November 2013

If Rumors Were Horses

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Against the Grain

"Linking Publishers, Vendors and Librarians"

Would You Like Print With That? — Will Electronic Reference Packages Supplant Print?

by Frances C. Wilkinson (The University of New Mexico; Phone: 505-277-4241; Fax: 505-277-7196) and Linda Lewis (The University of New Mexico; Phone: 505-277-7828; Fax: 505-277-4446)

Indeed, some areas have stayed the same. Concerns over price increases and inadequate budgets have not only caught the attention of the librarians participating in these columns, but librarians have bemoaned these concerns since at least 1927 when they were reported in College and University Library Problems. The other constant is the concern about keeping up with changes in technology. When this column began, the Internet was in its very early childhood and CD-ROMs were still considered an important format. Technology changes so quickly that computers that were state-of-the-art when they were ordered are outdated by the time they arrive in the library. No one knows with certainty what tomorrow's technology holds, although it is the job of librarians to make their best guess.

So, what has changed? Five years ago the question seemed to be “Do we want it in electronic format in addition to print?” Now the question seems to be “Do we want it in print in addition to electronic format?” Another change is the national drop in reference questions. Patrons are not coming to the reference desk as they used to. Now they are often dialing into a reference service — sometimes in the building from their own laptops! User attitudes have also changed in the last five years. Librarians used to worry that patrons would not use the reference resource in electronic format. Now many students will use the print format even when the electronic format is down and cannot be accessed.

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If Rumors Were Horses

Well ... it’s been a long, hot summer here in Charleston. But that hasn’t kept a lot of things from happening!

First and foremost, Adam Chesler (Director of Library Relations, Kluwer Academic Publishers) <adam.chesler@knap.com> and Marla Whitney (of the Edgerton, OH Whiteny), and formerly of CARL, Faxon, CARL, Rowecon/divine, and OCLC are getting married! Marla’s currently seeking to put her MLS back to work in the Boston area. She and Adam haven’t set a wedding date yet, but Marla sold her house in June (it was in Denver) and moved to Boston after NASIG. And, guess what? Their first meeting was at the Charleston Conference last year; though Adam says he was somewhat distracted by his impending appearance on the “weakest link” panel (which he’ll be appearing in again this year!). Pretty exciting!

More news! Chris Beckett <chris@chrisbeckett.com> (once Vice President of Library Services for Ingenta) resigned on July 8th to establish Chris Beckett Associates Ltd. CBA, which opened for business on September 1, is an independent management consultancy offering scholarly publishers, and other industry organizations, advice and research focused on business strategy, business and product development, and sales and marketing. Here’s the contact info: Chris Beckett, Principal, Chris Beckett Associates Ltd., Box Cottage, Tye End, Great Rollright, Chipping Norton, Oxfordshire OX7 5RU United Kingdom. Telephone and fax: +44 (0) 1608 730700. Mobile/Cell phone: +44 (0) 7771 849708. Coming soon: http://www.chrisbeckett.com.

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Dear Editor:

Thank you, guest editors Rick Lugg and Ruth Fischer, and all the contributors for an informative June issue about virtual approval plans and the changes in book selection due to technology, the Web, and continuous developments in the industry. I would like to note, however, while Blackwells pioneered the capture of Table of Contents data in the mid-1990’s, Majors Scientific Books offered the same service to its health science library customers in the mid-1990’s as well. Majors introduced the idea of being able to edit approval plan selections online in the late 80’s, creating a foundation for their virtual approval plan now available through their Website (www.majors.com). It is my understanding that Majors is experiencing a miniscule return rate which would indicate that their virtual approval plan process works well. Majors’ Table of Contents online database (TACO-Line®) is accessed by a small “taco” icon located under the title on its Website.

Future enhancements to any distributor’s virtual approval plan will be determined in large part by the questions posed by Stephen Png (p. 34) regarding cost-effectiveness, timeliness, viability and usefulness. However, once a basic virtual approval plan foundation is built, enhancements could easily follow, such as adding links to other formats and to other titles by the same author. Needless to say, publishers are the ones to determine accessibility to both chapters and full text, in particular prior to publication. (In some cases chapter information is already available at majors.com.) Majors plans to add new services and products in the near future, and information about them will be available on Majors’ Website.

