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ATG Interviews Mark Kendall

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by Katina Strauch (Editor, Against the Grain) <kstrauch@comcast.net>

ATG: Come again? YBP (Baker & Taylor) has just bought Blackwell Book Services in the US (Blackwell NA)? This is startling news! What will happen to the Blackwell offices in the US?

MK: Our top priority will be to work very closely with Blackwell staff to ensure that all Blackwell customers continue to receive the highest possible level of service while also beginning the process of transitioning accounts over to YBP systems as smoothly and as efficiently as possible. We have tremendous respect for the knowledge and professionalism of the Blackwell team, and will depend on their expertise as the transition goes forward. However, due to redundancies in the workforce and operations, over the course of the next 10 to 12 months, Blackwell's Blackwood, NJ facility will be closed. Blackwell's Lake Oswego, Oregon offices will remain open for a year or more, depending on business needs.

ATG: What will happen to the Blackwell sales reps et al. (John Laraway? Matt Naman? Etc.) When will we know who we will deal with?

MK: We are sensitive to the fact that Blackwell regional sales managers (RSM’s), like their YBP counterparts, have established close working relationships with the customers they serve. As noted above, we have great respect for the expertise and relationships that the Blackwell RSM’s have with the libraries they serve, so we will be working very closely with them to transition each library customer from the Blackwell system to YBP.

We are pleased that a number of Blackwell regional sales managers (RSM’s) will become part of the YBP sales team. During the transition period, we will also be evaluating sales territories to ensure that all customers are receiving the highest level of service possible. Customers will be notified of any changes in sales representation, if applicable, before January 1. In addition, Blackwell’s customer service staff will be retained in Oregon for an extended period of time. They will be instrumental in helping transition Blackwell customers to YBP based on their extensive knowledge of the Blackwell account structure, approval plan and systems.

ATG: What will happen to existing Blackwell approval plans? Firm orders?

MK: All Blackwell approval plans and firm order customers will be gradually transitioned to YBP and this will be done in close coordination with each library in a manner that respects existing library workflow processes. We have a great deal of experience transitioning Blackwell customers to our systems, and that expertise will only be multiplied with the help of the Blackwell customer service and sales teams.

ATG: The Blackwell and YBP thesauri are very different. How will Blackwell Profiles be incorporated into YBP? And isn’t this going to be a lot of extra work for already overworked acquisitions and collection development professionals? Will all approval plans profiles have to be redone really?

MK: Yes, the Blackwell and YBP approval profiling methodologies are quite different. However, YBP has significant experience converting Blackwell approval plans to YBP plans. Our experience shows that simply mapping out, or converting the Blackwell profiles without discussion in the library can take as long or longer than an actual session in the library and does not always yield optimal results. These sessions also allow us to develop a clearer understanding of the library’s collection objectives and, most importantly, the opportunity to engage in productive two-way dialogue that becomes the cornerstone of our future working relationship. Very recently, for example, one of my colleagues was in a library with a sales person converting a profile from another vendor. The selectors had arrived well prepared and seemed to enjoy the sessions. Their comments were positive. They had not reviewed their existing profile in a while, or they were new to their job and all felt it was a worthwhile exercise and not a lot of extra work at all.

Our goal today is the same as it was 35 years ago: to truly craft a precise profile that ensures that libraries receive materials (both print and electronic) that accurately match their current collection development objectives. Our plan is to begin converting approval plans over the coming weeks and Blackwell approval plan customers can expect to hear from both Blackwell and YBP sales representatives as they work together to help begin and facilitate this process. As noted above, YBP has a great deal of experience transitioning Blackwell customers to our systems, and that expertise will only be multiplied with the help of the Blackwell customer service and sales teams.

ATG: How many approval plans are there that need this type of attention?

MK: There are approximately 150 plans. ATG: This is bound to hurt competition in the book business. Comments? What changes will we see, especially in pricing?

