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An Interview with Sam Brooks

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Serials Review

An Interview with Sam Brooks

Emily McElroy, Column Editor
with a contribution from Jeff Slagell

Jeff Slagell interviewed Sam Brooks, the senior vice president of sales and marketing for EBSCO Information Services, in December 2001. In this interview, Brooks discusses the debate on embargoes and exclusivity agreements in full-text databases that took place last year on discussion lists and in numerous articles. He explains EBSCO's role in working with publishers and librarians in providing full-text database services. Brooks also describes his work with the eIFL Direct Project. Serials Review 2002; 28:142–150. © 2002 Elsevier Science Inc. All Rights Reserved.

Sam Brooks is the senior vice president of sales and marketing for EBSCO Information Services, the world's largest intermediary between academic libraries and publishers of scientific journals. During the last ten years, he has worked extensively with university libraries worldwide. He has participated in projects with ministries of education, ministries of science and technology, and ministries of culture.

Brooks has authored several articles that have been published in a variety of library science journals. He has also delivered papers and participated in panel discussions at many library conferences, including ACRL (Association of College and Research Libraries) chapter meetings, IFLA (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions), the Charleston Conference, ALCTS (Association for Library Collections and Technical Services) Networked Resources and Metadata Committee Meeting, and LITA (Library and Information Technology Association) Technology and Access Committee Meeting. He is profiled in the 2002 edition of the *National Register's Who's Who in Executives and Professionals*.[1] He lives in Georgetown, Massachusetts, with his wife and two children.

Many people in the library profession may have been introduced to Brooks first through his posts to the LIBLICENSE-L discussion list in the summer of 2001. He was actively participating in the ongoing embargo discussion and presenting EBSCO's perspective on various issues. This interview concentrates on the numerous facets of the embargo debate and also discusses exclusivity agreements, EBSCO's business practices, journal backfiles, new market exposure, and library automation systems.

Interview

JEFF SLAGELL (JS): Before we begin, Mr. Brooks, why don't you tell me a little about your background and your involvement in the information industry.

SAM BROOKS (SB): I have really tried to aggressively learn about the industry, and in ten years I have been able to learn quite a lot. With EBSCO I have visited libraries in more than seventy countries—and I have been saying that for a while, so I think it's a few more than seventy by now. I haven't actually sat down and counted them for some time. We have had the opportunity to go to a lot of countries that haven't had resources that are on par with their Western counterparts, so those have been some of the most rewarding trips that I have taken. A lot of my time has been focused on those "non-core" market visits, and spending a lot of time on the emerging markets, where universities often have collections of only ten or twenty journals; full-text databases are a huge jump in the right direction for them. That has been a big portion of what I have been doing. I'm a member of ALA (American Library Association), and I attend most of the major conferences, such as ALA and PLA (Public Library Association). I was just at the Charleston Conference giving a panel discussion there. I've written articles for some industry journals, including the *Journal of Academic Librarianship* and *portal: Libraries and the Academy*, which is a fairly new but up-and-coming Johns Hopkins University Press publication. I've also given a lot of in-

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terviews to trade publications like *Library Journal.* And that's as much as I would say about myself.

JS: Something that occurred to me while you were speaking was that it appears vendors, aggregators, and publishers have taken a much more active role in participating in conferences and publishing articles. Do you think there is a trend toward increased involvement and attempting to obtain a grassroots feel for what's going on in the profession?

SB: I think that is a trend. I can speak specifically for EBSCO in that we think the best way to create new products and enhance existing ones is to ask the market what it wants us to do. It sounds like it is such an obvious thing, but not every company is doing it. In fact, the level of involvement that we have now versus ten years ago is dramatically different. We have advisory boards and councils that are mostly conducted through meeting in person and some strictly through e-mail. The Web has enabled us to send prototypes out to these councils and ask, "What do you think of this?" But in general—and not just with the Web—our philosophy is to spend a lot more time discussing future plans and existing politics with present and future customers. Technology is forcing companies to discuss more. Statements on a discussion list like LIBLICENSE-L, for example, are made publicly and must be addressed publicly. I don't think any vendor can avoid that particular forum. We wouldn't want to, and frankly I'm glad that there is a willingness by librarians to provide that type of information. I've been in other industries where it is much harder to get the kind of information that we (EBSCO's) get from our customers. They'll sit down and take the time to say, "This would be a lot better if you did this," and that makes our product development efforts a lot easier.