Sincerely,
Anne K. Robichaux
(Prog. Emerita, Medical University of South Carolina; Consultant, Majors Scientific Books, Inc.)
<AWKR772@Charleston.net>

Dear Editor:

I was surprised by puzzling omissions in Bob Nardini’s current article about Cornell’s collaboration with its ILS vendor, Endeavor, on the latter’s ENCompass product. Given that Mr. Nardini, my former mentor and esteemed colleague, represents the vendor point of view (admirably and with aplomb, and always with insights into the library side of things, too), it was astonishing for this reader to find nothing about the ILS vendor’s ideas or opinions about said partnership. Did Mr. Nardini not interview the vendor? Did the vendor not want to be interviewed? This, in and of itself, would be interesting. Further, the mention of the faculty member asked to leave the discussion was particularly piquant and of great potential interest to ATG’s audience. I am guessing this was Dr. Van de Sompelijk or one of his associates, Mr. SFX Himself. Most, if not all of ATG’s readership probably associate SFX with Ex Libris, Endeavor’s competitor.

Wouldn’t the issues around this twist be a great read in a publication whose name is, after all, “Against the Grain”???

Dena J. Schoen
(Harrassowitz; Phone: 800-348-6886; Fax: 800-574-732)
<dschoen@ottosve.com>

From Bob Nardini — Dear Editor:

My thanks to Dena for providing a chance to learn a bit more about high-stakes campus research, a setting not unknown, these days, to some librarians. Among the people imagining and creating new online worlds for the rest of us to inhabit, no surprise that some such researchers can be found in the Computer Science department at Cornell. When librarians at Cornell, or at any research university, are likewise attempting to translate one of these futuristic visions into something that will actually work, today or maybe tomorrow, it will happen that people representing competing visions-and perhaps linked to competing commercial interests-occasionally find themselves in the same meeting, and so act out an instant case study in how a university’s ideal of free exchange of information might collide with the need to protect information that is proprietary.

I only wish I could offer a story as “pi-quaint” as it might well have been, with Herbert Van de Sompelijk, creator of SFX dynamic linking, storming from the library to burn away his anger with a long, brooding walk above one of the spectacular gorges which cut through the Cornell campus.

But I can’t. In fact I learned it was not Van de Sompelijk at all, or anyone working directly with him, who left the room when Endeavor came calling. The real story is in effect the same one, though, since it was a Computer Science department researcher involved with a different competing technology, not with SFX (competing, that is, with Endeavor development), who was asked to leave. In the interest of accuracy, while at the expense of drama, I’m bound to report also that when leaving the room, he left in all politeness.

A denouement: Herbert Van de Sompelijk, while not the man who left the room, has left Cornell altogether, after a short stay of some 18 months; again, not unusual in this high-stakes world. The man who did leave the room later left the Computer Science department too. He now works for the library, in fact, and can stay for all the meetings.

Dena is quite correct that I emphasized the library role in the joint development of ENCompass, at the expense of Endeavor’s role. Although I did in fact speak to Endeavor, and might certainly have said more from that perspective, I chose to highlight the library end of the relationship. That was because the benefits and costs to Endeavor seemed straightforward enough-clearly benefits for the most part, a core of crack testers and better marketing than could be bought. The library’s position seemed to me the more interesting, because it was the more ambiguous. Nothing proves that more effectively, I think, than the incident that didn’t happen, but that might have happened, when Herbert Van de Sompelijk was asked to leave the room.

Bob Nardini
<bradnini@YBCom>

Rumors
from page 1

Was recently in Amsterdam for the Fourth Fiesole Collection Development Retreat inspired by Mario, Michele and Barbara Casalini. The Retreat, cosponsored by Elsevier Science and Erasmus, was incredible and a lot of the papers are loaded on the Casalini Website at http://digital.casalini.it/retreat/. If you all want more information about the Fiesole Collection Development Retreats write me at <strauchkl@earthlink.net> or Becky Lenzini at <clenzini@charlestonco.net>.

And speaking of Erasmus, I was excited to learn that the co-owner of Erasmus, Sasha Brunsmann, worked for Richard Abel & Company in its Amsterdam office back in the seventies. Sasha owns Erasmus along with Kurt Tschennet. Erasmus was established in 1934 in Amsterdam and has become one of the leading library suppliers in Europe. http://erasmusbooks.nl/; Dora (Biblarz), <biblarz@asu.edu> this sounds like another interview possibility for your Richard Abel book!

