2018

Back Talk — The Disintegrated Library System

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Recommended Citation

O'Donnell, Jim (2018) "Back Talk — The Disintegrated Library System," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 30: Iss. 4, Article 60.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.8289>

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Back Talk — The Disintegrated Library System

Column Editor: **Jim O'Donnell** (University Librarian, Arizona State University) <jod@asu.edu>

I'm as nostalgic for the old card catalog as anyone, but you have to admit it had its drawbacks. You don't bump into strange backsides any more, you don't rise from a crouch only to crack your skull on a drawer somebody else left open, and you don't look on a set of drawers for an author like **Cicero** or **Shakespeare** and shake your head in despair at the confusing welter of information. Sing Ho! for the Integrated Library System (ILS) that rescued us from that world!

But ... is it time for a little disintegration? Let me try a theory here.

Fifty years ago we had several "systems" side by side. One was the set of files for orders and invoices and the tiny catalog-fitting order slips that were among the cards until the book showed up. Another was the separate set of files for tracking and checking in serials — and I doubt anybody misses serials check-in as a way of life. Another was the card catalog itself: the ultimate warehouse-management system, with a master card for everything and every card in its place. The shelf list was the king of that domain, usually hidden away somewhere from grubby-fingered students, and the public catalog offered its Paper User Interface (PUI). And there was a circulation system kept separately. I'm too young to be sure (and I love having an excuse to write the words "I'm too young" for any purpose!), but I think circulation systems were the first to computerize. Certainly when **ASU's Hayden Library** opened in 1966, part of the hype was the proud display of the punch card-based system then in use.

The deep insight underlying the ILS was that all these could be as one. From selector's recommendation to user's return of a book, all in one system. Yes, the transition was sticky. Where I was, the real problem (apart from incomprehension and nostalgia) of the new ILS was that we had "machine-readable" (there are other people

too young to know that phrase) records for only some (the more recent acquisition), of our collections, and for about five years we had to chivvy our students to remember that the online catalog that was such a miracle wasn't the only source of information about our books. But most places did catalog recon and even that drawback went away. Brave new world.

Of course, once again **Marshall McLuhan** was right. The content of a new medium is an old medium, he said. We had shiny new computers, and what they contained was an automated version of the card catalog, with other things glued on. But one reason **McLuhan** was indeed right is that the familiarity of the concept makes it easier to accept the new. I am old enough to feel at home in the traditional catalog, and so I can carry over habits and practices from that space and then be delighted that I can do more than title/author/subject searches.

But here's where I begin to wonder about the place we've gotten to. Nobody under the age of — shall we say 35? — has any meaningful experience of the traditional catalog. I don't want to have to explain to a bright undergraduate just what the difference is between a "one search" interface and "the catalog." Even if I got the point across, that young'un wouldn't know why I cared. The one thing we all, old and young, have learned is how to "do a search" and we've all acquired new skills and new blind spots.

So where is the ILS today? We still have it, though we're trying to school ourselves to call it our LSP (Library Services Platform), but it still quacks and waddles a lot like an ILS. But now we've added the "discovery layer." Notice

the metaphor: it's a layer, a thin slice of something, added on top of something else considerably more substantial.

An important reason why we continue to speak that way is because our ILS/LSP has changed so little. The MARC record based catalog, however sup-

plemented, is still obsessively focused on the things we possess in a given library. It started as a warehouse management system and in its heart it still is. The surest way to get into our ILS is for us to buy something, unwrap it, put a sticker on it, and put it on a shelf.

But another thing our new users don't care about — and will care about less and less as a greater and greater portion of what we own is in off-site shelving — is where something is located or who paid for it. Their interest in a given information resource is pretty binary: am I able to use it, yes or no? If yes, fine. If no, bummer. But we increasingly answer "yes" for a vast variety of things that our particular library doesn't own. Start with online journals and databases and eBooks that we license but that never enter any building or computer of our own — and can disappear when the eBook vendor decides to clean out its attic! (Grumble, grumble: matter for another crotchety column.) Then add all the riches of our increasingly rapid and seamless interlibrary loan. As user, I care about whether we have the object on a patron-facing shelf if I'm in a tearing hurry for it and there's no e-version that I can even peek at. (In a hurry like that, my first resort is **Amazon** search-inside-the-book. I can usually verify that footnote, find that quotation, or get a good sense how important this book will be for me while waiting for ILL to get it to me in a couple of days.)

So let me make a suggestion, first about words, then about things. Why don't we begin to speak of a "discovery system" and then mention, in a subordinate clause somewhere, the "catalog layer?" Isn't it time to focus more on the wizardry that lets us find and request the thing we want — wherever it is — and stop thinking about ownership, location, and the like?

Be careful about agreeing with me, because the logical conclusion of taking that approach will be that the effective discovery system does not need to be co-located with the users or their library. Who might be the one to give us an academic discovery system that knows the world of our curated information so well that we all use it in preference to anything we buy and pay for and install and configure locally? I don't know that they'd ever be interested, but is there really anything to prevent **Amazon** or **Google** from eating the lunch of every ILS vendor going?