JS: Some of your LIBLICENSE-L postings have not only a public relations aspect but also an educational component.[2] You're trying to put information out there that pushes the dialogue along so each side understands where the other is coming from. Would you agree with that?

SB: Absolutely. I think sometimes there is an assumption by some librarians that all for-profit companies are sinister and attempt to mislead at all times. The fact is that there are a lot of occasions where we need to educate the market about why we make certain decisions. The bottom line is that all decisions, at least those made by EBSCO, are made with the goal of having the best possible product quality. Explaining our decision-making process is better than just sitting back and letting misunderstandings be stated and not countered.

JS: The embargo debate rose to the surface last summer, and you have been active in sharing your perspective on discussion lists and in articles. What has been the result of this effort?

SB: Now I think there is a better understanding of the difference between an embargo of a journal subscription that happens to be electronic versus an embargo on a journal that is part of a very large full-text database. I don't think that understanding existed a year ago. Embargo is a word that generates very negative reactions. The reality is that we still have conversations with customers and prospective customers about the issue. It actually comes up quite a bit, but I think the conversation is a lot further along than it was a year ago.

JS: What do you think contributed to the negative reaction?

SB: Some publishers were placing embargoes on their e-journals and charging very large amounts for the journals. The market reaction was very negative, and from EBSCO's perspective, we can understand why. Because of embargoes on e-journals, there was a real surge in negativity regarding embargoes in databases when they became more apparent. I think the reason they became more apparent is because EBSCO added a very large number of new full-text journals to our databases that were never available in databases before. The publishers of those new journals would participate only if there was an embargo period. The embargo period is publisher-imposed. I don't remember exactly how long ago it was, but probably for nine months to a year ago there was a reaction by some in the industry who believed the databases were becoming lower in quality because suddenly so many of the journals had embargo periods. In reality, the journals that had been there in the past still had no embargo, for the most part. A large number of newly added, high-quality academic journals, however, had embargo periods. This situation exists because there is almost no way to get a publisher with a $5,000 journal to put that journal in a database, unless there is some difference between what's in the database and what they sell electronically for $5,000. Publishers naturally moved toward embargo periods in databases because libraries are really paying what works out to be five dollars or ten dollars per journal in a full-text database.

Our thinking is that embargoes on journals in databases are acceptable if the journal is of a high quality and if there is no way to license the journal without an embargo period. The journals that are available with an embargo in our databases are almost always expensive peer-reviewed journals. Because of the great number of them in our databases, we know that in many cases it will be the only way a library has access to that information. EBSCO has gone through a huge backfile expansion project involving the conversion of hundreds of journal titles dating back to 1965 and 1975 to PDF (portable document format). If the library has no other way to access a journal, and it has a three-month or twelve-month embargo, but the PDFs go back to 1965 or 1975, we think the backfiles add legitimate value in spite of the embargo, especially if it is a high-quality journal. That is the way we went into the backfile expansion project. In our title lists we have the embargo column next to each journal, very clear to see. Plus, the title list can be sorted in Excel format. I think librarians had not noticed it before because there were a lot fewer journals with embargoes before we added all the new titles. We added more than two thousand new, scholarly journals, many with embargo periods, and librarians were and are able to sort our lists however they choose. After what has been literally hundreds of e-mail responses and dozens of discussions in presentations at libraries, people are starting to see what we are thinking here. We believe that full-text journals with embargo periods are more valuable than no access to those journals, particularly when the cost per journal is so low via databases.

JS: Your statement prompts a question. How do you account for some of these publishers finally jumping on the bandwagon even though they are imposing embargoes on some of the selected titles? What do you think is bringing them into the aggregated database market?

SB: The biggest thing that allowed the new publishers into the market where they had never participated before was that we (EBSCO) had gained a lot of experience with other publishers. We were able to say "Look at these publishers. This has worked well for them, and you should be doing this, too." As the top subscription agency in the world in terms of revenue provided to publishers for journal subscriptions, we were in a good position to have publishers understand that we would not do anything to destroy our own core business. That core business is also the same core business that is so important to scholarly journal publishers. Therefore, they were more willing to take a chance and participate.

