November 2013

And We Werent There

Nat Bodian
Publisher's Marketing Consultant

Follow this and additional works at: http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg
Part of the Library and Information Science Commons

Recommended Citation
Bodian, Nat (1991) "And We Werent There," Against the Grain: Vol. 3: Iss. 3, Article 9.
DOI: https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.1085

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.
And We Weren’t There

Otto Rapp, Pergamon, and Robert Maxwell:
A Nostalgic Recollection

By Nat Bodian, Publisher’s Marketing Consultant

Volume 3, Number 2 of Against the Grain carried two items which
brought both sorrow and nostalgic reflection. I refer on the one hand to
the passing of my dear friend Otto Rapp and the beautiful tribute by
Oliver Sitka of Oliver’s Books.

The other item was the news about the buyout of Pergamon by
Elsevier. I had for eight years been head of all marketing and promo-
tion at Elsevier (1963–1971) and for all of those years and many since
then had spent many days and evenings with Otto Rapp when we were
fellow exhibitors at numerous scientific and library meetings. Otto
and I shared two things in common, a love of books and of marketing,
and we had many discussions on our favorite subjects. From these
discussions came a number of case histories I subsequently used in my
books on book marketing and direct mail promotion of books.

Now about the news that Pergamon was bought out by Elsevier. It
reminded me of a time in 1970–71 when Pergamon tried to make an
Elsevier acquisition and failed. That acquisition was me. Let me ex-
plain. After a scientific meeting where Otto and I spent some time
together, he telephoned me at the Elsevier office in New York. He
said there was an opening at Pergamon’s Elmsford New York head-
quartes for a book marketer—that he’d spoken to Mr. Maxwell about
me and that Maxwell showed great interest in my coming to Pergamon.

Otto then asked me to mail him
an up-to-date resume and the salary I
would want to leave Elsevier for Per-
gamon.

I provided both. Otto subsequently
told me he’d passed the information
on to Maxwell and he was now very
interested. Would I come to Elmsford
one day when Maxwell was next in
the U.S.

I said “No,” I wouldn’t cheat on
Elsevier by taking a working day off,
but would gladly meet Maxwell in
New York City any day either after
working hours or close to the end of
my normal workday.

A date was set up for a meeting
with Maxwell in the Park Avenue
offices of Maxwell’s New York City
attorney — a locale very close to
Elsevier’s 52 Vanderbilt Avenue
quarters, for 5 P.M.

When I arrived at Maxwell’s at-
torney’s office, Otto was waiting for
me in the hallway at the elevators.
He ushered me into what appeared to
be a board room. It had a long table
holding about 15 or more chairs,
about seven or eight of them occu-
pied by various members of the Per-
gamon sales and marketing staff who
had apparently come down from
Elmsford for the occasion.

I was seated at the far end of the
long table. The chair at the opposite
end was empty. We all sat quietly for
five or so minutes. Suddenly, the
legendary Robert Maxwell strode into
the room, a paper in one hand. He did
not sit down. Looking at the paper,
which apparently was my resume, he
read aloud a summary of my publish-
ing experience, with
all eyes focused on him. At the con-
clusion of his reading, he turned his
eyes toward me and asked if I had
anything to add. I replied “No.” He
then eyed his seated employees and
asked if anyone had any questions to
ask me. None — only silence.

Maxwell then turned to me again,
his eyes focused on mine, and spoke:
“You are hired. You will start (at
Pergamon) on ___ (he mentioned a
date about 15 or so days in the fu-
ture), and your salary will be ___ (a
figure several thousand dollars lower
than what I had asked for.)

He then turned and walked out of
the room.

The following morning, I tele-
phoned Otto. I told him I’d pur-
posefully stated a salary figure suffi-
ciently high enough to justify a move
from Elsevier to Pergamon, and that
I would not consider the move for a
dollar less. I was therefore turning
down Maxwell’s offer.

So my move from Elsevier to
Pergamon never materialized. But
now, some 20 years later, Elsevier
has Pergamon. And as I read about
Robert Maxwell’s recent acquisi-
tion of The New York Daily News, I
could not help but recall a time when
a Maxwell visit to New York City
failed to provide an acquisition he
sought.

June 1991 / Against the Grain