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ATG Interviews Howard Harris

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“Visualization allows our clients to get a graphical overview of the library in relation to...other libraries, library groups, or authoritative bibliographic sources ... drilling down to the level of wanted detail — even to individual full MARC bibliographic records.”

— Howard Harris

ATG: Who is Library Dynamics?

HH: Library Dynamics offers libraries innovative tools for analyzing, understanding, and making decisions about the development and management of library collections, resources, and capabilities. Library Dynamics, founded in 1998, initiated Weedlist. This program matched the shelllists of numerous small and large academic libraries to the titles from each of the three successive Books for College Libraries. Libraries have used this tool to identify titles dropped from BCL as prime candidates for weeding. Librarians requests for additional services have led Library Dynamics to bring to market a number of additional capabilities. In 2004 and 2005, Library Dynamics has expanded its services dramatically.

ATG: Howard, why and how did you get involved with Library Dynamics? Were you there in 1998 when it was founded?

HH: Robyn, your question lets me tell you a little about Library Dynamics and what led me to take on the role of General Manager of our company. Both of these comments should give you some insight into our company.

Bill Buchanan, a successful innovator and publisher in our industry, established Library Dynamics with Bob Aslemon in 1998. Initially, the principle product of Library Dynamics was the development of Weeddlist. Weeddlist was based upon Bill’s work with Evan Farber, former College Librarian at Earhart College. Farber proposed that academic librarians could base weeding and storage issues on titles that had been superseded in subsequent editions of Books for College Libraries. Farber wrote an article about this for Library Journal which can be found in Farber, E. L (1997) Library Journal, 122(13), 44-45.

I knew Bill in the 1990s. He was a very interesting and creative guy, and he was successful in bringing Evan Farber’s idea to fruition through Weeddlist for quite a while. However, Bill’s health began to fail in 1998, and any further development on Weeddlist came to a stop. When Bill passed away in 2000, the library community lost a very creative and productive member.

After leaving the University of Maryland College Park in 2001 where I had been the Director for Information Technology, I returned to an active consulting practice with library clients. In late 2001 I began discussions with Bob Aslemon and Eric Calaluca, principals of the then re-invigorated Library Dynamics; however, my real interest in the company developed at the ACRL Conference in April 2003 in Charlotte. At about the same time, I had a conversation with Bob Kieft, the College Librarian at Haverford College. Our conversation focused on the type of collection analysis work that the Tri College Consortium had in mind and the type of service that they felt that they and others in the library community needed.

At that point, I was hooked. I could see a real problem to be solved and my background and experience contributed to my belief that I knew how I could approach the problem. At that point I renewed my conversations with Library Dynamics’ principals and was offered the position of General Manager. Work began on Spectra CRC in the Summer and Fall of 2003 and by Midwinter 2004 in San Diego we were showing Spectra CRC for the first time.

ATG: Is Paratext your parent company? Who else is on the team at Library Dynamics and what strengths do they bring to the company?

HH: Although Library Dynamics briefly operated as a division of Paratext, it soon became a separate corporate entity. I don’t think there is any way to overestimate the value that such working relationships bring to a company. The ability to benefit from a wide spectrum of insights and experience within our two organizations gives us the flexibility of a smaller company plus a number of advantages possessed by much larger companies.

In Library Dynamics, we have a highly talented team. Bob Aslemon and Eric Calaluca, principals in Paratext, assist Library Dynamics with administrative matters and accounting. Susan Severson leads our nationwide Marketing and Sales efforts. Three of us from across our organization who are librarians serve as a product development team to assess new and existing products and services, product requirements and specifications, and requests for changes to existing products and services, market opportunity, and product support.

We have four people that work with client MARC bibliographic and use data by analyzing and processing it into a resource for our clients. They also create and maintain an impressive online search and retrieval capability to host that bibliographic resource.

Separately, we have a team of three Systems, Application, and Internet Technology technical staff who develop and deliver the visualization technology that allows us to work with quantitative data in new and exciting ways. We also have a group that focuses on the hosting and management of the servers that provide our Internet accessible services.

