
JBFL INTERVIEW

An Interview with Sam Brooks, Senior Vice-President of Sales & Marketing, EBSCO Publishing

Michael G. Enyart

***JBFL:* Can you give the readers a short history of EBSCO Publishing?**

In 1984, Gerald Seaman and Tim Collins, who currently manages EBSCO Publishing, co-founded a company based in the Boston area called Popular Magazine Review. The firm's product was a print magazine index with article summaries. The primary competition was H.W. Wilson's *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature*. In 1987, EBSCO Industries, Inc. bought the content-based company and merged it with a technology-based company that had also been newly acquired, Horizon Information Systems. A key figure in Horizon Information Systems was Oliver Pesch, who is now Senior Vice President and Chief Architect of EBSCO Publishing. This new organization combined its content

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with its newly available technology and offered one of the first periodical indexes on CD-ROM. In 1991, the company first offered electronic full text databases on CD-ROM and the following year EBSCO Publishing first began covering scholarly journals in its databases. In 1995, the company introduced its online service EBSCOhost. The company continued to expand, both in the number of staff and number of journals covered in its databases. By 1999, EBSCO Publishing had established itself as the world's dominant provider of online full text databases. On November 15, 1999, *Library Journal* published a survey of a large number of U.S. academic and public libraries and it said: "In the area of for-fee Web-based products, EBSCOhost and EBSCO's other Web products overwhelmingly took top recognition from both groups." In the late 1990s, EBSCO Publishing also established itself as the market leader outside the United States with national licenses in more than forty countries. Since then, the company has continued to grow its lead as the top provider of full text databases worldwide, adding new national licenses and new statewide licenses every year.

JBFL: Your headquarters are in an old mill factory. Can you tell us about that?

We are located in a three building, 200,000 square foot campus along the Ipswich River in Ipswich, MA, about two miles from the ocean. The buildings once housed The Ipswich Mills Company, which, during World War I, was the largest manufacturer of hosiery in the world. The company closed in 1928 and the buildings were eventually purchased by Sylvania, Inc. and were used to design light bulbs and manufacture machines that made light bulbs. During World War II, the buildings were used to manufacture proximity fuses for the war effort. The proximity fuse was unique at the time because it could automatically detonate a projectile when it came within destructive range, or "proximity," of a target. So, the buildings have a unique history as they have been home to key companies of the Industrial Revolution, the Manufacturing Age, and now, with EBSCO Publishing, the Information Age. We purchased the buildings in 1995 and renovated them, exposing much of the brick and beams that were exposed during its usage as a mill. We are pleased with the result and feel we have a very unique and interesting home. We love to show it off, so we would welcome a visit from any of your readers that find themselves in the area.

JBFL: What is the core business of the company and how does that fit with the overall business of your parent?

EBSCO Publishing's core business is providing online databases via EBSCOhost to libraries worldwide. There are two main types of databases: full text databases (e.g., Business Source, etc.) and secondary databases (e.g., EconLit, PsycINFO, etc.). EBSCO Publishing is a part of EBSCO Information Services. The other main business of EBSCO Information Services is the sale of journal subscriptions, which is handled via EBSCO Subscription Services. There are two types of journal subscriptions: print (AKA paper) and electronic (AKA e-journals). The two types of services (online databases and journal subscriptions) fit quite well together. Our services are linked together so that database customers have seamless access to full text from e-journal articles in their library's collection. Due to the core business of our parent company, publishers benefit because we are a responsible marketer of the full text databases. Publishers do not intend for full text databases to be used as replacements for journal subscriptions and because EBSCO shares the same core business with publishers, we are very careful to inform our customers of the dangers of misusing databases as substitutes for journal subscriptions. As a result, EBSCO Publishing has been able to license full text for the world's most prestigious scholarly business journals, while other database vendors whose parent companies are not subscription agents have not.

JBFL: Can you give us a short description of your product line?