And the wonderfully fabulous Dirk Raes, <dirk@erasmusbooks.nl> has been appointed Assistant Director of Erasmus! Congratulations, Dirk!

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Rumors from page 8

The wonderful and ever-reliable Bent Andersen has retired (effective July 31) after a combined 29 years of service with VBP and Baker and Taylor. I’m sure that Bent will be missed by all of us! He will be relocating from Virginia to California where he can be closer to his daughter and grandchildren (19 at last count! This leaves me speechless). Congratulations, Bent, and be sure and pack your baby-sitter’s manual!

The new Sirsi-LSI partnership was announced at the 68th IFLA General Conference and Council, which began August 18 in Glasgow, Scotland. The partnership will allow the provision of Sirsi libraries and their users with state-of-the-art virtual library reference services. Sirsi will integrate LSI’s Virtual Reference Toolkit (VRT) 2.0 software with its iBistro and iLink e-Library solutions for library users and staff, providing the capabilities for one-on-one virtual reference sessions and access to related electronic content. www.lsli.com or www.sirsi.com. And read the interesting article/opinion piece in this issue by Steve McKinzie and Jonathan D. Lauer. It’s called “Digital Reference: A New Library Paradigm or the Emperor’s New Clothes.” (p.34)

The always enthusiastic Steve Sutton has joined VBP Library Services as Regional Manager, Collection Development, effective August 19. Steve is well known to all of us for his work with academic libraries at Blackwell’s, netLibrary and most recently, Alibris. Congratulations, Steve! And, Steve will be in Charleston in November!

And, the fab-fab-fabulous Miriam Gilbert <MxGilbert2@aol.com> is now with Dekker! Here is her latest contact information: Miriam Gilbert, Site License Specialist, Marcel Dekker, Inc., 3121 Seventh Street, Boulder, CO 80304, phone: (303) 818-7187.

And this is just out! Bob Schatz <ebrover@yahoo.com> has been appointed Director of Sales and Marketing for the Franklin Book Company of Elkins Park, PA, a suburb of Philadelphia, effective September 1. “The most difficult decision of my professional career,” says Bob, who had to depart from his beloved Everetts. But — Colin Harrison and Bob swear that they’re both still friends and will remain so! Meanwhile, Manny Deckler, CEO of Franklin Book, and frequent Charleston Conference attendee (my kids still remember the peanut butter cups he gave them with great joy!), had this to say: “This is a great opportunity for us. Bob has earned tremendous respect in the library marketplace. His joining FBC will allow us to move ahead with plans to create a company that provides effective alternatives for libraries whose needs will never be met by the giant companies that dominate our industry.” Congratulations Bob!

And speaking of Franklin Book Company, Alison Roth is leaving her position there to become Northeast Regional Sales Manager with Swets Blackwell, where she was before joining Franklin. Alison is still participating in the panel “Vendors: Does Size Matter?” (the panel was her idea, after all) and she certainly has both perspectives (large and small) and it will be great to have her expertise on this panel!

In mid-August, word came out that the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) wants to discontinue PubSCIENCE. According to information released by DOE — since its inception in 1999, PubSCIENCE has provided researchers and science-affectionate citizens access to bibliographic records of peer-reviewed journal literature relating to DOE-supported work, addressing the need for a searchable gateway for the Department’s Web patrons. Based on an extensive public/private sector collaboration, PubSCIENCE has covered journals of participating science publishers, including hyperlinks to the full-text on publishers’ servers. More recently, private sector information products have emerged that freely offer bibliographic records to Web patrons. Provider systems such as Seirus and Infortrieve have progressively increased the availability of freely searchable citations, and this trend is anticipated to continue. A recent comparison of the content between PubSCIENCE and Seirus and Infortrieve showed that 90% of the journal literature in the scope of PubSCIENCE was covered by these two products. Taken as a whole, they provide coverage of information for DOE Web patrons. As a result of these findings, DOE is proposing to discontinue PubSCIENCE. Comments on this proposed action will be collected using the comment form available on this Website for a 30-day comment period to end September 8, 2002. Comments received will be considered in the final decision process for the future of PubSCIENCE.