Anyway, there are two main reasons for the influx of new journals and new publishers in databases. First, the number of participating publishers grew enough to make it comfortable for the new ones; and second, they were particularly comfortable working with EBSCO because they know we are the only company with as much to lose as they had. They knew we would be very careful about the way we marketed our databases. We actually sat down with many of them and went over everything we do to market the databases in a proper manner. We showed that we try to make it clear to our customers that our databases are not a replacement for journal subscriptions. It wasn't that hard to prove because many of the publishers follow what's going on in libraries—they go to the conferences, and they see us making presentations specifically about databases versus journal subscriptions.

Publishers look at the front inside cover of EBSCO's brochures and see the largest paragraph talking about the impact of databases on print and e-journal subscriptions. The publishers saw, and still see, many areas where we are communicating to our customers about this, and it makes them feel much more comfortable than if we had no financial stake in their core business and did nothing to discourage journal subscription cancellations. One of the main reasons we discourage cancellations is because we don't believe that the databases are an acceptable substitute for journal subscriptions. Not only do we have money to lose from such cancellations, but we also have customers that would be upset if we were to mislead them into thinking that they can go out and cancel Journal XYZ and expect it to still be in the database next year. In reality, if the publishers get a lot of cancellations, they will pull out of the database.

JS: When I was reading some of the posts in the LIBLICENSE-L archive, I saw a lot of activity from the aggregators, and it was initiated by questions from librarians. I didn't see much from publishers, however. Do you think that all sides contributed equally? Or do you feel that some were quieter than they should have been?

SB: I don't blame the publishers at all for staying out of the conversation. I think they perceive that if a publisher talks about something that some librarians consider to be negative, they will be singled out and there will be a free-for-all on that publisher. You know, open season. That is the reason why you very rarely see publishers coming out to talk about an issue such as embargoes. They are aware that not everyone will realize that they are just one of many doing this. They fear, and somewhat correctly, that some will believe that they are the cause of the "problem." I believe that is why you saw only one publisher respond to that chain of e-mails. They, MIT Press, were very clear though: they said they were finding that some aggregators were causing the cannibalization of their journal subscriptions.[3] By the way, publishers don't necessarily care to preserve the print; they care to preserve the subscription (print or electronic). MIT Press pointed out that they were in the process of reevaluating who they were working with, as far as aggregators go. They were clear with us that our being so up-front with our customers about embargo periods and the issue of replacing subscriptions was a big plus with them.

Unfortunately, there has always been an unbalanced discussion in the market. EBSCO is the one out there saying this is what we believe and why, and the other aggregators have been publicly silent and sometimes quietly critical. Publishers are silent for good reason, although I don't think MIT Press got a lot of negative press by their willingness to speak up. I think librarians appreciated that one of the publishers was willing to speak up. Still, I understand the perception of other publishers and the possible fear they experience. I participated in a panel discussion at the Charleston Conference (November 1, 2001) where we talked about why databases are not a viable replacement for journal subscriptions. I was glad to see there were a couple of publishers willing to get up and talk about this. However, it's a smaller forum with about 250 or 300 people in the room, so they were a little more comfortable with it, but there were not any publishers formally sitting on the panel.

JS: Are you familiar with the article "The New Digital Divide" that came out in *D-Lib Magazine* around the time this debate was taking place? It was July/August 2001, does that ring a bell?[4]

SB: Yes, it does ring a bell. You'll have to remind me. I think I read it.

JS: I have a quote from it that I would like you to respond to because it really jumped out at me. In this opinion article, the author stated in the discussion about embargoes that "publishers rarely enforce these embargo rights on aggregators, nevertheless their rights do so exist."[5] Do you agree with this assessment?

SB: If I understand that correctly, it's saying that publishers don't ask aggregators to impose embargo periods or that they don't require them to?

JS: Right, that's how I understand it.

SB: I think that's incorrect. Do you remember who wrote that?

JS: Stephen Bell is the author. I have the article right in front of me.

SB: Okay, I remember this exactly now. No, that's just not accurate. He is someone who's coming at this from a totally different angle. I don't know where that came from. I would encourage any librarian who is going to write such an article to contact us so that we can give better information.

Sometimes I read someone saying that EBSCO's goal is to do such and such, and I'll wonder why this person didn't at least check with us. I invite Mr. Bell to contact me at any time if he wants to discuss any of these issues. Anyway, when you talk to any publisher who is imposing embargoes, they know that they are imposing them, and they will tell you so if you ask them. They will also tell you that they are imposing them evenly. In other words, I don't know of a single publisher who says, "EBSCO, you must have an embargo in your databases, but Aggregator Number Two—you can have it without an embargo." The only reason we have more embargoes is because we have many more peer-reviewed journals in general. That comes from our position with the publishers. They know they can trust us, and they see us actively explaining to our customers that the real value of the databases is to bring new content to their libraries. EBSCO's databases have been the most stable of the aggregated databases. The reason for this stability is that we have gone out of our way to prevent cancellations by educating our customers. And that would definitely change if our customers decided to make wholesale cancellations of their journal subscriptions because of the databases.

