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ATG Interviews Remmel Nunn

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to accomplish that. Furthermore they have raised a red flag with publishers who are now speculating that Amazon might sometime in the future want to control all printing of books that they sell. There is a precedent in that Amazon requires all publishers to meet their proprietary standard for eBooks in order to be sold on Kindle. The legality of Amazon’s action on POD’s will be tested by the courts and nobody really knows how this will turn out. It is unclear if one entity can be sued for restraint of trade. What it appears to me is a shot across the bow of Google who is busy scanning and digitizing library collections and now Amazon will be the default printer for those books. In fact Amazon has targeted university presses for inclusion in the BookSurge program. For now print on demand is a profitable niche market, but Amazon has correctly seen that it is the future of publishing, both for reviving out of print books and for supplying new books quickly without warehouses or back orders.

Crossroads: A Community for Students, Teachers & Scholars

— Working alone or in groups, researchers at academic institutions, globally or locally, can create their own collections of primary documents from online databases, permanently bookmark documents and tag, annotate and comment on a vast range of materials.

Blending the past with the present — Crossroads can enhance the value of primary source collections by allowing users to add background and context to books, broadsides, newspaper articles, government publications and related materials. Crossroads can be used for everything from creating and sharing lists and bibliographies to creating customized groupings of available materials on any relevant topic.

How does Crossroads work? — Crossroads can be used to meet a variety of research, teaching and collaboration needs in academic settings. Privacy functions allow project creators to keep their work private or to permit viewing and/or editing on a limited or unlimited basis. Researchers can work alone or in collaboration. Also, in support of a course syllabus, teachers can create compilations of specific documents and customize those selections by annotating documents to define unfamiliar words, draw connections to other works or pose discussion questions.

For more information: www.readex.com/

New Books Brought to you by Algorithms

“The 2007-2012 Outlook for Tufted Washable Scatter Rugs, Bathmats and Sets That Measure 6-Feet by 9-Feet or Smaller in India” ($495 for 144 pages).

This is the title of a current book from Icon Group International. Wow! Talk about the long tail. This might have a market for what, one copy? The New York Times covered this in their April 14, 2008 issue. The publisher, a Mr. Philip M. Parker, has developed an algorithm for taking information off the Web and turning it into books, or rather computer files that can then be turned into print on demand books. He has 200,000 books listed as being in print! This is a reversal of the current process where books are moving to the Web. Here we find information moving from the Web into printed books. And Parker isn’t the only one doing this. Images from the Web are making their way into art books too. There is an interesting video on YouTube where Parker runs through the whole process. (Search: “Patent for Long Tail” on YouTube.)

By the way, an algorithm isn’t a new move dance by Al Gore, but “…a procedure or formula for solving a problem.” The word derives from the name of the mathematician al-Khwarizmi, who was part of the royal court in Baghdad and who lived from about 780 to 850. Al-Khwarizmi’s work is the likely source for the word algebra as well. A computer program can be viewed as an elaborate algorithm. In mathematics and computer science, an algorithm usually means a small procedure that solves a recurrent problem.” (Definition courtesy of Ask.com)

When you open one of Mr. Parker’s books you will find the skeleton of a book: a title page, table of contents, “content” and many pages of graphics, all generated by his algorithm. He says it takes about thirteen minutes to generate a new book. Parker admits that his books are rudimentary at best and are really only suited for someone who doesn’t know how to use the Internet. Not a huge market

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Vice President, New Product Development, Readex

The Company’s Newly Created “Crossroads” Interactive Research Environment

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

The Readex division of Newsbank, publisher of the Archive of Americana online databases, recently invited all libraries that have access to the Early American Imprints to accept free access to a new research “environment” called Crossroads. Here is the Against the Grain interview with Remmel Nunn, vice president for new product development at Readex, who explains what Crossroads is and why it was developed. Further information can also be obtained at: http://crossroads.newsbank.com/.

ATG: You’ve written that Crossroads took three years to develop. As the publisher of the Archive of Americana, Readex is chiefly known as a content provider. Why did you devote so much effort to creating something that isn’t content, at least in the traditional sense?

RN: Crossroads is content, but you are correct that it is not content in the traditional sense. Thousands of scholars use the Archive of Americana every day. Crossroads will enable them, for the first time, to create new additions to the archive, in the form of posted and attributed annotations or even much longer commentaries or theses. Those contributions and the archived discussion webs between the authors will form an ever-growing and evolving intellectual context for the historical texts in the Archive of Americana, and add a huge amount of value to them in the process.

ATG: Who will hold copyright to the contributions?

RN: As the “Terms of Use” section of Crossroads makes clear, the authors of the contributions retain copyright to them. Readex obtains digital distribution rights, but the authors may do whatever they like with the material they choose to make public in Crossroads.

ATG: Please clarify what you mean by “choose to make public”?