Just to be clear, here's what I as user and as librarian want. I want a search tool that knows at least the universe of library-held and library-curated and library-known information. (There's a tension here between the desire to find everything and the desire to filter what we find by some criteria of quality. "It's in the library" has been such a criterion. Can we reproduce it in this space?) This will include things that have restrictions on access and will include things that are open

continued on page 85

ADVERTISERS' INDEX

23	ACCESSIBLE ARCHIVES	13	COLD SPRING HARBOR LAB PRESS	9	PROJECT MUSE
2	ADAM MATTHEW DIGITAL	43	EMERY-PRATT	31	READEX, A DIVISION OF NEWSBANK
87	AMERICAN CHEMICAL SOCIETY	3	GOBI LIBRARY SOLUTIONS	15	SAGE PUBLICATIONS
69	BUSINESS EXPERT PRESS / MOMENTUM PRESS	11	IGI GLOBAL	27	SPIE DIGITAL LIBRARY
5	ATG	35	INFORMS	7	TAYLOR & FRANCIS GROUP
73	THE CHARLESTON ADVISOR	88	MIDWEST LIBRARY SERVICE	63	WT COX INFORMATION SERVICES
8	THE CHARLESTON REPORT	19	THE MIT PRESS		
		59	PRENAX		

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3700 N St, NW
Washington, DC 20057
Phone: (202) 687-7607
library.georgetown.edu

BACKGROUND/HISTORY: <https://www.library.georgetown.edu/about/history>

NUMBER OF STAFF AND RESPONSIBILITIES: Professional: 53, Support Staff: 59, Student Assistants: 17

OVERALL LIBRARY BUDGET: Materials: \$7,142,935; Salaries + Wages: \$6,988,068; Operating: \$2,187,925.

TYPES OF MATERIALS YOU BUY: Books, journals, databases, DVDs, video streaming services, eBooks, data sets, other.

WHAT TECHNOLOGIES DOES YOUR LIBRARY USE TO SERVE MOBILE USERS? We make an effort to use responsive design on all of our websites so that they can be used on mobile devices.

DOES YOUR LIBRARY HAVE AN ILS OR ARE YOU PART OF A COLLABORATIVE ILS? Yes, Collaborative ILS (WRLC) Alma.

DO YOU HAVE A DISCOVERY SYSTEM? Yes, Primo.

DOES YOUR LIBRARY HAVE A COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT OR SIMILAR DEPARTMENT? Yes, we have a Collections, Research and Instruction department.

IF SO, WHAT IS YOUR BUDGET AND WHAT TYPES OF MATERIALS ARE YOU PURCHASING? \$7,142,935. Purchasing both Print and Electronic.

WHAT PROPORTION OF YOUR MATERIALS ARE LEASED AND NOT OWNED? Approximately 10% is leased.

WHAT DO YOU THINK YOUR LIBRARY WILL BE LIKE IN FIVE YEARS? I think that we'll be getting ready for a major library renovation in five years that will truly make the library at Georgetown University the intellectual hub of campus.

WHAT EXCITES OR FRIGHTENS YOU ABOUT THE NEXT FIVE YEARS? Our new Dean of Libraries at Georgetown, Harriette Hemmasi, is starting in August 2018 and I'm tremendously excited about what she's going to be able to help us accomplish.

IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE YOU THINK OUR READERS SHOULD KNOW? Libraries have become places that aren't just about the stuff we have, like books or computers, but about what we empower people to do. It's a place where anyone's ideas can come to life.

Back Talk from page 86

access. (If this tool were to exist, it would put great pressure in favor of more open access.) It will know where things are and how to get them — in the sense that it will know what is analog material available by interlibrary loan, what is analog material only available to onsite visitors, what is digital material that requires some kind of ongoing financial relationship with the provider (a subscription or a license), what is digital material that's available for some kind of by-the-drink payment, and what is digital material that is openly accessible. And it will know what to do in order to enable the user to access and use that material — and it will do it for me. Our local delivery systems will need to integrate with the disintegrated library system well enough to perform the fulfillment function.

Doesn't that give us a chance for the DLS — Disintegrated Library System? Run our business of buying and tracking with one system, provide access to data about the things that we happen to contribute to the global information space with another, and let the discovery system do all the hard stuff? Am I nuts? 🐻

Don's Conference Notes from page 78

Endnotes

1. http://cdn.meta.com/assets/downloads/Pub_Bibliometric.pdf
2. <https://www.mysciencework.com/>
3. <https://www.typefi.com/>
4. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magic_Roundabout_\(Swindon\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magic_Roundabout_(Swindon))
5. <https://www.wizdom.ai/>
6. <https://www.editage.com/>
7. See <https://www.cell.com/figure360>
8. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Cialdini
9. Features of the new website are described at NEJM.org/revitalized, where there is also a link to an editorial discussing its development.
10. <https://www.growkudos.com/>
11. <http://www.emeraldgroupublishing.com/realworldimpact.htm>
12. <https://www.elsevier.com/solutions/scival>
13. See author-path.com.

Rumors from page 63

BREAKING NEWS — Elsevier has signed a definitive agreement to acquire **Aries Systems**, a leader in scientific publication workflow solutions headquartered outside Boston, MA. Aries' offerings are used by journals, books and other publications for manuscript submission, peer review, production tracking and eCommerce. Aries was founded by **Lyndon Holmes** in 1986 and has successfully developed several generations of technologies to support publications processes, including **Editorial Manager**, an online manuscript submission and peer-review system. Elsevier and Aries have

worked closely for nearly 20 years and Elsevier already uses the **Editorial Manager** platform for a significant number of journals, including its high profile **Cell Press** portfolio and many society titles. The transaction is subject to customary conditions and regulatory consents and is expected to close in the third quarter of 2018. **Scholarly Kitchen** via **Kent Anderson** has a detailed discussion of this. See — <https://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2018/08/06/interpreting-elseviers-acquisition-aries-systems/>.

Thanks to all of you who proposed sessions for the **2018 Charleston Conference**! It's going to be another great one! Have you registered yet? The early bird registration deadline is September 14! Time's a wastin' See you all soon! **Yr. Ed.** 🐻

This little fella is **Ayden Shetty** (2yrs old) who apparently loves **Mike Gruenberg's** book and says "information" every time he holds it. His parents, **Emily** and **Ash Shetty**,

are dear friends and colleagues of **Mike**. Guess it's true — you're never too young to love books. Thanks for sharing!