Mark Storm is now Director of Publisher Relations & Marketing (PRM) for Swets Blackwell. This global division is dedicated to strengthening their relationships with publishers and more than 65,000 publisher partners. In addition to his role as PRM Director, Mr. Storm will join Swets Blackwell’s Management Team, based in its head office in the Netherlands. Mr. Storm comes from CustomerSelekt, a unit of Elsevier Business Intelligence, where he was General Manager. He has also held publisher and marketing positions at Uitgeverij ten Hagen & Stam, a Wolters Kluwer subsidiary, and Sdu Uitgevers. Former Publisher Relations & Marketing Director Yvonne Campfens will return to Swets Blackwell later this year following her maternity leave, when she will take up the new position of Deputy Director for PRM.

The awesome Heather Miller <HMiller@sunyalkalbany.edu> spent two weeks this summer in Sweden & Norway with a bunch of academics. Heather’s also trying to pull together a panel for the Conference on “Where Have All the Acquisitions Librarians Gone?” What has happened to acquisitions librarians? We need them, but they seem to be on the endangered species list. Heather’s in the midst of polling people to see what might come together, so if you have anything to tell her and haven’t yet, send her an email.

In that vein, the fabulous Michael Young (once of SUNY-Albany) has moved on to the University of Connecticut and SUNY-Albany has not yet replaced him, after one failed search. Congratulations to Michael, but condolences to Heather!

And I am sure you all remember that Michael (above) very kindly agreed to compile the results from the Charleston Conference evaluations for 2001. This year we need someone else to help and Heather recently sent out a plea on continued on page 14

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Ireland, The Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Turkey, and the U.K. SPARC Europe’s organizational sponsors include the Consortium of University Research Libraries (CURL) in the UK; the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) in the UK; the Society of College, National and University Libraries (SCONUL) of the UK and Ireland; and the SURF Foundation (The Netherlands). Membership in SPARC Europe is open to national and academic libraries, library organizations and research institutions in the region. The SPARC Europe office in Oxford will open in late October 2002.

Speaking of SPARC, they have recently distributed a major white paper examining the strategic roles institutional repositories serve for colleges and universities—"The Case for Institutional Repositories: A SPARC Position Paper" by Raymon Crow, SPARC Senior Consultant. Located at www.arl.org/sparc/ir/IR_Final_Release_102.pdf, apparently, the conclusions of this paper will be a starting point for SPARC Europe’s work under Dr. Prosser (see above). The paper asserts that institutional repositories are a natural extension of an academic institution’s role as a generator of primary research, and envisions such repositories as critical components in the evolving structure of scholarly communication. The white paper finds that the enabling technologies, standards, and protocols to support institutional repositories already exist; therefore, institutional repositories can be implemented immediately. http://www.arl.org/sparc/SPARC_Europe is located on the Web at http://www.sparc-europe.org.

According to the ARL Statistics 2000-2001: "For the first time since 1986, the median serial unit cost declined from a high of over $300 to slightly less than $280. It is not clear what might have caused the decline, but several factors may be contributing. One is the ways in which ARL data concerning electronic journals are reported. In informal conversations held with some ARL libraries, it seems that the inclusion of electronic serials in the counts of serial subscriptions caused a slight increase in purchased serials—often, for a relatively small addition to the base subscription price, some publishers provide access to electronic resources for an additional 10 or 20% surcharge. Furthermore, the elimination of the print subscription may have resulted in discounted subscription fees for the electronic-only title; a library may have access to the electronic-only version of a journal for 80% (or some other fraction) of the print subscription price..." The “Monograph and Serial Costs in ARL Libraries, 1986-2001” http://www.arl.org/stats/arlstats/graphs/2001/2001r2.html.

This is from DealBook (edited by Andrew Ross Sorkin) — Tuesday, September 3 — http://www.nytimes.com/dealbook/dbtk — "A month after it dismissed its technology-minded chief executive, Thomas Middelhoff, the German media conglomerate Bertelsmann is harshly prising its Internet ventures. Bertelsmann plans to shut down or sell BOL.com, its main online book-selling service, and has held exploratory talks with its chief rival, Amazon.com." And, speaking of which — Oops! Did any of you all see the extensive Wall Street Journal front-page article (in July 2002, I believe) on Bertelsmann. It was a wonderful, worth-reading article that my husband threw away (can you believe it? Of course I would have never done such a thing!) so I cannot give y’all the citation! And when I go to the library (imagine that!) I can’t locate the article and the online version... gulp... costs money. Any help out there? Did anyone see the article and can you send me the citation?