JS: It doesn't sound like a flexible proposition.

SB: If you wanted to confirm what I'm talking about, you could talk to any of the major publishers participating in aggregated databases. They will tell you that they do impose an embargo on some journals in databases. They would also explain that they don't tell EBSCO and the other aggregators that they can choose whether to impose the embargoes. EBSCO believes it is important to apply embargoes when we are required to; otherwise, we may lose the renewal of the agreement with the publisher.

JS: That's clear enough. The statement just stood out as I was doing some background research, so I thought I would just clarify it with you now.

SB: This article, if I remember correctly, made statements about EBSCO's contracts with specific publishers and the details of the contracts, which are not public information. Many of the accusations were false. While we would like to correct every misstatement made about our company, it's not practical to do so. I try to speak with every librarian who really wants to get to the truth about what's going on, but I can't proactively look for these sorts of discussions. I can spend only so much time on these conversations. So sometimes we focus instead on positive things, such as improving our databases.

JS: Throughout the embargo debate, aggregators stated several times that embargoes are here to stay. What do you feel are the future developments in this area?

SB: I think that the publishers currently imposing embargoes will continue to do so. I think the reason is that they are comfortable with there being a differentiator between their subscription products. An example would be the journal *Science*. The publisher sells *Science* for as much as $5,000 per site in some cases. They also work with most aggregators. *Science* is in our databases, Gale's databases, and in ProQuest, and they impose a one-year embargo on their full-text content for all three of those vendors. The reason is that they are charging, in some cases, $5,000 for their electronic journal, a reasonable fee compared to other similar journals. The publisher fears that if our version of their journal was the same as theirs, librarians would always decide to take the considerably less expensive version. They couldn't afford to publish their journal if every site paid them only five dollars to ten dollars per year.

By no means do we encourage embargo periods in our databases, but when the publisher says that is what we are doing, we understand why they want to do so. Because we market our databases as complementary to journal subscriptions, however, and because we have been able to show publishers that our impact on their journal subscriptions has been negligible, or in a few cases positive, we have been able to sign some long-term renewals with no embargo periods. We just signed a long-term renewal with a publisher, which is an eight-year agreement with no embargo on any of the journals. So I can tell you that they will not have an embargo for at least the next eight years. I think there may be some publishers adding embargoes who never had them before, but I don't think you are going to see a huge number of them.

JS: In discussion lists and various articles that you have written, your mantra appears to be aggregator databases should be viewed as a supplement and not a replacement of individual journal subscriptions. In your opinion, is the library community getting the message?

SB: I think our customers get the message for the most part. I say that because our customers are much more exposed to this kind of information than libraries that don't buy databases from us. I was quick to note that the librarians who felt our message on LIBLICENSE-L was condescending were not EBSCO customers. Part of the issue was that this was the first time non-EBSCO customers were hearing it (that databases are not replacements for subscriptions). Our customers hear it all the time because we think it's our responsibility to communicate that to them—just as we think it is the responsibility that competing aggregators have to their customers. The reason EBSCO has almost three times as many peer-reviewed journals as other full-text aggregators have is that we go to such great lengths to ensure that the databases are used in the way that the publishers want them used. In the end, the publishers have control over what the databases will look like.

JS: The following is a statement from the unpublished paper that you wrote about academic journal embargoes. You had told me earlier that you had done this as a response to the discussion list messages, kind of a means of clarification. It's still unpublished, correct?

SB: Yes, I don't feel I have finished yet. I'd say it's about 90 percent there.

JS: Let me take a quote from it: "Thus an appropriate combination of secondary citation only databases, aggregator full-text databases, and current print and/or e-journals is generally the most advantageous solution for an academic library."[6] It seems like an appropriate analogy would be the stock market and diversifying your holdings so you would be less likely to be hurt. Is that the point you were trying to get across?

