People Profile: Richard Charkin

Editor
Looking Back, Looking Forward ... from page 22

anti-publisher sentiment but rather a legitimate desire to make available everything to everyone for free. The problem is there is no such thing as a free lunch, and a good value one can be pretty sustaining.

Q: How about other new things at Macmillan you'd like to mention?

A: The list could be very long. Here are some highlights: the new edition of the magisterial, multivolume Palgrave Dictionary of Economics, which marries the authority of tradition with the use of the Web to create an economics community; ScholarlyStats from MPS Technologies, which offers librarians a high-quality statistics service for journal assessment and reduced overhead costs; new products from Nature in the fields of photonics, nanotechnology, microbial ecology, climate change, and the geosciences, as well as a continued push into clinical with Nature Clinical Practice and Macmillan Medical Communications; more development of the American-English version of http://www.macmillanenglishcampus.com/ for university-level students; significant expansion of our Chinese and other Asian activities, http://www.macmillan.com/zh/; and, in particular, Spanish-language children’s publishing such as http://www.edicionescastillo.com/; and I am personally looking forward to our publication next year of Borat’s Travel Guide — I think he’ll be addressing with utmost indulgence all matters of diplomacy between the United States and Kazakhstan.

Q: This article is for Against the Grain, which is read by academic librarians, publishers, and vendors. Anything else you’d like to talk about related to libraries?

A: Library acquisition budgets should be increased significantly as the productivity of librarians improves. But I would say that, wouldn’t I?

Thinking Globally: The Benefits of Interdisciplinary Publishing

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Last evening I was reading the new, 50th-anniversary special edition of New Scientist. The issue contained a piece titled “Predictions: Brilliant Minds Forecast the Next 50 Years,” and one thing that jumped out at me as I read the predictions (each a long paragraph or so in length) was how narrowly focused most were on what would happen in the expert’s scholarly discipline (whether molecular biology, paleontology, or astrophysics) that would affect the larger world. Equally striking was the almost complete absence of any interdisciplinary thinking or suggestion that possibly a mix of new developments from different sciences might have the most influence on the future.

The Problem of Specialization

The single-discipline approach showcased in the anniversary issue of New Scientist is typical of today’s knowledge production industry. This industry is made up mainly of people from academia and public and private research institutions. It is funded by tax dollars, foundations, and private donations. Specialization and differentiation of interest and function in knowledge production and dissemination are now the rule; that specialization means that disciplines subdivide into increasing numbers of subdisciplines, each with its own concepts, methods, theories, language, associations, and publishing outlets. This trend is not surprising: the study of human