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Little Red Herrings-A "Wall" By Any Other Name Remains Equally Inspired?

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Little Red Herrings — A “Wall” by Any Other Name Remains Equally Insipid?

by Mark Y. Herring (Dean of Library Services, Dacus Library, Winthrop University) <herringm@winthrop.edu>

For those who keep up with such things, it now appears that the whole social network craze is well, a little forced, postured, and otherwise created out of thin air. It’s not unlike the so-called “HPOA Girl” who quit her job using a dry-erase board and air. It’s not unlike the so-called “HPOA Girl” postured, and otherwise created out of thin air.  It’s not unlike the so-called “HPOA Girl” to think about building a program content (it’s not all skiing and St. Bernards). So, if you’re interested in a meeting somewhat off the beaten path, keep us in mind.  Feel free to contact me with any questions.  I hope to see you on the Mountain next May!

The acquisitions Institute Planning Committee:
Faye Chadwell, Oregon State University
Nancy Slight-Gibney, University of Oregon
Scott Alan Smith, Alibris
The Institute is an Oregon educational non-profit corporation, #361549-95; EIN 71-1001116.

Notes from Mosier
from page 76

exhibits, but book vendors, serials agents, automation vendors and publishers attend and interact as colleagues. I must indeed thank: Alibris, Elbsco, Gale Cengage, Puvill, Swets, and YBP. We really appreciate it!

This year’s keynote speaker was none other than our own Katina Strauch. Katina’s presentation, “All I Need to Know I Learned at the Charleston Conference” was, as you’d expect, thought-provoking and engaging. With the help of Stacey Devine, Assistant Head of Acquisitions and Rapid Cataloging at Northwestern University Library, we’re working on a Website to host presentations, past programs, and other content from earlier Timberlines — I’ll let you know when Katina’s presentation, as well as others, are up and available.

The 2010 conference was also a first in that Camila Alire,ALA President, was in attendance and gave welcoming remarks. In addition, Molly Raphael, now ALA President-elect, was able to join us as well.

The complete 2010 program is available for viewing at our main Website, libweb.uoregon.edu/ec/aitl.

A couple of years ago someone referred to us as a “boutique conference,” and initially I resented the remark. The more I thought about it, though, I decided it wasn’t such a bad reference after all. We work very hard to provide the best possible conference experience, particularly regarding the program content (it’s not all skiing and St. Bernards). So, if you’re interested in a meeting somewhat off the beaten path, keep us in mind. Feel free to contact me with any questions. I hope to see you on the Mountain next May!

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Against the Grain / September 2010
As I See It! — Journal Pricing In An Electronic Environment

It is inevitable that the impact of the recession in the general economy from which we are now emerging has still not fully worked its way through higher education. There has been a time lag between the impact of the financial crisis and budget cuts in the public sector of the economy. In the UK, only now are we faced by significant cuts in public spending, which will affect the university sector. Libraries' acquisition budgets throughout Europe are likely to be static at best. We are simply following in the footsteps of the US economy. And the outlook is not promising in the foreseeable future.

Publishers have done relatively little to restructure their pricing models to adjust to two new realities: libraries' constrained ability to pay, and the overwhelming dominance of online journals in the modern library. Some publishers have frozen prices or have put through very low increases. But prices are still modeled on the individual journal subscription price, and even the Big Deal with consortia is grounded in the libraries' print holdings.

We have tracked scholarly publishing practice in a series of surveys for ALPSP. In the last survey in 2008, pricing methodology remained as complex as it had been five years before (Cox J. and Cox L., Scholarly Publishing Practice, Third Survey 2008, ALPSP, 2009). However, there has been a dramatic fall in the use of including online access with print subscriptions amongst large publishers and an increase in online-only pricing and ‘other’ models, including tiered pricing by number of sites, by FTEs and by classification schemes such as JISC Banding in the UK, and the Carnegie Classification in the USA:

- **JISC Charging Bands** are based on the public funding that UK universities are allocated by the government agencies responsible, the Funding Councils.
- **Carnegie classifications** tier universities by three fundamental qualities: what is taught at undergraduate and postgraduate level, the student profile, and size.
- **FTE-based pricing models** do not necessarily count FTEs in the entire university; in some cases, only faculty, staff and students in specified disciplines, schools, or departments may be counted.

In July 2009 Elsevier announced that it was reviewing journal pricing models, if only because 90 percent of its revenues from the academic market are for e-journal access. Since the launch of ScienceDirect in 1997, online usage has grown to half a billion downloads per year, but Elsevier has acknowledged that its journal pricing structures, however, have not kept pace with this speed of change (www.elsevier.com/wps/find/journalpricing.cws_home/reconsidering_journalpricing). It is not alone; most of the big publishers are working on how they can decouple online pricing from the printed edition.

In the online environment, the published subscription prices for individual journals bears little resemblance to what an institution pays for participating in a consortium deal or subscribing directly to a subject-based collection, which may represent a considerable saving on published subscription prices. Publishers have wanted to maintain their revenue streams, and libraries have been wary of accepting new models that significantly vary the total price paid to each publisher. Both have been happy to accept pricing that had its base in what was spent on printed journals in the mid-1990s.

However, that is not a rational basis for moving forward. There is a steady migration to a wholly digital journal environment in most academic libraries. Both librarians and publishers are considering new pricing methodologies, based on objective criteria. These criteria may include classification, the number of sites or FTEs, as mentioned, or usage. The problem is that they all have imperfections.

The classification schemes used may well suit a particular country, but they are not transferable outside the countries for which they were devised. The UK and the USA are okay, but what about the rest of the world?

Using the number of sites in an attempt to simulate the number of print copies that the publisher might have sold to a multi-site institution makes no distinction between genuinely separate campuses, buildings spread around a city in what is essentially an integrated institution, institutions with a federal collegiate structure such as Oxford and Cambridge, where the university (with its own library system) consists of many constituent self-governing colleges (with their own college libraries), and universities with affiliated external organizations such as hospitals. It is a horrendous model on which to base pricing, as any institution that is not based on one site faces negotiation with the publisher to establish fair pricing. That incurs significant costs for the publisher which can only be recovered through prices!

Basing pricing on faculty and student population (i.e., FTEs) seems rational. However, the numbers have to be transparent and auditable. In the UK, reliable and detailed statistics on student numbers and academic staff are maintained by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA: www.hesa.ac.uk). In other countries, institutions may be required to self-certify staff and student numbers. But in many countries in southern Europe, where the structure of universities varies from the typical Anglo-Saxon model, it is wholly inappropriate, as student registration means something different. Moreover, there is no...