November 2013

Issues in Vendor/Library Relations -- Hype

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Recommended Citation
DOI: https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.3193

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developers and testers, with collective expertise EnDavor could hardly have found in house, who have materials to test on, and who are willing to help perfect the system. Not only that, testing itself comes with a marketing bonus, since the ENCompass team will gladly show their work to potential ENCompass customers, and the prestige of the Cornell name, displayed on the firm’s Website along with those of some forty other institutions testing other EnDavor systems, will do no harm when it comes to winning new accounts, market share, and profits for the company.

Cornell, for one thing, gains influence with EnDavor. As a test partner, the library can reduce its risk that ENCompass would develop in ways not suit ing Cornell. “They give us a certain amount of focus,” according to Turner, who feels that the team has been successful not only in the pursuit of Cornell interests, which a successful ENCompass will serve, but also the interests of large libraries in general. Calhoun believes that the team’s work “adds to the library’s intellectual capital,” and also demonstrates the advantage of an interdisciplinary team approach, a lesson of value for the future. Meryl Brodsky found the chance to work on this multi-talented team a “tremendous learning opportunity,” a view that Calhoun, as Assistant University Librarian, wishes to encourage. “I want to be on a team like the ENCompass team,” is the sort of conversation she wants to overhear in library hallways.

Cornell, as well, strengthens its position as a leader among academic libraries, luster which will help to recruit and retain staff, to attract grant money, and to reinforce institutional support from within Cornell. Finally, in return for being an early co-developer of EnDavor, Cornell already has an EnDavor customer for other integrated library system modules, with the ENCompass software at no cost.

To add it up, then, Cornell and EnDavor both benefit substantially from their partnership, a word with more meaning here than often is the case when used in library-vendor context. Of course each side gives up certain things in a partnership. The EnDavor agreement, for instance, includes confidentiality requirements. George Kozak recalls an EnDavor visit to Cornell when a member of the Computer Science department happened to be in the room. This professor, it surfaced, was by coincidence active in research on matters related to the underpinnings of ENCompass. The librarians had to ask the professor to leave the room, which he gracefully did.

What if ENCompass, after all in an early stage of life, in the end doesn’t work very well? That, believes team members, is unlikely. But, if necessary, the team would find another system, or might write its own, Calhoun and her team so believe that the library world needs what ENCompass promises to do. Beyond that, what the group has learned in the course of this project will in itself make the effort a success for Cornell, says Calhoun.

“We can’t go it alone,” she says. The library market and technical landscape both are so fluid and chaotic that a library like Cornell needs to enter into outside partnerships and projects, with entities on campus, like the computing center or university press, and with organizations from beyond the campus, such as EnDavor and Sun and a spectrum of content providers. EnDavor and Cornell found themselves organizations with overlapping areas of expertise and common problems to solve. With ENCompass, are they buyer and seller, partners, or both?

Cornell is one of a handful of libraries that could even think about in-house development of anything so complex as a digital library management system. An organization like EnDavor, with considerable but incomplete technical resources of its own—and no anti-slavery pamphlets to work on—has the capital and the marketing strength to bring a perfected system to the libraries who will need one—once somebody develops it for them. “We don’t know exactly what it is we’re building. We’re building as we go,” says Calhoun, referring to her project’s technical and interface challenges. She might have said the same, though, about the relationships being built between library and vendor.
Hype
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ate and then lock up the entire market for a product defined by them. And at the top of the dot.com boom, why not? Their black and red logo, which featured a half-circle, the netLibrary name, and an open book enclosing the letter “e,” was soon as easy to summon to mind as the Golden Arches. They went in no time from eight employees housed in modest offices, to over three hundred, who enjoyed their own Boulder, Colorado “campus.” netLibrary speakers were on the program of every library conference, wearing suits more expensive than anyone else’s. Their brochures were the glossiest too. Their best contacts received flowers. “Generous” hardly does justice to the handout of netLibrary bags, pins, buttons, plaques, and other giveaways, which were everywhere.