RN: One of the most interesting trends that we discovered when we began researching digital scholarship was the growing number of multi-institutional research projects. We also learned that the organizers of these collaborations often do not want them made publicly available until the project is completed and “published,” as it were. For this reason we built Crossroads to facilitate the creation and management of such projects but we give users a choice of conducting their project publicly or “in private,” as it were, so that only the author, or a class, say, or any assigned group of scholars has access to the project.

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The science of service.

At Eastern Book Company, we’ve spent more than half a century shaping our unique brand of service. The first step is fulfilling our customers’ orders with unmatched speed and accuracy. Then we custom-fit our operations to our customers’ needs, allowing libraries to streamline processes and maximize budgets. And finally, we cultivate next-generation technologies to help our customers build the libraries their users need.

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ATG: Can you give us some examples of these collaborative projects?

RN: Sure. One of the larger ones is the Core Humanities Course recently directed by Michael Clark at the University of California, Irvine. Clark leveraged digital primary sources and the internet to solve the problem of how to provide access to the same texts when they are needed by more than a thousand students at the same time. At Brown’s “Virtual Humanities Lab,” Vika Zafrin managed an international project to create digital annotations to Boccaccio’s Decameron. At the University of Central Florida, Mark Kamrath and his team partnered with us and Aptara to keyboard and code in XML hard-to-access texts as part of the Charles Brockden Brown Electronic Archive and Scholarly Edition. One of the most ambitious collaborative projects is being planned in the UK by JISC, the Joint Information Systems Committee that serves academic libraries nation-wide. JISC’s Early Modern Texts Forum will be an interactive online collaboration that will link thousands of scholars to a common set of texts and communications.

ATG: The projects feature in Crossroads, applied to a classroom, sounds very much like a course management tool, and there is nothing new about those. Is Crossroads a new version of Blackboard?

RN: Not at all. Crossroads complements course management software, but it is very different, in several ways. Unlike course management software, Crossroads is not bounded by the firewalls that keep Blackboard and other such tools limited to use within a single institution. More importantly, Crossroads is, at heart, a permanent and organic archive of attributed scholarship. Course management tools are great for the purposes they were designed for, and we’ve built Crossroads so that the users of such tools can easily go back and forth between these tools, but they are very different tools.

ATG: And how does Crossroads compare to Zotero?

RN: There are a few features common to Zotero and Crossroads, but they are designed to do fundamentally different things. Crossroads was not designed to manage citations, but to provide tools for researchers to participate in online discussion groups and add scholarly contributions to the Archive of Americana. While Zotero does have features that let researchers share their bibliographies, it does not provide a Notebook feature that facilitates discussions and collaboration like Crossroads. Moreover, Zotero currently only resides in the browser on a computer, and not on a server, which means that whatever work you do in Zotero is not available across different computers. Zotero is primarily a citation management tool.

ATG: You mentioned “firewalls.” Doesn’t Crossroads have its own firewall in the sense that it enables researchers to annotate only a set number of documents—those in the Archive of Americana?

RN: That’s true of the annotation feature, but Crossroads users can imbed in their annotations live links out to any document that has a persistent URL. This means that they can link out to any item in Google Books and in most other publisher’s online archives. Using Crossroads, a teacher like Michael Clark could create a course syllabus with live links not only to Archive of Americana texts but to any of the millions of texts that are available on the net.

ATG: How will you monitor the contributions of these thousands of scholars you expect to use Crossroads?

RN: For the contributions of project members, the project organizer is responsible for keeping frivolous, or worse, contributions out of the public database. For the contributions of individual scholars we will use software to detect the obvious kinds of problems that might arise, and we will have editors looking for problems as well. As the project scales we will review this process and adjust our procedures appropriately.

ATG: Will Crossroads be free?

RN: To give everyone an opportunity to explore Crossroads, we are offering it free until January, 2009. After that, a modest annual fee will be required for continued access. The fee ranges from $3,600 for an academic
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ATG: Given this fee, how would you describe the value proposition here to the librarian?

RN: One thing that librarians are keenly aware of is the value of metadata. Catalogs, indexes, bibliographies — these are among the key tools that librarians use to serve their patrons, and Crossroads is in a very real sense an extended form of metadata, a potent one that has the power to reveal hidden facts about millions of historical documents. The tagging and annotation features of Crossroads create an organic, self-indexing system, which is particularly needed for the millions of items that exist online but have not been cataloged at all. Newspapers are a prime example of this. The Archive of America contains more than two thousand of them and is growing, and it provides some title-level metadata, but true item level indexing for newspapers is not issue-level indexing but article-level indexing, and the sheer number of articles in the Archive of America — one hundred and ten million to date — is too vast to ever be indexed by any single institution. They could be indexed in the long run, however, if the thousands of users of America’s Historical Newspapers could tag and annotate to the article level, and that is what Crossroads enables them to do. It won’t happen overnight, but it will happen. By providing their patrons with this ability, librarians are contributing to one of the largest indexing projects ever undertaken. They are also, of course, providing their patrons with access to the thousands of annotations that will be created and with a way to communicate with the contributors.