SB: I think that is exactly it. We really feel that combination makes the most sense. By secondary databases, we are referring to products like PsycINFO, for example. As hard as we work on the abstracts we create for our own journal databases, each subject area has a comprehensive index that has emerged as the standard. For example, the standard for psychology indexes is PsycINFO. Users expect to be able to go into PsycINFO and get as much full text as possible. The way we want to deliver that is through a combination of links to full-text databases and links to whatever journals the library has in its e-journal collection. That is the way we see libraries accessing this information in the future. We think the combination is very strong, and if the library is too dependent on full-text databases or too dependent on e-journals, with no full-text databases, the library will have some gaps.

Librarians might not know that our databases provide the full text of many journals that are not available in electronic form. We are the only electronic source for a lot of journals. Some of them are the leading journals in their discipline, but the publisher does not yet offer an electronic subscription. These journals represent one of the greatest values of EBSCO's full-text databases.

JS: Okay, we have talked about diversification. Let's look at the other extreme from a publisher's perspective. How do exclusivity agreements with aggregated database vendors fit into this equation?

SB: Exclusives are an area that has been talked about quite a bit. We have received quite a few inquiries from our customers based on what I believe was a rumor started by one of our main competitors. Originally, librarians noticed how great the differences were between our databases and those of our competitors, regarding the number of full-text peer-reviewed journals and the number of publishers participating. There was and is such a big difference that it's obvious there is some reason why publishers are participating in our databases and not in competing databases. Our sales reps, who are trying to differentiate our products, are saying, "Here are the full-text journals we can offer that are not currently available in your existing database." They are trying to give librarians a reason to change. If we cannot show them why our databases are better than what they currently use, then they shouldn't change; they should stay with what they are using. As a result of the distribution of these unique lists, there were some librarians who were upset and assumed, or were told by our competitors, that we must be signing exclusive agreements with publishers in order to have this advantage. In reality that wasn't the whole story.

"De facto exclusives" is an important term for anyone who is trying to understand the situation. De facto exclusives exist when a publisher decides "this is the database where I'm going to put my journals." Publishers may decide not to put journals in other databases because they feel that the other companies have no other financial stake in their core business. EBSCO is a billion-dollar subscription agency; these other aggregators are not subscription agencies. They don't incur any financial penalty if the customer misuses the databases and eliminates large numbers of journals subscriptions. That single fact caused many de facto exclusives, resulting in so many journals going into EBSCO's databases and not into competing databases.

Publishers see a definite difference between our databases and those of our competitors. Our databases are much safer to them because they know we are financially motivated to do what they want us to do, which is to market the databases properly. If the publisher feels comfortable that they are not going to experience journal subscription cancellations, then they will participate in databases. Until they have that comfort level, it is not worth it to them. Publishers who have a 100-million-dollar business are not going to make even one percent of that from databases.

I think some people imagine that we are paying ten million dollars to this publisher and that publisher, and it's just ludicrous. The percentage of their total revenue that publishers receive from aggregators is tiny. It's not about how much money they make from aggregated databases. They want to get exposure without cannibalizing their core business, which is so much larger. There are a lot of newspaper publishers that think in terms of how much money they can make from aggregators, but when it comes to academic publishers, they care most about preserving their core business, since the library market is their core business. Newspaper publishers do not usually know very much about libraries.

JS: Well, just for clarification, we should probably be making a distinction between a de facto exclusive (when a publisher feels comfortable working with EBSCO because they are also a subscription agency, for example) and also the legal exclusive contracts that exist.

SB: Right. I don't know the exact number of full-text journals we currently have, but I think it's around six thousand, and about half of those are not in our competitors' products. Those tend to be the more scholarly or more expensive journals. They are most often de facto exclusives.

JS: I would guess that many people's interest was piqued when they read about EBSCO's relationship with the *Harvard Business Review* in "The New Digital Divide" article.[7]

SB: Right. Actually, it's interesting—there was also an article done in *LJ Academic Newswire*.[8]

JS: I think the author was mentioned in "The New Digital Divide" article. Here it is, Andrew Albanese.

SB: His article was based on a rumor that he clearly identified as rumor. Yet, when Andrew called Harvard Business School Publishing and EBSCO, he received a very similar response from each organization. Our long-term interests are most aligned with Harvard Business School Publishing.

