. There is, however, a fourth new and emerging trend that while nascent is nonetheless sure to be as significant as the other three in the coming decade: that is the delivery of learning content, writ large, through the library and its technical infrastructure, either in partnership or in competition with the large learning companies (e.g., **Pearson** and **McGraw Hill**) and open educational resource (OER) providers — like **OpenStax**. This is a hotly contested perspective, but I maintain it is a significant and inevitable trend for two key reasons. First, the business model whereby learning content is monetized on a per-student basis at very high per student costs is under ever-growing assault. And, second, the growth of alternative learning content (for fee and OER) on the open web needs the curation and indexing of a typical library database to be widely discovered and accessed.

Pulling this all together — a broader thought experiment, if you will — requires of us an embracing of key assumptions about the future, whether we be leaders charting the course of the future of information service companies or administrators directing the university library:

1. Open Access must become a broad concept — Open will mean open access research, open educational resources, with quality indexing and integration within platforms of open sources of information from multimedia providers not specifically and directly monetizing their content via access charges. This is all the best content, for free and for fee, discoverable on one platform with equal quality indexing and metadata.
2. The digital space that is the library must serve the whole faculty member and the whole student — I spent the first nine years of my career with **Cengage** and **Pearson** (Learning) and

the second nine years of my career with **iGroup**, **Alexander Street** and now **ProQuest** (Research). It has always struck me how shockingly separate these worlds are. Very, very few people transit these two spaces during their careers. Were there more “cross-fertilization” in these professional spaces, the “business models” would not seem so insurmountable as obstacles to achieving the win all stakeholders are after in learning: better outcomes and better cost efficacy. Faculty and students toggle all day long between teacher and researcher and student and researcher. It makes little sense that the content and services required to complete these complimentary roles are served by distinct and separate companies with radically different business models.

3. Demand driven acquisition must get smarter — Much has been written about the damage demand driven acquisition has done to smaller university presses. And I have seen firsthand the struggles of niche educational video providers reliant upon multiple views of their content to achieve a monetized use. The logic seems to go that only publishers with high use content or very large and deep backlists can survive DDA. But this is thinking too narrowly. Publishers and library administration simply need to engage in a meaningful dialogue around cost of access, and an evolved platform is the mechanism to achieve this outcome.

The conversation cannot be forced, but it can be facilitated in “electronic barter.” At present, the terms of access are narrow, the conversation between publisher and patron is opaque, and the returns are lopsided. Our technology is smart enough to overcome these obstacles, and publishers and information providers and

librarians responsible for budgets and purchasing are smart enough to understand that different use cases for different types of content merit different access terms and pricing.

4. Platforms must become multi-media, truly multi-media and the total number of platforms must continually decline — Although the **American Psychological Association** has not formally recognized “Platform Weariness” as a condition, I know many librarians who are certain they are suffering from this malady. At **ER&L** this past spring, the growth of evidence based acquisition offerings that are publisher-direct was significant. In most cases, the publisher platform for evidence-based access already existed, so this was simply the extension of a new business model, but why? Why not deliver EBA through an existing multi-publisher platform? As a former director of a small, specialty publishing company I was engaged in no fewer than 20 distinct distribution partnerships that each came with a platform. And, each relationship/platform entailed different decisions about access, pricing, etc., but none were truly multi-media and very broadly multi-publisher (except **Amazon** ...). I imagine a future state with a handful of very, very smart platforms that publishers, patrons and the information provider/platform provider are cooperating, achieving stated critical goals and measures and exceptional outcomes are had by patrons and platform weariness is no more.

Here is to the future! 🌱