MK: Actually, I would argue that this is probably the most competitive time in the history of bookselling. While there still remain a good number of traditional academic library bookellers (Midwest, Coutts, Emery-Pratt, and others) for libraries to choose from, there is also significant competition from less traditional library bookellers including Amazon, Goodies, and eBook aggregators such as EBL, NetLibrary, publisher direct content bundles (both print and electronic), print on demand (POD) options, and specialized out of print (OP) vendors to name but a few. With this level of competition will come competitive pricing.

ATG: What has Blackwell retained? The bookstores and Lindsay and Croft? Other?

MK: Blackwell’s United Kingdom office will continue to operate separately. This includes incorporating Lindsay and Croft into their existing Oxford business as well as continuing to operate their retail book stores.

YBP Library Services and Blackwell Ltd. have entered into a reciprocal supply agreement under which Blackwell will supply U.K. published academic books to YBP and, in turn, YBP will supply U.S. published academic books to Blackwell.

ATG: What will be the name of the new company? Who will be in charge? This applies to both Blackwell and YBP/B&T?

MK: Blackwell customers will transition to YBP Library Services, which will replace the Blackwell name in the parts of the world YBP will serve (North and South America, Asia, Australia, New Zealand, the Middle East and the Pacific Rim). The Blackwell name will be retained in the United Kingdom which includes the Lindsay and Croft business.

Blackwell will serve libraries in Europe and Africa. The Blackwell retail business in the U.K. will also remain intact. Blackwell will be under the management of CEO Andrew Hutchings and YBP. Baker and Taylor’s academic division, is led by George Coe, President of B&T's Library and Education division.

ATG: Why are you not retaining the Blackwell name? You retained the YBP name.

MK: The Blackwell name will be retained by the UK based Blackwell business. This includes the library service business that will support libraries in Europe and Africa as well as the Blackwell retail business.

ATG: If prepayments have been made to Blackwell will they be transferred to YBP?

MK: Prepayments and/or deposit accounts with Blackwell will be transferred to YBP once a library’s account is transitioned to YBP.

ATG: Can you be more specific about how this transition will be managed? It’s effective December 9? My heavens, its Dec. 11 now!

MK: For the time being, it will be “business as usual.” We are now entering an approximately 45-60 day period where we will be undertaking the necessary internal work to prepare for the customer account transitions. Blackwell and YBP operational and sales/service staffs will be working closely in planning each step of the transition. In the continued on page 42
From the Reference Desk

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Sage Reference adds another title to its collection of encyclopedias that draw their strength from a multidisciplinary approach. The Encyclopedia of Human Relationships (2009, 978-1412958462, $425) edited by Harry T. Reis and Susan Sprecher is a three-volume set that focuses on the research and theory related to what is collectively known as relationship science. Intimate relationships like those between spouses and among family members are discussed as well as those among co-workers, neighbors and professional associates.

The disciplines drawn from are more diverse than one might initially think. Core fields like psychology, sociology and communications are well represented but so are others less obvious like neuroscience, anthropology, legal studies and physiology. Articles focus on a rich variety of topics including cognitive and communication processes, health and biology, social context, the role of individual personality and broader emotional and psychological processes. A number of entries also discuss what the editors categorize as the “dark side of relationships.” Following on this theme there are articles on topics like abuse and violence, bereavement, bullying, incest, loneliness, hostility, rejection, revenge and shyness. Rounding out the coverage there are articles that focus on the theoretical underpinnings of relationship science as well as specific methodologies employed in its study.

The articles are academic and grounded in scholarship being, for the most part, intended for undergraduate and graduate students as well as a professional audience. However, needed definitions and explanations are provided throughout enabling interested lay readers to easily comprehend and benefit from the contents of the set. The organization of the three volumes lends itself to ease of use. The articles are alphabetically arranged with a full list of all entries in the front of each volume. There is also a reader’s guide that groups the articles under eighteen related categories while each article has a list of “see also” references. Helpful bibliographies are provided for each entry and a thorough and comprehensive index provides access to information at the volume and page level.