When Andrew did some research after the article, he found that publishers were doing reports based on input from customers who hadn't renewed their subscriptions. The customers were asked if there was a particular reason why they cancelled a journal subscription. I've found that, for the most part, librarians are pretty honest people—or at least more honest than people I have dealt with in other industries. They will say, "Yes, I cancelled because it was in Database ABC," not knowing that is a possible death warrant for that particular journal's availability in that database. The publisher's reaction is "I don't make enough money in this database to handle all of these cancellations, and I've got to get out." Many publishers share that kind of research with us, and one of the questions that always comes up is, "According to your customer list, you have more customers than the other aggregators, yet we get fewer cancellations from your customers. How is that happening?" That question is an opening to discuss everything EBSCO does to keep its customers informed on this issue. I also think educating the publishers on this issue is just as important as educating our customers.

JS: Along the same lines, are you familiar with the *Searcher* article written by Larry Krumenaker?[9]

SB: Yes. I have to admit that there are parts of the article that made me laugh out loud, and I'm not saying I was laughing out loud at the content; I was laughing at some of the ways he worded things. He was very clever in a couple of areas.

JS: I guess I was interested in Krumenaker's assertion that EBSCO had bolstered its market share with exclusive agreements.

SB: Was that his opinion or was he saying that's what someone was saying about us—perhaps one of our competitors?

JS: In the conclusion, that was his general statement. I feel it was from his perspective.

SB: Okay. I think Krumenaker should have been clearer about that being his perspective. That's one of the things that has been very frustrating to me. I have seen people write "EBSCO's strategy is to get a lot of exclusives and raise prices for their customers." Well, those things are not true. I think there is an average annual journal subscription price increase of 7.5 percent, but our database price increases don't come close to that, and aren't likely to. These are the same databases that in any given year will suddenly have hundreds of new full-text journals, yet they are only averaging a price increase of about three to four percent. We do not intend to suddenly impose huge price increases on our databases, and you won't find our customers saying that we are doing that.

Anyway, there were other parts of the article where I thought Krumenaker made some good points. He did some very thorough studies comparing the uniqueness of the journals, but I think he just compared what we had loaded at the time. We had a lot more journals licensed at that time, but he didn't actually list all of them because they weren't yet loaded in our databases.

JS: Let's shift gears a little bit here. I went through the EBSCO Website and looked at some of your press releases. In a June 2001 press release, EBSCO announced that it was working with Serials Solutions.[10] While it's an extremely useful product, do you have any concerns from EBSCO's or the publishers' perspective that it might create a means for some libraries to cancel individual titles because of the increased access that the product provides?

SB: We at EBSCO do not think working with Serials Solutions is going to make cancellations any more likely. I think that a librarian makes the decision to cancel journals fairly early. Often they are not aware that if the databases are used to replace individual journal subscriptions, the databases will lose a number of titles, making the database an unstable source of articles. But we don't think Serials Solutions is going to make that any more or less likely to happen. Our goal is to make librarians aware of the risks. I think Serials Solutions is a good thing overall, and that's why we're working with them. Serials Solutions is not the only service of its type; I think there will be a lot more services like it in the near future. We want to expand access to our databases. Once everyone understands what the databases are intended for, I don't imagine anyone will be more likely to cancel journal subscriptions because of Serials Solutions.

JS: From EBSCO's perspective, exposure is obviously crucial. I'm sure from a business perspective, the more exposure to your product, the more a potential customer realizes what you have to offer.

SB: That certainly is true. There are some librarians who feel that databases won't be around in ten years because e-journals will replace databases. Serials Solutions is actually one of the ways we can help ourselves be around longer by providing more ways for libraries to get access to the content of the full-text databases, which makes them more useful. Serials Solutions is one way, and an-other way is linking from the secondary databases such as MEDLINE, PsycINFO, and so forth, using a different organization's index with links to our full-text databases. When every journal is electronic— and I think that may eventually happen—it is unlikely, for budgetary reasons, that libraries will buy individual subscriptions for all six thousand journals in our collection.

JS: In an October 2001 press release, EBSCO announced the implementation of a new journal authority format in various databases.[11] I believe this is going to be integrated piecemeal in various databases such as MasterFILE and Academic Search Elite. This would allow users to search by publication name, journal volume, issue, and so forth. It sounds like a wonderful resource, and it will provide more information to the user as far as means of access. But again, is there a fear of possible misuse along the same lines we discussed regarding Serials Solutions?