How was your summer? The wizard John Riley <jrlrey@attbi.com> says that Mass. and Maine had record heat all summer (106 degrees on the fourth of July!). Whew! It wasn’t even that hot in Charleston!

John R McLaughlin sends word to his valued customers that he has left Ambassador Book Service and can be reached at <jrlrey@erols.com>. He is looking forward to hearing from his friends.

Heard from the bam-zowie Kim Hallett (Sales and Marketing Director, Waddesdon Manor <vnmbox@smtptrust.org.uk>) the other day. After working at Blackwell’s Information Services before they joined forces with Swets, he is now working for an historic house in England called Waddesdon Manor, home to the Rothschild collection of art treasures. Kim says they have many publications which would interest us, including Waddesdon Manor—Heritage of a Rothschild House which recently got a favorable review in Library Journal.

Have you seen The Electronic Library: issue on Electronic Books for Teaching and Learning—www.emeraldinsight.com/eli.htm—(v.20, issue 4, August 2002), Guest Editor Monica Landoni. Papers in the special issue were selected from the track on “Electronic Books for Teaching and Learning” part of the Seventeenth Annual ACM Symposium on Applied Computing, (SAC2002), sponsored by the ACM Special Interest Group on Applied Computing which was held in Madrid in March, 2002. Participants from eleven countries contributed papers.

Recently visited my long-time soul mate, Betsy Williams (Outreach Librarian, Appalachian State University) <williamsd@appstate.edu> (no, Williams is NOT a typo). Betsy used to be a Reference Librarian at the College of Charleston and I have been upset ever since she left for the mountains she loves and the luxurious ASU Library. Anyway, while we were in Boone, of course, we visited with the library staff including the wonderful Mary Reiche and, of course, Eleanor Cook! Or I should say that we tried to visit with Eleanor! She was not at the library the day we were there. Rather, she was playing "Shoe Goddess" for the local Humane Society rummage sale (in addition to being president of NASIG, I might add). She was sorting through shoes, handbags, and belts rather than books and journals. Eleanor reports that they made $30,000 this year. Oh well, next time we’ll try not to conflict with the shoe sale...
just out of Library School. Susan was born and raised in Quebec and had both Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Library Science from McGill University. Surviving her are her husband, Dr. Mark Feinglos, her children: Daniel and Rebbecca, and her parents, Ralph and Beryl Goldman. Memorials may be made to the Duke Brain Tumor Center, c/o Henry S. Friedman, M.D., Box 3624, DUMC, Durham, 27710.

May both of our colleagues rest in peace.

Was recently perusing the Web and found this article in Delib magazine (June, 2002, v.886) http://www.dlib.org/dlibjune 02/bollen/06bollen.html—“Evaluation of Digital Library Impact and User Communities by Analysis of Usage Patterns” by Johan Bollen (Computer Science Department, Old Dominion University) <jbollen@cs.odu.edu> and Rick Luce (Research Library, Los Alamos National Laboratory) <rluce@lanl.gov>—Bollen and Luce maintain that a quantitative approach to digital library (DL) evaluation is needed “that analyzes the retrieval habits of users to assess the impact of a collection of documents and to determine the structure of a given DL user community.” Sort of related to this, the subject that keeps coming up repeatedly as we prepare for this 22nd Charleston Conference is usage of electronic resources and the fact that many libraries do not have the budget to continue to receive their current basket of books and still continue to obtain new materials. This will be an interesting session!

The steady and reliable (not to mention fun!) John Laraway (Blackwell's Book Services) <John.Laraway@blackwell.com> was recently in Charleston (he is taking over the Southeast territory) and we were talking, among other things about Lyman Newlin — Papa Lyman! Did you know that John used to work for Prentice Hall and he first encountered Papa when Papa was buying books for Richard Abel & Company? I didn’t. But John said that he was scared to death of Lyman and was excited when Lyman offered him a job at RAAC. The history that Papa has to tell us. Get crackin’, Papa!

