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ATG Interviews Dave Williams

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ATG Interviews Dave Williams
Managing Director, Bernan

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ATG: Can you tell us when you arrived at Bernan, and a little about the experience you bring to the Managing Director role there?

DW: I came to Bernan in the beginning of September, but—and I mean this in only the best of ways—I feel like I've been here a long time. That's because Bernan is a mix of both government publication distribution and professional publishing, and I have spent a good number of years associated with both.

I started with Harper & Row in the 70's in medical publishing, then with Aspen Publishing in the early 80's in healthcare management, and finally in the later 80's and 90's at Government Institutes, where we provided legal/regulatory compliance information for the business, college, and library markets. This included authored books, subscriptions—print and electronic—self-study and live training courses, as well as distribution of government regulations and federal agency industry guidebooks.

During those years—and you do start to feel your age when you describe your career in "decades"—I've held a wide range of editorial, marketing, manufacturing, publisher, and operations management positions, so I'm comfortable with the various aspects of the Bernan business (although the underlying technologies have certainly changed throughout those years).

Most recently, I was Vice President & General Manager of Government Institutes, which had become the publishing and training division of a large consulting engineering firm.

ATG: Looking at the "state-of-Bernan" as it exists today, aren't the majority of your publications government-document based?

DW: Yes, that is the case, especially on the Bernan Distribution side, and also true to some extent for Bernan Press, our publishing imprint, although here the typical approach is to add proprietary analysis and expertly compile and organize the government information that is used.

ATG: Then with most government documents now available online, what are Bernan's plans as a publisher and distributor moving forward?

DW: Well, for one thing, I think the move to electronic dissemination of information may be inexorable, but it is also evolutionary, and the need for print versions will stay around for a long time.

Another consideration is open-ended potential to add value to government documents by aggregating the tremendous amount of information out there, providing a user focus to it, and then adding to it other information such as expert analysis.

Additionally, the growing accessibility of government data online reminds me of a comment I heard a CFO make in the mid-1980's when spreadsheet use began: "The problem now is that everyone thinks he or she is a financial analyst."

In that vein, the increasing ease in accessing government regulations doesn't make you an attorney any more than the ability to access government statistics makes you a statistician. In short, at times there can be almost too much information, too loosely organized, available.

ATG: What about the statistical data published through Bernan Press—do you have plans to "mine" that data and make it available online?

DW: Absolutely, and the "who, what, when, where, and how" of this is actually one of the key points of our current strategic discussions.

ATG: Given the particular experience you bring to the table, what changes can we expect to see coming out of Bernan?

DW: The short-term answer is a qualified "None." There should be little change to the core Bernan business, because it is a solid business of service to the library community built on a longstanding "customer first" relationship — and while you always strive to improve, there's no substitute for keeping your eye on your customers' changing needs.

However, what I do hope to bring to Bernan are things that will be additive in nature.

Bernan Distribution will continue to emphasize its comprehensiveness in providing libraries "one-stop shopping" access to over 45,000 U.S. government and intergovernmental titles, and I certainly encourage the expansion already underway to bring this same level of comprehensive distribution to electronic information services.

We are also working to improve the ease with which customers can place orders, access current and forthcoming title information, and communicate so as to get quick answers to questions and resolutions to problems.

Bernan Press already has a wonderful and growing collection of statistical references in print, although we're more than just Data Books.

We have a new title that we co-published with the Library of Congress, the Encyclopedia of the Library of Congress, which will be a wonderful addition to any library. We have co-published important titles with other government agencies in addition to numerous titles with the World Trade Organization, and we'd like to continue to expand our activities in this role.

Where I hope my personal experience will come into play is in helping us build an even wider range of authored and compiled publications and reference works that will have appeal not only to the traditional Bernan library market, but also to corporations and government agencies.

ATG: I understand Bernan Press has a title on the CHOICE "Outstanding Academic Books of 2004 list coming out in January. What is that title?

DW: "The Almanac of American Education" has been selected for inclusion in CHOICE's annual "Outstanding Academic Titles" list. That's a real source of pride and a tribute not only to our in-house publishing staff, but also to our outside Editors involved with these works, and I think it is this kind of recognition that will encourage more federal agencies and intergovernmental organizations to work with us in co-publishing ventures.

ATG: What do you see as the key to future products and services that Bernan will provide, and thereby the key to Bernan's future success?

DW: That's always a dangerous question because it requires a broad answer, and in answering broadly you can sometimes miss something "right in front of your face," as they say, simply because you live and breathe it every day. I also want to be careful that ideas and concepts aren't interpreted as promises!

With that caveat, I think the keys to future success boil down to five things for us:

1. Always begin by listening to your customer's needs. This sounds simple, but it's easy to lose sight of, given the exigencies of the day.

Against the Grain / February 2005
<http://www.against-the-grain.com> 61
2. Be a part of the inexorable move
to electronic information deliv-
ery, but in doing so, don’t forget
what got you here. I’ve witnessed
first-hand, how easy it is to get
cought up in the glitz and glamour
of what you can technically do —
regardless of whether your cus-
tomer actually needs you to do it!

As alluded to earlier, many of our cus-
tomers appreciate the fact that Bernan
provides print editions of government
publications that are otherwise issued
only in electronic form, and in some
cases we have continued to publish valued
data compilations that have been dis-
continued altogether by the government.