Our online service is called EBSCOhost. This service offers three main kinds of products: full text databases (e.g., Business Source Premier), secondary databases (e.g., EconLit) and e-journal subscriptions (known as EBSCOhost EJS, which stands for Electronic Journals Service). There are five full text business databases available via EBSCOhost. They include three versions of Business Source (Elite, Premier, and Corporate), a companion to Business Source (Regional Business News), and Corporate ResourceNet for corporations that are looking for a smaller, more affordable option to Business Source Corporate. Business Source Premier (BSP), designed specifically for business schools and widely used by academic and public libraries worldwide, is our flagship product within our line of full text business databases. It is the world's largest and most complete periodical database specifically designed for business schools. Business Source Elite (BSE) is a high quality subset of

BSP. In order to avoid confusion, I will focus on Business Source Premier, which is an index to about 4,500 business periodicals with more than 3,500 of those titles available in full text. The database includes three kinds of periodicals: magazines, journals and country economic publications. It also includes many other non-periodical full text sources such as monographs, company profiles, industry profiles, market research reports, case studies, etc. Newspapers, newswires, and transcripts are available in companion databases, but are not actually part of Business Source Premier. The journals are the main focus of Business Source Premier. Recently, we decided to bring the top 300 journals in the database back to 1965 or the first published issue.

We also provide many secondary databases to business libraries, including: EconLit, Hospitality & Tourism Index (HTI), PsycINFO, and others. One of the key benefits of these databases via EBSCOhost is that abstract-only products like EconLit, HTI, and PsycINFO link not only to all e-journals held by the library, but also to all full text titles available through EBSCO full text databases. For example, EconLit indexes nearly 300 journals that are available in full text in Business Source Premier (many with deep PDF backfiles).

JBFL: Can you tell us what is EBSCO Publishing's sales focus? It does not seem that it is on selling your product to individual libraries?

We are focused on selling to and servicing individual libraries. We have about 200 sales representatives worldwide, and out of that large group, we have about twenty specialists who work with consortia, while the rest are focused on selling to individual libraries. I believe this question is being asked because we have been so successful in selling to consortia, but our long-term strategy calls for us to continue to provide the highest level of service at the individual library level.

In countries (e.g., Russia, South Africa, Iran, etc.) or states (Illinois, Ohio, Texas, etc.) that are EBSCO consortium customers, we are still very actively working with individual libraries to accomplish many company goals. First, we want to ensure that we exceed expectations at the individual library level, so that these customers will give their consortium's committee confirmation that they in fact made the correct decision to go with EBSCO. How do we do this? Within each customer group, we try to provide training for as many individual libraries as possible. Further, we attempt to be responsive to suggestions for improvements. In fact, we strongly encourage our customers to pass on such feedback. It's the one time we really have an opportunity to impress

someone. I can think of dozens of situations where specific individuals have requested something and we were able to go out and get it done. Further, we have many products and we believe our customers are excellent candidates for these other databases such as EconLit, HTI, etc.

In countries or states that are not EBSCO consortium customers, we also visit the individual libraries. In many cases, these are nations or states with no large consortium, so selling is not very complicated. In situations where a state provides a competitor's product, we believe our job is to visit the individual libraries to learn what they like more about our competitor's product, so we may improve our own. We also believe it is our job to provide them with detailed facts about why so many libraries have migrated over to EBSCO's products. In many cases, these libraries end up buying our databases on an individual basis, despite the fact that they receive competing databases free from the state.

JBFL: Who do you consider your major competitors?

Our major competitors in the area of full text databases are ProQuest and The Gale Group. Our major competitor in the area of secondary databases is Ovid/SilverPlatter, but they seem to be shifting their focus away from academic and business libraries to medical institutions. We do have some additional minor competitors in addition to those, but they are more of a fringe group and could not be described as major competitors. With respect to full text business databases, our company has only one real competitor and that is ProQuest. For many years, ProQuest's ABI/INFORM set the standard among business databases. However, this has changed. We now believe that we have substantially more customers for our Business Source product line, especially among the world's academic libraries.

JBFL: What would EBSCO Publishing's strengths and weakness be vis-à-vis your competitors?