And Ted Arnold is no longer with Blackwell’s. We will miss Ted and wish him well!

Speaking of Blackwell’s. In August, I talked to the incredibly knowledgeable Jack Walsdorf (last at Alibris but he was at Blackwell’s for a long time!) <jackjune@teleport.com>. Jack sounds wonderful! He has retired and is managing his brother’s estate and having a great time in Portland, Oregon. He says he will continue to do his book shows! We hope to see him soon — maybe in Charleston? He insists on subscribing to Against the Grain!

And, a little bird told me that Jordan Scopanski’s and Lea Well’s daughter will be a freshman at the College of Charleston this fall.

And I understand that Jordan and Lee went to the United Arab Emirates this summer.

Well, the Conference Directors for the 22nd Charleston Conference have really been working this year! The fabulous Ramune Kubilius (Collection Development/ Special Projects Librarian, Callier Health Sciences Library, The Feinberg School of Medicine, Northwestern University) <kubilius@northwestern.edu> sent out word over the MLA listServer. We have several great people speaking this year including Scott Putschke, Director of the Lister Hill Library, Univ of Alabama, and the husband of Lynne Fortney, Director of the Biomedical Division, EBSCO Information Services (formerly a librarian at UAB). And thanks to Sarah Gable (Associate Director/Head of Public Services, School of Medicine Library, University of South Carolina) <sarah@med.sc.edu> who reposted the information about the conference on the South Carolina/MLA Website as well.

This topic is particularly relevant due to the recent downturn in the economy and its impact on state university budgets. And it seems that the manner in which the necessary cancellation projects for serials were conducted varied widely. The astute Arlene Hanerfield (Associate University Librarian for Technical & Collection Services, Randall Library, UNC Wilmington) <hanerfield@uncw.edu> is putting together a panel of three librarians from UNC System Libraries who will discuss their recent serial cancellation projects during the Charleston Conference in November. Besides Arlene, the panel will include Nancy Newsome of Western Carolina University, and Stephanie DuBose, East Carolina University. Each presenter will provide information on the criteria and methods used to reach cancellation decisions. I know that travel budgets as well as materials budgets have been impacted this year. I am just keeping my fingers crossed that all of you will be able to come to Charleston. Arlene says she is dealing with the budget crisis by taking long walks on the beach!

The medical library people are exploring PDA technology big time. Have you visited http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/mobile/ edition/, the Wiley MobileEdition Service Website? The cut line is “Bringing journals to your palmtop.” This platform delivers “must-have” journal information (browseable journals’ Table of Contents and abstracts) directly to users’ wireless handheld devices and WAP enabled phones. Eileen Dolan (Vice President, WileyInterScience, John Wiley & Sons Inc.) says, “Health professionals have been particularly receptive to content delivery via palm-top technology, as it complements their work patterns, which can often be fragmented with most of their time spent away from their desks. … It was within minutes of the service actually going live and before it was officially announced, that we had our first user—a medical student.”
Aggregation, Integration and the Library Without Walls?

by Adam Hodgkin (xrefer) www.xreferplus.com

Content aggregators are playing an increasingly prominent role in delivering electronic subscription resources to libraries. It is timely to consider some of the advantages that can be conferred by aggregation but also some of the potential limits in the aggregator role.

The typical aggregation service will collect together in one on-line electronic resource copyrights licensed from a variety of publishers or authors. But aggregators do more than collect content from a variety of sources; these resources will be delivered to end-users through a common interface, they will usually be supported by a single search service and they will be part of a single delivery mechanism. There is a surprising degree of variety in the commercial terms offered in different areas, but increasingly aggregators are moving towards forms of subscription publishing. I work for xrefer which is an aggregator of “reference resources” so I will tend to draw examples from this field: but aggregators are operating in a number of different areas of the market: news stories, financial data, eBooks, ejournals etc. There are plenty of areas in which content from disparate sources needs to be aggregated if it is to be well used on the Web.

From the librarians’ or the end users’ point of view, I would suggest that there are three main advantages in having an aggregator deliver content resources into the library:

- All the resources are presented through a common user interface and style of presentation (this might be as simple as putting all the documents into Adobe Acrobat format).
- The resources share a common location (which for the end user means finding a large variety of similar resources within one service).
- The resources are offered through a common license, subscription package and support function.