ATG: I noticed on the company Website for Library Dynamics, that you produce Spectra CRC and NATC (North American Title Count). Please tell us about your background and how your experience has enabled you to publish these tools for libraries.

HH: From the beginning of my career I have focused on technology, planning, management, and systems. Early in my career I had experience with approval plan book purchasing at Argonne National Laboratory’s Library and also as a part of the Systems Department at the University of Chicago Library where we made use of the MARC tapes to create an alerting service for bibliographers based on language and subject profiles.

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Both at the **University of Chicago** and in my consulting work with libraries principally with **RMG Consultants, Inc.**, I learned how to work with a technologically oriented team each of whom had specialized skills. I learned how to write requirements and specifications and how to coordinate the development of technically oriented projects.

Later, as a consultant to the **American Library Association** and the **National Center for Educational Statistics**, I began to appreciate the value and efficiency of visualization tools that could analyze complete datasets, provide for repeated exploratory analysis of such data, and also convey insights directly to various audiences who may or may not have the time to review tabular presentations of data.

I think these are some of the elements of my background that have contributed to my understanding of how to go about creating and developing products and services for **Library Dynamics**.

**ATG:** Your experience as a library automation consultant and also as a practitioner and strategist, gives you a unique perspective. **What trends for collection development and collection management can we expect in the near future?**

**HH:** In some ways it feels so prescriptive to think that my experience could give me such insights but let me try to share some of my thinking. Libraries have in place a number of substantial investments in physical plants, content, systems, and most importantly human resources and the challenge is to rationalize those investments and protect them. I think we are seeing a lot of change. At the front end of the process, I think we may see changes in buying patterns as selectors engage in some increased spot buying of materials in some areas based on need, not just anticipated need. I think the notion of "in print" is under challenge given the emergence of e-books as emerging electronic content. Even in the print sphere there has been some recent research which challenges the notion that older, "out of print" material is scarce and pricy and that will have its effects.

I believe there has been great interest in various digitization projects with somewhat more modest understandings of how to take such projects into account at a working level in libraries. This falls in the area that we in **Library Dynamics** refer to as the "capabilities" area — what a library may not own or license but can deliver.

I think that the evolution of very specialized systems and procedures for the purchasing, management, and reporting with regard to electronic resources has left libraries vulnerable in terms of accountability for their resources overall. This is part of what prompts us to provide views of the library which integrate rather than segment such investments.

I feel those who support private higher education, as well as those in the public sector, have interests in fostering institutional strength, accountability, as well as new expectations for the benefits that collaboration including collaboration between and among libraries can bring.

**ATG:** I hear the word Data Mining used in a variety of ways. Would you explain your definition and how the tools produced by Library Dynamics assist librarians with their collection analysis? Is there a certain segment of the library market that can benefit best from your products?

**HH:** I agree with you about the term Data Mining. There is a movie titled "The Spanish Prisoner" in which there is some business process or formula that is supposed to make the company and its principals a fortune. Data mining always seems a bit like that to me as if gold could be extracted from information. To me very simply Data Mining consists in the after the fact observation of patterns and/or relationships within data that people create and maintain for some other more prosaic business or operational purpose. Someone could characterize what we do in that way and I wouldn't disagree but I don't choose to talk about it in that way.

What we do is allow librarians to visualize the patterns and relationships in their data that may have gone unnoted and to use the patterns and relationships that they discover to give them an overview of the library as a whole in relationship to a consortia to which they belong, another library, a set of libraries, and/or one or more recognized bibliographic sources including authoritative bibliographies or review sources. Our services allow librarians to examine those relationships within progressively more detailed subject areas, and ultimately to examine individual titles, their ownership, and standing within recognized bibliographies and review media. These capabilities support a wide range of library operational needs.

I think that increasingly librarians are becoming aware of visualization techniques but it will take the community a while to learn and adopt such technologies. There are some efforts in our community that are beginning to continue on page 50
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highlight the importance of visually based quan-
titative information including LibQUAL+TM in
the ARL arena and other such information that
focuses on libraries’ use to solicit, track, under-
stand, and act upon users’ perceptions of ser-
vice quality. In addition, visually based quanti-
titative tools based on GIS and demographic data
within the public library sector have begun to
play an important role in communicating the
tangible value of library programs in the over-
all health of communities. I believe we will see
a growing use of such tools across the board.