In order to answer this concisely, I will discuss our flagship product and its main competitor. This is a question we have to answer on a regular basis because if you don't give libraries a reason to change, they would not and should not change. First, I will start with our weaknesses and what we are doing to address them. Our biggest weakness vis-à-vis our main competitor is that their product has been around for a very long time and it has enjoyed a good reputation. As a result, the name of our competitor's product is sometimes still associated with quality; even if

many of its highest quality full text journals are no longer available on an ongoing basis. We find we are very successful with libraries that are making decisions based on the quality and quantity of full text content. The other weakness of our products has historically been the level of A&I (abstracting and indexing). This will soon be a big advantage for EBSCO. I say this because EBSCO put quite a lot of effort/research into the creation of the definitive thesaurus for business, and we are using this new superior controlled vocabulary to retrospectively re-index all of the top journals in business in Business Source Premier. We are doing this back to 1965 or the first published issue. We are also re-indexing these articles by today's NAICS codes, as well as by company, by geographic location, by document type (case study, book review, etc.), and more. In addition, we are re-abstracting all of these articles, either with new, lengthy, high-quality informative abstracts or with the author-supplied abstract (depending on the article). This multi-million dollar project is currently in progress, and all of this new data will be added to Business Source Premier at no additional charge for our customers. Our philosophy is that this one-time major investment will permanently make Business Source Premier superior in every category, since it is already far ahead in full text journal quality and quantity.

Regarding our strengths, I'd like to start with the most important one: we have full text licenses for many more of the world's leading business journals than all other companies combined. In many cases, these journals do not have an institutional e-journal, so the only way to gain access is via Business Source. For example, we were given the usage statistics from Oxford University's Said Business School. They showed that, electronically, their two most used business journals were *Harvard Business Review* and *Journal of Marketing*. Since receiving that report, we have expanded coverage of *Harvard Business Review* in PDF from 1922 to present with no embargo. This should drive up usage even further. Our main competitor's database does not offer any full text for this publication. The same thing is true for most of the other journals we see at the top of the usage reports of leading business schools—our full text coverage is usually current with no embargo, and our competitor's coverage is either halted or unavailable (e.g., *Academy of Management Journal*, *Academy of Management Review*, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *California Management Review*, *Industrial & Labor Relations Review*, etc.). In addition, we are adding greater value to these publications by bringing them back to their first published issue in PDF. Further, since receiving that report from Oxford, we have expanded coverage of the *Journal of Marketing* in PDF from 1936 to present with

no embargo. Again, this should help generate additional usage. In the case of the *Journal of Marketing*, our main competitor's full text coverage for this journal ended on December 31, 2002. This is also true for the *Journal of Marketing Research*, *Journal of International Marketing*, *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*, *Marketing Health Services* (formerly called *Journal of Health Care Marketing*) and many other journals. These advantages exist with top journals in all disciplines within business, including marketing, management, MIS, POM, accounting, finance, econometrics, economics, etc. One reason for this is that when we work with leading scholarly societies and associations, we make sure we are giving them good reasons to continue their relationships with us for the long-term. In several cases, we have created special Web sites for society members and this has been helpful for the associations to maintain and increase their memberships. We are also the natural partner for most publishers as they know us as their largest subscription agent and they realize that we have as much to lose as they do if we are irresponsible in the way we market our databases. They do not want databases to replace their current journal subscriptions (print or online if available). We do a lot to inform our customers about the dangers of misusing our products and there is no question that this is helping us create a more stable set of databases. It is hard to grow a database if you are losing full text licenses as rapidly as you are gaining new ones. We do not have that problem. Between January 1, 2002 and December 31, 2003, we added more than a thousand new full text journals to Business Source Premier.

We will continue to expand backfiles for business journals. While our main competitor is offering a collection of about 30 business titles with expanded backfiles, we are including expanded backfiles for more than 350 business journals in Business Source Premier at no additional charge. I realize this is a long answer to your question, but in short, our strengths can be summarized by the following phrases: higher quality journals, deeper backfiles, and more active, full text, peer-reviewed journals in general.

JBFL: Can you tell us a little about Embargoes?

Publishers impose embargoes in order to protect against journal subscription erosion. I have written a comprehensive paper on this issue, and I encourage anyone who is interested to take a look. Here is the citation: "Academic Journal Embargoes and Full Text Databases"; Brooks, Sam; *The Library Quarterly* (University of Chicago Press); July 2003;

Volume 73; Issue 3; Pages 243-260. Since this is readily available, I will keep my response to you somewhat brief and make a few key points.