The first point is hugely important and is directly driven by the importance of Web standards. Any successful Web aggregation service has to be true to the proven success of established Web services (Yahoo, Google etc). This provides a very important benefit for Web users. Think back to CD-ROM and the first generation of “pre-web” online services. The first and second generation of electronic publishing (on-line from a proprietary dialup system and CD-ROM) gave the information providers latitude to invent their own interface for each electronic publication. This predictably led to a confusion of incompatibilities, systems, interfaces, commands and functions. Whatever the merits or demerits of any particular solution or interface, the end-user was in the awkward position of having to learn and “forget” scores of different and incompatible approaches. The enormous pressure of Web standards has helped to stop rival software producers from re-inventing the wheel with each new publication. The Web has encouraged aggregators and it has encouraged them to keep it simple and to limit innovation.

There is however an important role for aggregators who can find ways of adding value without adding needless complication. For example: the Web services which five years ago began to aggregate financial information services soon realised that there was great added value for users in providing automatic and customisable graphing features. At xrefer we saw that a consistent model for aggregating reference works would allow us to create an additional type of metadata, xrefences, which provides linkage between reference works created by different compilers. A user who consults xrefer’s services (e.g., xreferplus) is able to browse between the different titles using additional meta-references which are generated by xrefer’s software and database system. For the user this means that browsing a collection of reference works can be an experience in which intimate connections between entries in different books are revealed.

The very scale and global nature of the Web has encouraged aggregators to focus their efforts within specific domains and to aggregate content sources which might otherwise be thought of as competitive. Thus one sees on the Web a tendency for content of a similar type to cluster within a service rather than being distributed between services. One might call this the “Chinatown” phenomenon. Just as Chinese restaurants frequently cluster within the same street, so content aggregators tend to offer groupings of content, which are both competing and complementary (one aggregator concentrates on newspapers, another on scientific journals, and so forth on reference material). I suspect that the reason for this is just the same as the reason that Chinese restaurants tend to cluster together. It is easier for the market to find a good meal if there are several restaurants in close proximity. It is easier for the user to find appropriate content if the competing resources can be expected to be in the same general “location.” This is of course a point in which aggregators tend to think very differently.
the final analysis, virtual reference is only limitedly effective. For all of the hype about reaching out in extraordinary ways and in unusual times, virtual reference fails our users. It doesn’t meet their information needs efficiently, and it doesn’t deepen their research capacities.

To be sure, the service allows librarians to pander to our readers’ addiction to the new world of 24/7. We can connect with them to a degree at their convenience and on their terms, but the seeming advantages fail to outweigh the service’s genuine shortcomings. Virtual reference doesn’t give us, as public service librarians, the kind of in-depth contacts with our users that will enable us to build relationships or develop our reader’s searching capabilities.

In traditional reference service, librarians offer assistance that is face-to-face, locally based, and decidedly human. Let’s be frank. In-person, genuine real-time reference involves moral and emotional elements that are virtually impossible through disembodied online interaction. Consider just one aspect of these moral and emotional elements: the well-recognized educative functions of reference service. Whether we are practitioners at a small liberal arts college or librarians at a large public library, our role is the same. We are cultivators as much as disseminators of knowledge. We model habits of information touting, gathering, selection, and dissemination. This modeling is almost impossible to develop over fiber optics.6

Moreover, any reference librarian can attest to the relationships that develop over time with students or readers who come back repeatedly to the librarian/mentor who first provided the service and inspiration to tough out a difficult research assignment. These relationships require contact face-to-face over time in a given place.

This is why fiber optic reference as a complete service has serious limitations. The Internet (for all of its advantages and wonders) is only minimally interactive. Anyone who has been part of a chat-room, a listserve discussion, or an instant messenger conversation knows the limitations of these relative even to a telephone conversation.

Online interaction can be ultimately dehumanizing and disembodied in ways that even the telephone is not. It may be too much to say that digital reference service is always decontextualizing, dehumanizing, or necessarily fleeting, but certainly this is often the case.