ATG: Many libraries are forming multi
type consortia. Do you have a model of
how consortia libraries are able to use Library
Dynamics’ products and services?
HH: It’s interesting that you mention con-
sortia. I was showing an earlier version of Spectr-
a CRC to a librarian who has written in the
collection development area. Two comments
from that meeting have stayed with me. This
librarian made the observation that although
Spectra CRC was initially developed for col-
lege and university libraries, research libraries
share some of the same needs and could make
use of capabilities similar to those we have de-
developed. It was clear in our meeting that Spectr-
a CRC not only makes the case for collabora-
tion, but also provides the tools to guide and
evaluate it. I found this interesting in light of
the comment I read in an introductory text on
collection development. The comment said that
the effect of cooperative collection develop-
ment has, is probably the most written about
topic in the collection development field but that
putting cooperative collection development into
practice programmatically is inherently dif-
ICult and unrealized on a scale comparable to its
importance. My belief is that the lack of appro-
riate tools contributes a good deal to that dif-
ICulty. Interestingly, I don’t need to make the
case to anyone in a consortium who sees Spectr-
a CRC. It’s not only a tool that demonstrates
the value of a consortia but also allows those
involved in a consortia to coordinate and evalu-
ate the effectiveness of their cooperation and
demonstrate it to their respective institutional
management.

ATG: You have decided to discontinue the
print version of NATC which was formerly
produced by the ALA Division ALCTS. Is this
because you feel that the digital age has fi-
nally reached all libraries that could benefit
from NATC?

HH: The North American Title Count
(NATC) has for many years compiled counts
of the number of titles held by libraries in ap-
proximately 700 subject categories. It grew out
of what was then called the National Shelflist
Count. It took a new name in time to reflect
the participation of libraries in Canada in the
Count. In the past the Count was undertaken
every four years. Actually ALCTS discontinued the print
version of NATC when they were responsible for
the program in favor of a CD-ROM based prod-
uct. I think we are just taking the next logical
step in moving the content from the CD-ROM
environment to accessibility via the Web as well
as the additional step of making an annual, under-
taking which we think will help libraries
who depend on it when they undertake collec-
tion development studies.

ATG: Who are your competitors? Why are
LD’s tools superior?
HH: Companies have come and gone in
this market space. And of course it depends on
how you characterize the market. There are
some large companies and organizations offer-
ing various tools for collection analysis includ-
ing OCLC and Bowker. Other organizations
have focused on one or the other component of
the collection analysis business, especially for
serials or electronic resources. I think each of
us sees the market differently and I am not sure
there is enough cohesion in the marketplace to
call us competitors.

What we in Library Dynamics believe to
be distinctive in our approach is our belief that
clients value the ability to visualize graphically
key quantitative aspects of the library’s content.
These aspects include its overall size, its sub-
ject matter, its comparability in terms of dis-
tinctiveness, areas of overlap, and gaps, and its
usage. We believe that the ability to view a
number of different analyses in spatial terms
focused on the overall library or a library seg-
ment of interest enhances the pace, the quality,
and the transparency of decision-making and
communication within the library and between
the library and its sources of support.

Visualization allows our clients to get a
graphical overview of their library in relation to
one or more other libraries, library groups, or
authoritative bibliographic sources. The user
can interact directly with the plotted data, high-
lighting data points which reveal information
about the plotted point and drilling down from
an overall library level to the level of wanted
detail — even to individual full MARC biblio-
graphic records. Currently we provide eleven
(11) analyses at each of three progressively de-
tailed subject levels: Class, SubClass, and In-
terval. Plots at each of the 22 Classes, 250
SubClasses, and 6,000 Intervals provide more
than 60,000 potential plots. Intelligent naviga-
tion among the levels and the plots guide the
user to only those areas of greatest interest but
does not limit the specialist who wants to work
at a very precise level of detail. All of this power
is further enhanced when you consider the num-
ber of comparisons available to other libraries,
library groups, and bibliographic sources.