Because EBSCO markets its databases in a responsible manner, we are able to show most publishers that our databases do not negatively impact participating publications, even those with no embargo. EBSCO licenses many more full text, peer-reviewed journals than any other aggregator, and as a result, we have more journals with embargo periods than competing products. However, we also have a lot more quality journals without an embargo. If you look at the most cited management journals ranking study (by Coe & Weinstock), the top eight journals are very telling. Two of the journals are available in full text from EBSCO's Business Source Premier and its major competitor. Both databases are forced to embargo the full text of these journals for one year. The other six journals are all available via EBSCO's Business Source Premier with no embargo, but they have halted full text coverage (or no full text at all) in competing products. Halted coverage represents the most severe form of embargo. Management is not the only example of this trend. Every marketing journals ranking study I can find shows the top journals are available in full text via EBSCO's Business Source Premier with no embargo, but the full text for those same titles has been halted in competing databases. As far as I know, there are no cases where one vendor has a license with an embargo, while another one has a license without an embargo. Speaking from EBSCO's perspective, we would not want to agree to such a license. However, usually leading publishers do not feel comfortable licensing their full text to non-subscription agents. As a result, there are sometimes situations like the following: the *Journal of Finance* is available in PDF in EBSCO's Business Source Premier from March 1946 to present with a one year embargo. This journal is not available in full text from competing databases. It is situations like these that allow our competitors to claim that we have more embargoed journals than they do. While this claim is not untrue, the question is, would a library prefer to have no full text or ongoing PDF coverage with large backfiles and an embargo? We think we know the answer to that question because we have asked it so often. Libraries that buy the e-journal can link to current issues through our current abstracts, because abstracts are never embargoed. Libraries that don't have access to the e-journal benefit from more than 55 years of PDFs from one of the top two journals in finance. There are many other cases like this one. We feel confident that any librarian who researches this

will find that EBSCO is making the best possible decisions about its products for its current and future customers.

***JBFL:* You have established a number of “exclusive contracts” with some publishers. The big name of course is the *Harvard Business Review*. Many of us are happy that there is at least one electronic copy of this periodical but the “business model” is disturbing. If aggregators have to pay increased sums to publishers for the product, it stands to reason that some of those costs will be passed onto the aggregators’ customers, namely libraries. In the end, libraries will wind up paying more for the same or less. How is that beneficial to aggregators and libraries in the long term?**

In many cases, EBSCO is benefiting from what I call “de facto exclusives.” Most high-end academic publishers do not license their content to non-subscription agents. Because EBSCO is the only full text database vendor who is also a subscription agent, we experience a de facto advantage in this area. In the case of *Harvard Business Review*, their situation is a little different as they wanted an adjustment in the model and we were the only ones who agreed to their terms. We felt we had no choice because this was the most used journal in our databases. These are good business people and most librarians do not realize just how big their other ventures are (even beyond print subscriptions, such as reprints and products for professors) in relation to database royalties from the college and university market. These factors play a role in any decision they make and we are sensitive to that point. We have a long-term agreement with *HBR* (through June 2010) as we do with most other unique publications. It is these long-term agreements that help keep our database prices relatively stable. Certainly there are price increases, but the prices of these databases are almost always increasing at a rate lower than is typical of journal subscription prices, despite the fact that these products are made up of the same journals that are increasing at a rate of 7% or 8% per year. This is happening despite the fact that these databases experience dozens if not hundreds of full text journal additions each year. It is also occurring despite the unprecedented PDF backfile expansion we completed last year, and despite the massive retrospective re-A&I project on which we are currently working. So, it is accurate to say that libraries are not paying more for the same or less content. They are paying slightly more for a lot more content. We believe this trend can continue as long as our customers do not misuse our databases.

JBFL: You have used the phrases “responsible marketing of your database” and “customers do not misuse our database” Can you explain what you mean?

