Profiles

Profile of Oliver Pesch
Christian Burris, Profiles Editor

Photo Courtesy of Oliver Pesch

Oliver Pesch is the Chief Product Strategist at EBSCO Information Services. In addition, he serves as co-chair of NISO's (National Information Standards Organization) SUSHI (Standardized Usage Statistics Harvesting Initiative) Standing Committee and the Executive Committee for Project COUNTER (Counting Online Usage of Networked Electronic Resources) as well being a member of several standards committees. Mr. Pesch previously served as the NISO Board of Directors chair in the 2008-2009 term and as interim director for part of 2014. As an advocate for library standards, he has articulated their importance both through his "Spotlight on Serials Standards" column in *Serials Librarian* and in his frequent speaking engagements at conferences across the country.

How did you begin working with libraries?

I have been involved in developing solutions for libraries for over three and a half decades. My first project related to libraries was a contract project to develop a cataloging module for an integrated library system (ILS). That was back in 1981 and from there I took on the role of head of development for that same system provider as we became one of the first organizations to offer a full-feature ILS that ran on a network of PC computers – that was a big deal back then! In 1986, after several years of ILS development, I joined two other individuals and we created a CD-ROM-based search and retrieval system that would deliver databases to libraries on that new platform. That company was ultimately acquired by EBSCO, and the software we developed evolved into what EBSCOhost and EBSCO Discovery Services (EDS) are today.

You're the chief product strategist at EBSCO. Could you share more about what you do in this position?

My role is about helping EBSCO set the direction of its products with a focus on our librarian tools related to managing, accessing, and analyzing library information resources. The role involves working with others within our product management team to set long-term visions for products and services and how they may interact in

the future, and to anticipate what problems will need to be solved in the years ahead. With the bigger picture in mind, we are then better able to advise current product and service development so that it can address today's needs while also anticipating future directions. Actual duties include keeping abreast of current trends in the market through the literature, engaging with librarians, participating in conferences as an observer, and through involvement in industry groups like NISO, COUNTER, etc.

Did you have any projects that you enjoyed developing?

I've enjoyed most of the projects I have been involved with but the ones that are really fun are where the team is able to produce a product or service that solves a problem that hasn't been solved before, or solves it in a more elegant way. I'd be happy to highlight a couple of these – one related to EBSCO work and the other related to some standards work.

In the late 1990s, EBSCO's portfolio of databases was growing and included a number of abstract and index (A&I) databases, like ERIC, MEDLINE and PsycInfo. Customers searching these databases also subscribed to full text databases from EBSCO as well as had multiple subscriptions with e-journal publishers. Customers were frustrated by the fact that a MEDLINE search result wouldn't provide a direct link to the full text, and that their users would have to conduct another search or go to another site to find the full text of the article. To address this challenge, we developed a technology which we called *SmartLinks* where we captured all the article-level metadata for all the full text we knew about (including the actual link to the article), whether that was in an EBSCOhost full text database or available at a publisher host. The system included article matching and rights checking components that would instantly match a search result in an A&I database against the available full text and, if there was a match, it would check the institution's rights to the article and show the full text link if they had a subscription. Databases like ERIC and MEDLINE that contained no full text suddenly were showing full text links for 50% or more of the

results for some libraries. The evolution of this technology, introduced in the early 2000s, remains one of the key linking technologies, both for our OpenURL link resolver and for our EDS/EBSCOhost search interface, driven by an article-level knowledge base of over 150 million full text links.

On the standards front, one of the most rewarding initiatives I had the good fortune of being involved with was SUSHI -- the Standardized Usage Statistics Harvesting Initiative. The year was 2004 and the problem was finding a way for electronic resource management systems (ERMs) to automatically load COUNTER usage reports from a growing number of content providers. This project went from concept in July (a casual meeting in a hotel lobby at an ALA conference) to working prototypes that allowed ERMs to harvest real COUNTER statistics by November of the same year. That initial prototype was tweaked a little based on the feedback we received, but the overall approach remains the same as SUSHI is today. SUSHI is one of the more successful standards developed through NISO. That was a nice win!

How did you become involved with NISO?

I first became involved with NISO by being a member of its working groups. The early working groups I participated in were Z39.7 (Information Services and Use Metrics & Statistics for Libraries and Information Providers) and the OpenURL working group that created Z39.88. Both of these working groups were seeking standardization in areas which were important to EBSCO and were of particular interest to me so they were a good fit. Participating in these working groups helped me better understand the power of collaboration and cooperation to solve problems.

As mentioned in the previous answer, such a problem presented itself in 2004 when a group of librarians and vendors were trying to solve the problem of automating the harvesting of COUNTER usage reports. NISO was the logical place to take this work and the result was SUSHI -- the Standardized Usage Statistics Harvesting Initiative (Z39.93). I was co-chair of the original SUSHI committee

and remain as co-chair today as we look to introduce SUSHI-Lite – a much more lightweight version of the protocol that will lower barriers to usage.

Your column, "Spotlight on Serials Standards," has been a popular feature of Serials Librarian. How did you get started writing it?

In 2008 I published an article in *Serials Librarian*, "ONIX, Z and JWP: Library standards in a digital world[1]" that attempted to put the various standards and related initiatives in the context of the e-resource workflow by identifying which standards were available for information exchanges in the various stages of the workflow, the nature of the data exchanged and between which parties. After reviewing this article, the editors of *Serials Librarian* thought that serials standards would be a good topic for a regular column. They asked... and I agreed.

How is NISO approached to consider and/or develop a new standard?

The scholarly information community in general has always been a good source of ideas for new standards, but NISO doesn't simply rely on being reactive to requests coming from the community and its membership. NISO has a committee structure in place to help manage the standard portfolio and engage the community. Currently there are three "Topic Committees," each with responsibility for standards work in different topical areas that are somewhat aligned with the overall scholarly workflow. These are: Business Information; Collection & Content Management; and Discovery to Delivery. In addition to managing a set of current standards initiatives, the Topic Committees seek to identify new standard opportunities; track complimentary standards activity; convene thought-leader meetings around topics getting buzz in order to incubate; and, consider ideas from the community. Anyone with an idea for a standard can contact NISO at nisohq@niso.org and they will make sure it is presented to the right group.

Would you like to share anything else with us?

I began working with libraries very early in their progression from print to online collections. It has been interesting watching the nature of collections, library workflows, and libraries themselves change over the past thirty plus years. And the rate of change continues to accelerate, as does the complexity of the networked information environment within which libraries now operate. No single organization can provide all the information, or all the services, or all the products needed by today's libraries. True success can only happen through cooperation, collaboration, and interconnectivity. This is why I see standards work as having continued and growing importance, with organizations like NISO and COUNTER providing the forum where stakeholders in the information supply chain can come together to consider effective solutions that enable the necessary information exchange and interconnectivity. It is also why I am excited by the new FOLIO (the Future of Libraries Is Open) collaboration as it imagines a new open source library services platform where libraries will be able to customize their solutions by assembling the set of applications that address their specific needs (https://www.folio.org/). The FOLIO collaboration operates under the assumption that a community coming together to innovate on the challenges its members face can be far more agile and effective in solving those problems than any one person or organization attempting to do so on their own. These are exciting times!

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[1] Oliver Pesch, "ONIX, Z and JWP: Library Standards in a Digital World." *Serials Librarian* 53, no. 4 (2008): 63-78, http://dx.doi.org/10.1300/J123v53n04_05.