All in all, the Encyclopedia of Human Relationships is a well conceived and professionally produced reference that covers relationship science more comprehensively than either The Cambridge Handbook of Personal Relationships (2006, 0-521-47524-4, $90) or the dated Encyclopedia of Relationships Across the Lifespan (Greenwood, 1996, 978-0313295768, $165). It will primarily appeal to academic libraries but large public libraries with demand for information on relationships will also find it a valuable addition.

Another Sage publication possessing similar positive qualities is the Encyclopedia of Medical Decision Making (2009, 978-1-4129-5372-6, $375). Edited by Michael W. Kattan and Mark E. Cowan, this two-volume set draws on the expertise of contributors from fields as disparate as econometrics, psychology, and ethics to create a collection of some 300 articles discussing numerous relevant topics.

The approach is both normative and descriptive in that articles “investigate the processes and technology by which optimal medical decisions should be made,” as well as describe the way such decisions are made under real life pressures and limitations. Much of the encyclopedia is made up of articles that cover scientific and analytical topics falling under categories like biostatistics and clinical epidemiology, decision analysis and mathematical models, health outcomes and measurement and the impact or utility of the possible outcomes. On the more descriptive side there are essays that discuss subjects like cultural issues, the level of trust in the healthcare system, the type decisions faced by the patients as well as by their proxies, the quality of data being used, medical errors, patient rights, and religious factors.

The main audience for this set is students, scholars and professionals. While every attempt is made to make the articles accessible to the informed lay reader the more technical articles will require careful reading. Entries on topics like analysis of covariance, decision trees, net benefit regression and test treatment threshold entail time and effort to assimilate the formulas, graphs and charts used to explain these concepts and methods. But the results are worth the effort to gain an understanding of these important topics. Naturally, each article has “see also” references to related articles as well as lists of further readings. A useful general index rounds out the set providing direct access to specifics.

Encyclopedia of Medical Decision Making is a serious work that illuminates important concerns. There is nothing else quite like it in the reference literature with its authoritative focus on both the analytical and real world elements of medical decision making. This set will be of particular value in health science and hospital libraries. Larger academic libraries may also want to give it strong consideration. Given the specific nature of its coverage these libraries may prefer placing it in circulating collections.

weeks and months ahead, all ordering and approval systems and customer support tools will be integrated into a single customer interface which will be GOBI. We are conducting a “gap analysis” between GOBI and Collection Manager which will result in us incorporating the best features from each service into GOBI. Once that is completed, and after all customers are converted to YBP systems, Collection Manager will be retired. Customer updates regarding the transition planning will be issued frequently.

ATG: Can you tell us about the purchase? How much money or other securities, whatever were involved?

MK: As this was a transaction between two private organizations, we are regrettably unable to disclose any financial aspects of the agreement.

ATG: Where does James Bennett fit into this transaction?

MK: James Bennett Booksellers becomes part of Baker and Taylor. There will be no changes in the James Bennett operation at this time, except a pre-planned move to a larger facility in Australia to accommodate its growth. James Bennett will keep its name.

ATG: Will YBP offer new services that previously were unique to Blackwell?

MK: Yes. Services that were previously unique to one provider, such as Blackwell’s Table of Contents Catalog Enrichment Service, will soon be offered to YBP customers. By combining mutual best practices and resources of both organizations, YBP will provide an even greater level of customer service and support to our customers.

ATG: Will YBP expand their services in any way or hire new personnel? How long has this been in the works?

MK: During the past few years, employment has grown steadily at YBP (including several members of our management team returning to YBP) as we worked to appropriately increase our staff, now at its highest level ever, to meet the needs of our growing volume of business and to offer the increasingly complex new range of services our customers require. With this recent transaction, we are poised to increase our staff size once again to meet the needs of our current, and new, customers. As to how this acquisition came together, both parties have long held mutual respect for one another and acknowledged within the past year that combining our resources would provide a stronger base of resources and capabilities for both organizations to serve libraries worldwide. In fact, the combined organizations create synergies that neither organization could offer on their own. We have noted but one example of a new service offering in response to the previous question.

ATG: Thanks, Mark, for your timely responses!