SB: I think the publisher takes that into consideration. They are going to consider what their risks are going to be if they go into our databases with no embargo. If they go in with no embargo and experience subscription cancellations, the publisher may add some sort of embargo. We hope that scenario doesn't happen. If users go into our journal authority file and click on *Harvard Business Review*, they'll see there is no embargo on the journal. However, they might go to the next journal, which does have an embargo, and see very clearly that the most current six months and so forth are not available. So the same thing that protects the publisher in a search of the entire database protects them at the individual journal search level. Most librarians don't want to cancel a title in favor of embargoed access, especially if they don't have the guarantee that it will stay in the database. For those titles with no embargo, librarians should understand that the fastest way to have one applied by the publisher is to cancel subscriptions for those journals.

JS: What did the embargo on the electronic version of the institutional subscriptions to *Nature* and the subsequent about-face tell you about the current environment we are dealing with?

SB: I think that told us that the market would not react well in any circumstances to embargoes on e-journals. Although we work with a lot of publishers who have some sort of an embargo on their e-journals, embargoes on e-journals have become a rarity, and I think that is a good thing. I would never advise a publisher to put an embargo period on a journal in a database or on an e-journal. I think it's particularly dangerous in terms of market perception to do so on an e-journal. The case with *Nature* involved cooperation among librarians to work to change the situation with the publisher. Nature Publishing should get some credit because they listened to the market and responded by removing the embargo on their e-journal.

JS: I'd like to talk about consortia for a moment. In various publications from EBSCO, I have noticed that one of the selling points is that the databases feature titles that are relevant to a specific customer type (e.g., academic library users). Yet consortia have a lot of different interests and institutions involved, such as colleges, universities, school libraries, and special libraries. It seems that the consortia market could encourage the creation of one mega database to appeal to diverse groups. How are EBSCO and other vendors dealing with this issue?

SB: I think it would be a mistake to create a single mega database for a consortium with many different library types. We have seen other companies do this, and the reason we haven't done so is that we think there is already a problem with the Web in general. I don't care how good the search engine is—you see good stuff along with the garbage, and you have to sort through the garbage to get to the good stuff, which is frustrating. I think different people have different impressions of what's garbage; that's why it's hard to have a search engine sort it out easily.

With libraries it's easy, if you have a company that's willing to form databases for the different library types. Several aggregators have specific databases for the different library types. An elementary school student should not be searching a database with a chemical physics journal in it. That publication is garbage to a fourth grader. We want librarians to understand that we are not playing a numbers game. It's very easy to place a huge number of journals and magazines in a database, but if they are inappropriate for the target audience, all you are doing is creating marketing spin, which helps you get a sale initially but makes it hard to hold onto. You're not creating something that is useful for the end user. That's why there is a different database for every level of user, and there are different subject databases.

We do allow users to search all of our databases at once if they want to. We think the best way to measure numbers, if somebody does want to get into looking at numbers, is to look at the unduplicated number of titles across all of the databases that are offered. That will give you a much better answer.

JS: Let's move on to backfiles and discuss the process that EBSCO follows. Are backfile stipulations tied into the agreement that you initially create with the publisher and who is responsible for creating the backfile itself, EBSCO or the publisher?

SB: EBSCO creates the electronic files, but it's a collaborative effort with the publisher. We are willing to share the electronic data we create with the publisher. We just finished creating PDFs for the several Academy of Management journals going back to 1958. We actually got the issues from the publisher, which made it a lot easier. We implemented brand-new scanners with state-of-the-art technology for the project. We attempt to acquire rights to past content, allowing us to keep older PDFs in our databases even if the ongoing content license is not renewed. The majority of publishers have allowed us to do that for the project. I don't think there has ever been such a big project to create PDF backfiles for academic journals. We are doing all of the processing.

JS: I see. In response to the proliferation of electronic resources, various standardized licensing agreements are now available. Do you think the library profession should insist on a standard embargo-reporting format and other related details so we are all looking at the same information?

SB: To be honest, that's one where I'm biased. I would say yes. I think EBSCO does it in the way that is most upfront and useful. I would like to see all vendors do it the way we do it. The information is in our MARC records very clearly. In fact, some librarians use our MARC records as the standard and load them into their integrated library system because they know that not all of the aggregators are putting that information into those records. If they see it in our MARC records, they know to mark it on the competing databases's access to that journal, which has an embargo even though it's often not listed as such.