“Responsible marketing” refers to the way a full text database provider positions their products to their customers. We are responsible in that we make sure our customers know the publisher’s expectations in participating in these databases. Some vendors avoid this issue and their customers are often under the false impression that databases offer an affordable long-term way to save money on journal subscriptions. We have seen marketing materials from other full text database vendors that have actually advocated journal subscription cancellations as a way to free up funding for their databases. We consider that to be irresponsible marketing. “Customer Misuse” refers to customers who cancel a particular journal specifically because it is available in full text via the database. Databases offer many benefits, but this is not one of them. Vendors whose customers have “misused” their databases have paid for it in the form of massive turmoil, i.e., full text journals becoming halted or removed completely from the databases.

JBFL: It has been heard from some academic publishers that EBSCO has paid increased fees and promised help with maintaining their print subscriptions. This seems like a conflict of interest. What is your response?

We are interested in helping publishers maintain journal subscriptions, not necessarily paper subscriptions. In other words, many publishers are fine with a library canceling print in favor of electronic, as long as the electronic is the e-journal subscription rather than a database subscription. I dedicated several pages to this issue in an article which may be of interest to your readers. Here is the citation: “Integration of Information Resources and Collection Development Strategy”; Brooks, Sam; *Journal of Academic Librarianship* (Pergamon Press, an imprint of Elsevier Science); July 2001; Volume 27; Issue 4; Pages 316-319.

That text is still relevant today. Basically, full text databases can only continue to exist if they are a complement to journal subscriptions. If a publisher loses subscriptions, they will pull out of the database and the library will be left with, at best, a substantial gap in coverage even if they re-subscribe to the journal. In many cases, once cancelled, that library has lost the budget dollars needed to re-purchase the subscription. This is why we strongly recommend to our customers that journal sub-

scription cancellations should be made more on the basis of the prestige, usage and value of the journal, rather than its availability in a full text database.

In addition, e-journals and EBSCO databases are thoroughly linked from a technical standpoint. As a result, end users experience “one stop shopping” when using our products. We see this relationship as a large benefit, rather than a conflict of interest.

Finally, it is worth noting that our efforts to help maintain journal subscriptions (please notice I did not say “print” or “paper” subscriptions) are having a positive affect. Nearly every study/survey conducted by our publisher partners has shown they are not losing subscriptions due to participation in our databases. In some cases, our databases have resulted in new subscriptions to the journals. We are doing a lot to inform our customers about the risks of misusing databases.

The EBSCO staff has written articles touching on this in peer reviewed journals and international periodicals in local languages. We have done interviews with leading industry publishers and always bring this up. We have been the only vendor at many panel discussions, who specifically discussed this issue. We discuss this issue in detail on our Web site, our customer listserv and in our brochures. In general, we have found librarians are appreciative about the upfront approach. In the end, we are helping our customers avoid making costly long-term errors in collection development, and we are making publishers aware that at least one full text database vendor is marketing their products responsibly.

***JBFL:* It seems that publishers have yet to develop a business model for electronic publishing of their print products that yields a profit. Do you see EBSCO as the “electronic publishing arm” of many of these academic publishers?**

While we do provide electronic access to publisher content, our aggregated databases are a distribution channel for publishers, rather than an “electronic publishing arm.” We generate incremental revenue for publishers and provide them with additional exposure to markets and users they have not previously reached. Many of our publisher partners have their own electronic publishing initiatives to which our efforts are complementary.

However, there are some smaller publishers with whom we partner that do not offer e-journals and in many cases, our databases serve as the only electronic access to their publications.

To continue to be successful in the future, we realize we need to find more ways we can leverage the outstanding technical capabilities of our company as well as the far reach of our customer base to the benefit of our publisher partners. If we do this, we will continue to be able to provide libraries with valuable products and services at reasonable prices.

JBFL: Small boutique academic publishers may not be able to make the leap to electronic publishing. Will EBSCO assist those publishers in providing electronic files to their public?

EBSCO Publishing is focused on finding creative ways to be a useful long-term partner to publishers, regardless of their size. We perform many different services for publishers. There are cases in which leading societies and associations are looking at EBSCO databases as the main way libraries will access the electronic issues of their journals. At the same time, EBSCO is enabling the society or association to offer services to their members that cause these members to see greater value in their membership to the organization. So, yes, we are partnering with many small publishers now and are open to working with others to help them accomplish their goals.