In visualizing usage we begin with circula-
tion and in house usage data supplied by our
library clients. However, we combine the vari-
ous types of usage, normalize it, and analyze the
data in several ways. Because we extract and
make use of the data that the library ac-
quired each title we calculate in each case its
annualized use and report that in the biblio-
graphic record. Based on that calculation we
provide two types of usage data — one that
emphasizes the aggregate use of material
within subject categories and another, the aver-
age intensity of use of titles within subject ar-
eas. Usage is not just a column in a table for us.
We intend to develop additional tools and ways
of seeing and gaining access to data that im-
proves the library abilities for understanding
both the entire collections and the usage of
the individual library and library consortia.

Fundamentally, we are focused on deliver-
ting tools, products, and services focused on
analyzing, understanding, decision making, and
interpreting library physical COLLECTIONS
— (i.e., what the library owns — the “C” in the
product name), electronic RESOURCES —
(i.e., what the library either owns or licenses in
electronic form — “R”) and CAPABILITIES
— (i.e., the other “C” — what the library nei-
ther owns nor licenses but can invoke and de-

eriver to meet the library user’s need from con-
sorts and shared system library partners or other
sources.)

We also believe in leveraging human and
financial investments that libraries and library
groups have made in purchasing and main-
taining integrated library systems and the content
of those systems with respect to library materi-
als and their use. I think the financial and hu-
man investments in those systems need to be
leveraged and not abandoned in favor of some
other approach to analyzing the library’s col-
lection, resources, and capabilities.

ATG: I understand that you plan to par-
ticipate in the 2005 Charleston Conference? Why
do you feel it is important for Library
Dynamics to be at this Conference?
HH: The Charleston Conference gives us a
unique ability to meet with those with interests
and responsibilities in the development, analy-
sis, and management of library collections.
Actually, “meet” is an overworked word. It is
an opportunity to hear and participate in great
programs, to sit down with people and have a
conversation about what matters to them in col-
lection development, and do it at a time early
in the academic year — prior to ALA Midwinter
— a time of year that allows academic li-
brarians to participate. Charleston is large
enough to have the facilities to host the confer-
ence but small enough that the logistics of get-
ing to and from meetings and hotels do not
absorb a disproportionate amount of people’s
energy and time. And then of course, there is
Charleston, a city rich with history and culture.

ATG: According to the company descrip-
tion on your Website, Library Dynamics will be
introducing new products and services in the
near future. Would you give the ATG read-
ers a glimpse of what’s coming up in 2006?
HH: We just recently brought Spectra
CRC to the Web. We are very pleased with how
our librarians are interacting directly with the
plots of data which results in displays of plot
detail based on responses from the visualiza-
tion engine at the server and clicking on points
for information in order to drive the analysis
into more specific subject areas.

For the present, we will be concentrating on
and large on ways of enhancing our existing
products and services such as Spectra CRC and
NATC. Whether some of those developments
come part of the core products and services
or emerge on their own remain to be seen. Also,
our experience in working with data which we
receive from libraries has led us to believe that
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<http://www.against-the-grain.com>
Libraries wanting to develop their collections in African American studies have had a few recent titles to ponder. The just released Greenwood Encyclopedia of African American Literature (2005, 0313329753, $495) may be on the short list for many. Edited by Hans Ostrom and J. David Macy, Jr., these five compact volumes are packed with close to 1030 articles written by some 200 scholars.

It comes as no surprise that coverage includes numerous articles on influential writers, as well as those on various literary forms, genres, and movements. However, there is also ample space given to the historical and social issues impacting African American literature ranging from Afro-centricity to the Vietnam War, affirmative action to the Middle Passage and from the Nation of Islam to the Underground Railroad. Other essays treat important newspapers like the Amsterdam News and literary journals like Callaloo while others cover influential regions and locations ranging from New Orleans to Detroit and from Haiti to Paris. While accessible to general readers and high school students, undergraduates will find the articles useful for background and facts, and will appreciate the list of added sources following each article.