All vendors, if they have journals with embargoes, should be putting that information in their MARC records. They should be putting the information on their Website where everyone can get to it, not in a separate file. When librarians compare to see if a particular journal has an embargo, they shouldn't have to look at two lists. In my view, the embargo period for full text should be right next to the coverage date for full text. I also think the journal authority file in the database should list embargo periods. I don't think the differences in the way different aggregators communicate this will always be as dramatic as they are now. Customers of other aggregators must be complaining about this, and eventually they will follow suit. I don't think anyone would ask that we handle this differently, but I'd be interested in hearing feedback. It would be nice if there were some kind of standardized format. I think we would have a lot fewer misunderstandings.

JS: I would like to project ahead and talk about new market exposure from your paper posted on the ALA Website for the presentation you gave at the ALA Midwinter Conference in San Antonio.[12]

SB: You found that. I forgot about that.

JS: Yes, it's in the conference section for the ALCTS Networked Resources and Metadata Committee. You talked about the importance of new market exposure especially in community colleges, four-year colleges and so forth. You also mentioned the third world. Would you briefly discuss the importance of new market exposure and the current status of the eIFL (Electronic Information for Libraries) Direct Project?

SB: When I talk about the importance of exposure, I'm talking about exposure for publishers. Many academic publishers have subscribers among the ARL (Association of Research Libraries) libraries and among the midsized four-year academic libraries, and then it drops off. Most of the publishers we work with don't have the market penetration they would like in the small four-year colleges and junior colleges. They also want their content to be used in universities in the third world, and by coincidence, that is where EBSCO has the greatest market share. There are thirty to forty countries participating in eIFL Direct, and in every one, EBSCO is the main provider of electronic access to full-text content in nearly every university.

eIFL Direct is an important part of what we are doing in the third world, but it isn't our only source of business. We are working with other charitable organizations that have purchased access for a number of other countries. There are also more sales reps for EBSCO in these countries than you might expect to find. In some countries, like India, we have six sales representatives. It's a very interesting area for editors and publishers. They really like that exposure. We're not just doing it for the publishers. We think there is a lot of business there for databases, and we are thrilled to be helping developing nations to develop their universities. The greatest value of a full-text database bringing new, quality materials into a library that did not previously have access. A library that only has seven journal subscriptions is going to be very much in need of databases that can provide access to six thousand full-text journals. They can't afford not to buy our databases. That is why we invest a lot in content that is specific to these countries, that will complement what we already offer from publishers from Western Europe and North America. In most emerging markets, our market share is from 80 to 100 percent.

JS: Very impressive. That's all the questions I have for you today. Did you have any topics that were left untouched?

SB: I can't think of anything to add—you covered all of the major topics I can think of. The only important issues we could have talked about are the various aspects of linking, and I'm not really the best person at EBSCO to talk about that. When you look at the panel discussion requests that we have for various conferences, they are very often concerning linking: "What are you doing with SFX?" and "What are you doing with e-journals?" Tying those things together is important, and we do an awful lot there. Within the last six months, the library industry seems to have started to come around on the previously distorted issues of embargoes and exclusives. Were you at the Charleston Conference?

JS: No, I wasn't able to attend.

SB: During the panel I participated in, it became clear that once librarians understood the behind-the-scenes dynamics, we are able to move on to more critical topics. There was not a lot of argument on those particular issues; I think if you did that a year ago, you would have gotten the opposite reaction. The leaders in the discussion, the people that you see on LIBLICENSE-L all of the time, were actually getting up and saying things—not "I love embargoes," don't get me wrong—but that they would rather have this content than not at all, and that this does make sense.

JS: Does that provide you with a certain level of satisfaction?

SB: Yes, these are very bright people and in some cases it didn't take that much conversation. You had David Goodman from Princeton University and Chuck Hamaker from University of North Carolina at Charlotte, and others. The people who are on LIBLICENSE-L most often grasped it fairly quickly. We just had to explain exactly what our position was and is, and where this was all coming from.

JS: I do have one last question. My institution is in the process of selecting a new automation system, and in conversations with automation vendors, we discussed loading records and compatibility with various databases. Those I asked said they maintained a good relationship with EBSCO and other aggregator vendors. How does EBSCO fit into this automation business role?

SB: We put a lot of time and effort into working with the leading automation vendors. We do more work with vendors that are successful with universities because those tend to be the customers that are most interested in getting the information into their integrated library system. Endeavor, SIRSI and Innovative Interfaces are examples of automated system vendors we work closely with.

JS: Well, thank you for your time and insights, Mr. Brooks.

Notes

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