Yes, librarians should be exploring the potentials of digital reference. We should be open to anything that enhances user services and enables us to serve our readers better. Digital or virtual reference should be part of the librarian’s wardrobe. We should be clear about that. We certainly need to be open to change. Nevertheless, we should keep our heads and shun the high-flown rhetoric. The seeming advantages of virtual reference as a full-service approach to reference fail to counterweigh its deficiencies. The emperor would have been better off avoiding the tailor’s rhetoric as well as the tailor’s new clothes. The emperor’s less flashy and more substantive wardrobe had served him well enough.

Public service librarians, we argue, face a situation similar to that of the emperor. We have a substantive, non-virtual wardrobe of powerful and effective reference apparel. There is certainly no need to revamp our approach to collection development or begin to weed our print resources that may prove less accessible to our potential virtual users. Despite the revolutionary rhetoric to the contrary—revolutionary rhetoric that seems to emerge in decade-like cycles in library circles—virtual reference can only serve as a complement to the regular clothes of library public service. Virtual online service modules and electronic resources can never equal the potency and effectiveness of on-site, in-house, in-place, and wholly-interactive traditional reference practice and time-honored paradigms of reference collection development.

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Endnotes
6. We acknowledge our indebtedness in this section to the trenchant case made by Diekema and Caddell in their recent article regarding the limitations of virtual education. See Diekema, David and Caddell, "The Significance of Place: Sociological Reflections on Distance Learning and Christian Higher Education," Christian Scholar’s Review XXXI: 2-159-184.

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Rumors
from page 26

about the place of university presses in our current marketplace.

When I got this email just now I couldn’t help myself. My time is so spent with serials/journals/continuations and the special headaches they engender, that sometimes a good ole book is just what the doctor ordered. And this one is from one of my favorite people/publishing companies, Lynne Rienner Publishers! — Is Hilary Headed for the White House? / Madam President? The question is not if, but rather when the United States will elect a female president. With insightful analysis—enhanced by telling profiles of Shirley Chisholm, Elizabeth Dole, Geraldine Ferraro, and Pat Schroeder — Anticipating Madam President, March 2003, ca. 270 pages, ISBN: 1-58826-137-9 / cloth $55, ISBN: 1-58826-113-1 / pb $19.95 <tielrrnppub@hotmail.com>.

Heard from the affable Jim Gerard <gerard@ashgate.com> <Brookfield Marketing, Inc., Suite 703, 131 Main Street, Vermont 05401> who has retired from the Presidency of Ashgate (Y’all remember that Barbara Church took over a couple of years ago) and started a consulting business helping publishers (mostly European and small North American) market their books in the USA and Canada via direct mail, electronic book sellers, book review sources, mailing list acquisition, special sales, direct sales calls to librarians, advance book information, space advertising, listing books with major jobbers, BIP, etc., etc. Jim says that the Charleston Conference is an important adjunct to this work and is good fun as well. Anyway, Jim says he is looking forward to coming to the Conference this year.

There has been a lot of discussion on liblicense and other lists about Sage Publications’ decision not to renew its base licensing contracts with ProQuest and EBSCO when they expire at the end of 2002. Apparently, Sage has for several years been concerned about the impact of database aggregations on their subscription business, and recent research confirmed that Sage should plan now to discontinue participating in these aggregations. Because of this long held concern, the Sage agreements with ProQuest and EBSCO have for several years been one-year, renewable contracts. The liblicense archives <http://www.library.cdu.edu/liblicense/v12007/msg00099.html> is a good source for this. Also, upcoming in The Charleston Advisor (v.47/2) is an interview with the fantabulous Blaise Simuq about the ramifications of this decision for libraries.

Please send in your nominations for the ALCTS Acquisitions Section Leadership in Library Acquisitions Award. This award of $1,500, donated by Harrassowitz, is given to recognize the contributions by an outstanding leadership of an individual to the field of acquisitions librarianship. This recognition is made for intellectual achievement of a high order in this area. For nomination information, contact Nancy Gibbs, Chair, Leadership in Library Acquisitions Award Committee, Box 90187, Perkins Library, Duke University, Durham, NC 27708-0187, Phone: 919/660-5894, Fax: 919/684-2978; email: <nancy.gibbs@duke.edu> <http://www.acals.org/alaawards/leadership.html>.

That’s all we have room for this time. See y’all in November! <http://www.against-the-grain.com>