We are also now a distributor for online
products from intergovernmental orga-
nizations such as the UN, OECD,
World Bank, World Tourism Orga-
nization, and the Pan American
Health Organization. And our free
monthly Government Publication
News electronic newsletter is very
popular.

3. Partnerships. The ever-changing
economy, pace of technological change,
increasing globalization, and the
depth of expertise and extent of
outreach required in today’s business
climate make the development of key
partnerships an integral part of
today’s business operation. This
includes strategic partners in building
new products, new subject areas, and
new customer markets, as well as
partners in reaching and delivering
these new products and services to
the market.

4. Resources. Perhaps the best part of
coming to Bernan is the strong and
experienced core management team
already in place. Libby Bauer, our
Director of Distribution, Tamara
Wells-Lee, our Director of Publish-
ing, Bruce Sanmuelson, our Direc-
tor of Marketing & Library Services, and
Sharon Keyser, our Chief Financial
Officer, all have many years of ex-
perience at Bernan and within the
industry.

Also, our experienced Customer
Service and Acquisitions staffs have established
long-standing relationships with customers
and agencies so they understand the
unique needs and nuances that are criti-
cal to providing excellent service on both
ends of our business. An important part
of my job will be to help with strategic
direction, resources and support where I can —
and to know enough to stand out of
the way where I should.

And last, but not least,

5. Always end with your customer,
specifically listening to how well
you’ve delivered on meeting those
needs you’ve hopefully listened to
in the first place!

And in that regard, I’ve enjoyed spending
a portion of my time in those early
months talking to our library customers
about some new product ideas, and I look
forward even more to being a part of
the many library conferences at which
Bernan exhibits. Whether it’s at ALA,
SLA or AALL, I hope your readers will
stop by to introduce themselves and share
their feedback and ideas. And they don’t
have to wait for a conference; I can al-
ways be contacted via email at
<dwilliams@bernan.com>.

ATG: It’s nice to see Bernan’s continuing
and strong commitment to customer service.
And last, but not least, while I’m sure working
at Bernan is fun, what do you do for fun out-
side of Bernan?

DW: I suppose the normal range of things.
A little less of the tennis and skiing we’ve al-
ways done a lot of, now that our kids are out on
their own (our son lives in Manhattan, our
daughter in D.C.). But I still golf (badly), love
going to the theatre — especially Broadway on
our trips up to New York, and the Shakespeare
Theatre here in D.C., and then travel wherever
we can fit it in.

And like many of us in this field, I like to
write — hopefully maybe just a bit better than I
golf, but I suspect not!

ATG: And with a career in publishing, what
do you read?

DW: While I never have enough time to read
as much as I’d like, when I do, it’s a really
eccentric range — most recently the History of
the Blues (my “beach read”), quite a few
Edward Abbey’s works, an anthology of writ-
ings from The New Yorker, and currently Holy
Blood, Holy Grail.

Additionally, my wife is in charge of Reading
and the Secondary English Curriculum for
our county’s public schools, so I’m constantly
being handed myriad poems, short stories and
essays to read — which I promptly do. You never
know when there might be a test.

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**ATG Interviews Bob Schatz**

**Couts Library Services**

by Jack Montgomery (Western Kentucky University) <jack.montgomery@wk.edu>

**ATG:** Bob, you’re not a new face to most
of our readership. Could you take a moment
to tell us how you’ve come to be with Coutts?
What is your new title?

**BS:** Thanks for asking. After events at
Franklin Book went down, I was fortunate
enough to have several companies express in-
terest in acquiring my services. Frankly, at that
time, I didn’t think of Coutts as my primary
interest. As I had discussions with key manag-
ers within Coutts, including Andy Afferows,
Stephen Wilson, Managing Director of Coutts,
and James Gray, the company’s CEO, I became
more intrigued and more interested. After vis-
iting Coutts’ North American headquarters, I
became convinced that this represented a great
place for me to continue my career. At that point,
I accepted their offer to become Director of New
Business Development for the U.S., and I have
no regrets about that decision.

**ATG:** Can you tell us a little bit about the
company’s history and its overall philosophy?

**BS:** To my way of thinking, there are really
two Coutts: the Coutts of the past and the
Couts of the present. The company has been
aroused since the demise of the Abel empire,
some thirty years ago. Coutts at that time built
a solid reputation as an approval vendor of some
repute. The company faced some challenges,
though, and lost ground in the U.S. market at
least, to other organizations. Five years ago,
BMBC, a UK-based wholesaler of medical and
business books, acquired ownership of Coutts,
and this began the rebuilding of Coutts into a
truly comprehensive, international book sup-
plier. We now see ourselves as rightfully join-
ing Blackwells and Yankee Book Peddler as
one of only three truly comprehensive academic
book suppliers in North America, and in other
parts of the world for that matter. Coutts Li-

brary Supply, the largest division of Coutts
Information Services, now represents offices
in North America (US and Canada), the UK
(England, and Farries, a public library supplier
in Scotland), and in Holland, from which we
provide firm orders, approvals, and standing
orders to libraries in 130 different countries.

The philosophy is fairly straightforward:
offer true choice and true competition by pro-
viding a full array of services, delivered well.

**ATG:** Coutts seems to be changing, from
hints we’ve seen in the press and heard at con-
ferences. Can you tell us what’s going on? Is
the company changing its focus?

**BS:** We certainly have changed, from a com-
pany that thinks of itself as a regional niche
player, to a global organization, fully invested
in competing in all arenas in all services related
to the supply of books to libraries. And, we’ve
continued on page 63

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