Library Marketplace
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there, but with 200,000 titles and no inventory there is definitely a shot at profitability. Parker is already producing many other types of books including crossword puzzles, annotated foreign language books where his algorithms can translate the harder words in the margins, and he is even moving into video production with animated figures controlled of course by...algorithms. His next project is to crank out romance novels. I guess they are formulaic enough to succeed to Al-Khwarizmi’s blandishments.

P.S. If you have never seen the episode “The Obsolete Man” from the Twilight Zone, treat yourself to it on YouTube. As usual, Burgess Meredith plays a great librarian. While you’re on YouTube be sure to check out “Ghosts in Libraries.” There seem to be quite a few of them around.

ATG Interviews Tom Richardson
Director, Institution Sales & Service,
The New England Journal of Medicine

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

ATG: Tell us about NEJM. When did it begin? Was it always a publication of the Massachusetts Medical Society?

TR: We began publication in 1812 as the New England Journal of Medicine and Surgery, and the Collateral Branches of Science. We’ve also published as The New England Medical Review and Journal and the Boston Medical and Surgical Journal. The Massachusetts Medical Society purchased the Boston Medical and Surgical Journal in 1921 and changed the name to the current New England Journal of Medicine in 1928.

It’s been interesting looking through some of the older journal issues, as we’re in the process of digitizing all of our content back to 1812. We expect that this will complete sometime in 2009.

ATG: Are your subscribers mainly institutional or are they mainly individuals? What type of advertising do you take and do you see this continuing?

TR: We have always been a publication with mainly individual subscribers. Nearly 90% of our subscriptions go to individuals. That’s the main reason why we were late in understanding library needs for online access. Now we have a group that focuses on institutions every day.

We accept advertising relevant to physicians such as pharmaceuticals, medical devices and educational institutions, along with physician recruitment advertising. I expect that to continue, but we’re in a slow market right now for pharmaceutical advertising.

ATG: When did you start a Website and how has that effected your advertising dollars and subscription base?

TR: The NEJM Website went online in 1996, with full-text access available to subscribers beginning in 1998. The shift to online communication creates challenges and opportunities for all of us. The mix of revenue sources is different than when everything was about print.

ATG: Is your main model a subscription model? Do you provide any open access material? How is this determined?

TR: Our main access model is the subscription. We do make original research articles freely available on our Website, six months after publication; this has been our policy on research articles since 2001. From time to time, we also make articles with important public health implications free to all at initial publication. Video interviews, images, podcasts and audio summaries are often available for free. Our editors make that determination. Our weekly content alert and Resident E-bulletin are also free with registration.

ATG: There has been a lot of controversy over the “ politicization” of the NEJM. What were the more questionable articles? In hindsight should they have been handled differently?

TR: The Journal does not shy away from accepting cutting edge or controversial scientific papers, which often generate coverage in the news media. The editorial process for acceptance of papers, however, is based on merit through peer review. Papers are evaluated on the basis of the data submitted by the authors — on occasion we have had to publish corrections when we learned from the author that data was missing or incorrect. This is part of the scientific publishing process.

ATG: Tell us about the NEJM Beta Website. What is it and why did you do it? When did you start it?

TR: The Beta Website (http://beta.nejm.org/) gives us an opportunity to experiment with presentations of articles, images, audio, and video. This way we can test ideas to find the good ones before we integrate them into our main Website. We launched it in July 2006.

ATG: The Beta Website is pretty cool. What projects have you done there that have been implemented on the main Website?

TR: Some of the projects we have tested and implemented include a new search interface and engine that reflects community opinion; lists of most popular, downloaded, blogged, news cited and emailed articles; PowerPoint slides for more types of articles; and NEJM for a handheld device.

ATG: We notice that you are making use of Google, Amazon and Yahoo! tools on the Beta Website. Are these also available on the main NEJM Website? How do these types of partnerships (is that what they are?) work? Is YouTube next?

TR: These tools work on the main Website. They’re not partnerships; we’re working to provide our tech savvy users the new information tools they want to use. We have RSS feeds on Google gadgets and podcasts on iTunes; our videos have even found their way onto YouTube. We want to distribute our content to users through their preferred tools.

ATG: Tell us about the NEJM Videos in Clinical Medicine in a new full-screen player. How are these made available to subscribers?

TR: We launched our Videos in Clinical Medicine feature with the April 13, 2006 issue. They are a video form of Review Articles and they are indexed in Medline. We’ve worked with an outside company to develop the video player that you see on the Website. The full-screen option is our latest update to the player.

Like all of our Review Articles, the Videos
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<http://www.against-the-grain.com>