An advertising campaign in the library press featured multi-page spreads in black-and-white and subdued color, telling stories of ordinary people blessed by ebooks. The ads obviously came out of a professional agency and were not the homemade “when’s the deadline?” work of an in-house sales and marketing department with too much else to do. Other ads were not meant for librarians. Some were directly aimed at students, whom netLibrary wagered would step up and ask, “Where’s the eBooks?” on their own campus. NetLibrary conducted the press like a string quartet. The New York Times wrote up netLibrary. Everybody did. Without a press release in hand to announce that netLibrary had partnered with your company, or if a publisher signed up some of your books, or if a library contracted with you or your consortium, you knew you were nowhere. They were the biggest dealmakers we’d ever seen.

Then, something happened. Or rather nothing happened, or not enough. Print books

entreprenneurial headline in one trade journal, whose lead paragraph had news about layoffs, salary cuts, and investor losses. Next were stories about bounced royalty checks to university presses, and serious talks with a potential buyer. The plot climaxed when netLibrary was “rescued from oblivion,” as one story put it, by OCLC, who was the serious-buying buyer. By then, Time-Warner had closed down its iPublish.com, MightyWords.com had folded, Reciprocal had gone under, Adobe had announced layoffs, and Questia had too; five among the eBook “players” all trimming sails like heavy storm-tossed frigates, in tight formation.

“...of those people — made a lot of predictions that were baloney,” an official of Palm Digital Media remarked to Publishers Weekly. Industry spokespeople all but stood in line to deliver humble statements. “We’re in this for the long term,” remarked the director of eBooks merchandising at Barnes & Noble. Attendees at a downsized e-book conference, reported PW, agreed now that the hype was past, “the real work is getting done.” Simon & Schuster’s president said, “eBooks are right where they should be.” NetLibrary broadcast a listserv message to say, “We remain deeply grateful

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If you enter the ring with hype, you’d better win.” — Muhammad Ali

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to all of our customers, publishers, partners and friends for your notes, calls, and continuing expressions of encouragement and support.”

When the mighty fall, encouragement and support rarely are the only feelings expressed. Many bystanders enjoyed the show, and with Goliath already on the turf, Davids everywhere loaded up their slingshots. At a certain point, it was suddenly natural to talk dismissively about eBooks, to say they “weren’t ready,” to refer to the printed book as an unsurpassed technology platform, and to roll the eyes at the very mention of netLibrary. “What? You mean the people in marketing were wrong?” was one facetious listserve header for a posting on eBooks. “What a shock, marketing people over hyping something.”

But it hadn’t been only the marketing people on this one. Anybody with anything to do with eBooks, it had seemed, briefly, was fully credentialed to offer forecasts at any time and in any medium on the future of the book (none too rosy, in some of them, for the print variety), on reading, education, publishing, scholarship, libraries. The virtual podium got awfully crowded. NetLibrary was hardly out there alone.

Should netLibrary have done it differently? Could they have promoted their eBooks patiently and quietly, getting to know the market with shoe leather and old-fashioned sales calls, with business cards left on desks, mornings of phone calls, lunch with top prospects? “We think our eBooks might interest you,” the netLibrary representative suggests to the librarian, as a waitress departs with order in hand. Then the next call, then write up the day’s reports at night, then another day just like it tomorrow.

Their investors must wish that netLibrary had done it mostly that way. Which of the rest of us, though, would really have preferred for netLibrary to build up the business like some beloved mom-and-pop outfit? Universities, after all, are hardly innocents when it comes to hype. Who didn’t enjoy the show? Who wasn’t flattered to have such a good ticket for a major production in hype like netLibrary staged? Who didn’t think netLibrary gave it a good go?

And who wasn’t half scared to death, for a little while, that the future had come and gone, and pitilessly had left the slow sitting by, caretakers of dusty and undisturbed

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Bet You Missed It

Press Clippings — In the News — Carefully Selected by Your Crack Staff of News Sleuths

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JAPANESE LIBRARIES JOLTED by Pamela M. Rose (University at Buffalo)

Escalating subscription prices (nothing new to U.S. libraries) combined with unfavorable exchange rates and decentralized collection development have hit Japanese libraries hard. Additional institutional challenges, such as the specter of sudden gaps in journal runs due to individual professors canceling their subscriptions and multiple individual departmental libraries, mean the extent of the crisis remains to be discovered. Officials are hoping to take advantage of cheaper online access and joint bargaining power to reduce subscription costs.