The set also contains an alphabeti-cal, as well as topical list of all articles, a helpful introduction and a chronology. These features all add value and give the reader a firmer sense of the contents and coverage of the Encyclopedia. Providing access to the page level is a thorough, easy to use general index.

Rich and detailed, the scope of this work is nonetheless broad and inclusive. The Greenwood Encyclopedia of African American Literature not only provides information about writers and literary movements but it successfully places them in historic and societal context. While in no way replaces Macmillan’s Encyclopedia of African American History and Culture (a 2nd edition will be released later this year), it is a worthy complement. It also serves to update, as well as broaden the scope of the critically praised Oxford Companion to African American Literature (1997, 0195065107).


Routledge’s Encyclopedia of Christian Theology (2005, 1579582508, $495) offers a serious, scholarly treatment with a decidedly European slant. The reason for that is obvious. It is an English language translation of a 2nd edition of the Dictionnaire critique de theologie, first published in 1998. Edited by Jean-Yves Lacoste, the over 500 articles contained in this three-volume set attempt to lend shape to the “massive amount of discourse and doctrines that Christianity has assembled about God and its experience of God.” Lacoste draws on the expertise of 250 scholars, the majority coming from Continental Europe, to accomplish this challenging endeavor.

While there are discussions about liturgy, church administration, spiritual practices and social and moral issues, the main concerns here are theological concepts like the Trinity, Christology, Knowledge of God, Justification, Salvation and Revelation. Many of the articles are more than a background recitation of facts and historical development. The contributors are not afraid to point to controversy, speculate and provoke questions and may make some readers steeped in tradition pause. The production features are what you would expect from a work of this caliber. The organization is alphabetical with liberal use of cross references, and while there are no illustrations, the layout of the text is clear and visually engaging. The bibliographies are often extensive but many references are to works in languages other that English, a possible limitation for many students.

Intended for the scholar and upper division or graduate student, this reference will not be easy going for the general lay reader. Treating complex concepts and in the critical tradition of European, especially French theological thought, many of the articles ask more that a casual familiarity with the issues covered. All by the largest public libraries will probably pass on this work; however, theological libraries, as well as academic libraries supporting majors in religious studies should give it serious consideration.

ABC-CLIO has published another nicely focused historical encyclopedia suitable for either circulation or reference collections. The Constitutional Convention of 1787: A Comprehensive Encyclopedia of America’s Founding (2005, 1581096698, $185) includes more than 400 articles providing a multidimensional look at this central event in American history. Individual essays cover the delegates and other influential people, important committees, relevant documents, proposed plans of government, and philosophical influences. Author John R. Vile writes in an accessible, straightforward fashion informed by serious scholarship referencing authoritative sources throughout most of these essays. A series of appendices provide relevant historic documents prior to, during and after the convention, a selected bibliography, and a brief list of authoritative Websites. There is also a topical table of contents, a day by day timetable of the convention and an introductory essay setting the stage for the rest of the articles.

Academic libraries in particular will find this title useful. As noted above, given its special continued on page 54

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there are some ways in which we may be able to enhance their abilities to manage and improve the quality of that data. Stay tuned.

ATG: Is there anything else that you would like to tell the ATG readers about yourself, your family, and/or your company? What is your greatest professional accomplishment?

HH: I am glad to say I have worked in the library field for a number of years. I attended library school "a few years ago" in North Carolina at UNC-Chapel Hill where I met my wife in the Master’s program. Pat, my wife, is perhaps better known in the library field than I am having worked for the American Library Association and NISO in the course of her career.

We have one daughter, Mary who is a Producer for ABC News. Just before beginning our interview I watched the first of four stories in a series she produced entitled “Made in China” for Good Morning America. I hope my greatest professional accomplishment always lies ahead of me instead of behind me. I find you can drive better looking through the windshield than in the rear view mirror.

ATG: Thank you very much, Howard. See you at the Charleston Conference!

HH: I’ll be looking to see you there Robyn.

Library Dynamics will be at the Charleston Advisor Vendor Showcase event on the first day and available then and later in the meeting to talk with participants to learn about their needs and obviously to talk with people interested in our products and services. I wish everyone a good meeting in Charleston. <http://www.against-the-grain.com>