UPPING THE TENURE ANTE by Phil Dankert (Cornell University)

In this Point of View article the author expresses his concern over the “publish or perish” model that exists in academia today. Junior faculty members have to publish more and more these days in order to get tenure. “When someone six years out of graduate school is expected to have written two books...the system has gone beyond absurdity and approaches farce. Aspiring professors may one day have to start roughing out their future books while still in primary school.” This coupled with the fact that university presses, primarily for economic reasons, oppose multiple submission of manuscripts causes problems for junior faculty (“It’s simply not fair to punish the victims of inflated expectations by making it harder for them to do their jobs in the limited time allotted.”). A suggestion for dealing with this situation is proposed.


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shelves of printed books? All the hype had one sure effect: nobody wanted to be that. The hype threw a spotlight and cast an interrogation lamp too. What was your library doing? Lots of libraries took up with netLibrary and bought some e-books. They learned in a hurry — this was not a distance education opportunity — and figured out how to use them, how to catalog them, how to promote them, how to integrate them into everything else the library was doing. There were some real successes.

Librarians learned a lot about e-books. Some things they learned were, that there weren’t very many of them, that the use model was restrictive, that they were not a bargain, that there were preservation questions, and above all that their patrons’ degree of urgency about the need for e-books was well below that of people in the industry. The hype had been a good teacher.

Should netLibrary have done it differently? Should Clay have been polite to Liston? That would have disappointed everyone, probably even Liston. But Muhammad Ali always knew something that netLibrary now knows too. If you enter the ring with hype, you’d better win.

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**NUCLEAR KNOWLEDGE**

*by Sandy Beehler (Lewis & Clark College)*

Preserving knowledge about nuclear weapons may seem a dubious goal to some, but it could prove crucial to the U.S.'s defenses — an uncertain future that includes rogue nations with nuclear arsenals. In addition to the problem of maintaining millions of paper documents and thousands of electronic files, there is the problem of passing on the knowledge that is held only in the heads of an aging population of nuclear weapons scientists. To address these problems, the U.S. is mounting both digitizing projects and training programs to ensure this information will be available to future generations.

See — “This is Not a Test” in Wired 10.03 (March 2002).

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**LIFE AFTER THE PROPAGANDA MILL**

*by Bruce Strauch (The Citadel)*

The Russian intelligentsia makes a come-back for big bucks and the status it brings. In a Moscow dominated by nouveau riches capitalists, the eggheads moped in destitute squalor. Then Grigory Chkhartishvili created a 19th-century gentleman sleuth and suddenly found he had foreign language deals, movies and a T.V. series. This was followed by Tatiana Tolstaya’s experimental novel Kys and Alexei Slapovsky’s T.V. screenplays, until there are as many as ten (!) authors pulling down 100 to 500K a year.

Chkhartishvili was previously employed translating Japanese and piddling with a magnifying opus *The Writer and Suicide.* Enjoying nothing so much as a good walk in a graveyard, he got the idea of his Slavic Sherlock Holmes living in what Russians now regard as a Chekovian golden age. Now a nine book superstar, he has T-shirts and a cologne named for his hero for sale online. And a new Peugeot in the drive. But he still thinks in terms of Five-Year Plans.


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**ENGINEERED EVERGLADES ECOLOGY**

*by Sandy Beehler (Lewis & Clark College)*

It’s an interesting question: can a vast and unique ecological system, brought to the brink of ruin by human progress, be saved from ruin without endangering that progress and the human beings it sustains? This article provides a fascinating overview of what ecologists are attempting to achieve in the Florida Everglades. The plan calls for a gradual restoration of the original hydrological systems that sustained this huge wetlands area-including freeing the Kissimmee River from its man-made banks, storage of potential flood waters in underground wells, and creation of a marshland to filter pollutants from water flowing into the park area.

See — “Re-engineering the Everglades” Wired 10.02 (February 2002).

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**LET THEM EAT TOAST**

*by Bruce Strauch (The Citadel)*

Napster’s been KO’d, but music thieving teens are still at it in a major way. Roxio produces 70% of the CD “burner” software which is cutely named “Toast.” And Roxio lures to branch out into phots, video and DVDs. But the music empire has struck back with CDs that can’t be copied.

Roxio is striving to convince the industry that burning is a positive thing for them. They’re only showing a profit on 10% of new music releases anyhow. So why keep backlogs of music inventory that will never sell?

EMI has been won over. For a fee, users can burn music from Roxio’s Website. The biz plan? Make legit burning easier than stealing.