

NASIG Newsletter

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Profile

Bob Boissy

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One of the great things about NASIG is that we have members from all segments of the scholarly communications spectrum. Bob Boissy, our president for 2012/13, has spent his post-MLS career on the commercial end of that spectrum, first with a vendor, later with publishers. He's worked with technology, licensing, information standards, and developing relationships between vendors, publishers, and libraries. He's smart and creative, and one of the quickest-thinking, wittiest guys you will ever meet.



Bob got his B.A. from Middlebury College with a major in religion and a minor in renaissance history, thereby getting a good start on developing librarian-geek cred. His early jobs were service-related, first in a church-sponsored school, later in establishing a group home for teens in Berea, Kentucky. While in the latter job, Bob spent a lot of time in the Berea College Library studying for the GRE. It was there he was inspired to pursue a career in librarianship. His studies at the SUNY Albany School of Library and Information Science (MLS, 1984) were focused toward medical librarianship and general science bibliography. But a shortage of medical library positions and the inexorable intertwining of library work with information technology drew him on to Syracuse University, where he studied information retrieval systems, office automation, and human-computer interactions, and received the Certificate of Advanced Studies in Information Transfer in 1988. On completion of his C.A.S., Bob had a choice between an academic position and a position with a subscription agency. He had experience through an internship at IBM with the systems used by the agency, so chose to go in that direction. "Luckily," he says, "I have been able to work with libraries ever since then."

For the next 15 years, Bob's work focused on the technology side of the vendor business, "... starting as a trainer for DOS based subscription control software for PCs, and gradually advancing to running MARC records services and then adding electronic data interchange services." He says he feels fortunate to have worked during this time under the guidance of Bonnie Postlethwaite (currently dean of libraries at the

University of Missouri – Kansas City), and the late Fritz Schwartz, for whom NASIG named its prestigious library education scholarship. He continues, “I would have been content to pass my career on projects designed to eliminate manual data entry for everyone by implementing new data interchange services between library systems, intermediary systems, and publisher systems ...,” but his professional trajectory changed when the agency he worked for went under.

Fortunately, Bob notes, a colleague pointed him toward the publisher formerly known as Kluwer Academic. “So,” says Bob, “I finished with the agency on a Friday and started with the publishing firm the next Monday.” When asked about making the transition from techie guy to licensing and library/vendor/agent relations guy, Bob responded:

As a former IT production person, I was not that keen on licensing. Balancing this was the fact that I was trained as a librarian and the clients were academic libraries, so I reconciled myself to serving academic libraries in a new way. After the merger with Springer, it really worked out for me, as the larger firm looked at my experience at an agency and said they wanted me to write service level agreements with the agents and work with them regularly, and really professionalize the relationship.

Many librarians assume there are no more than a dozen agents of any consequence. I tracked over 400. I was privileged to travel to Australia, Thailand, Mexico, Europe, and the US, and count trips to 46 US states and 15 foreign countries so far. Many in publishing and with sales careers have traveled as much or more. We signed service agreements with over 50 agents that are still in place. Soon Springer realized that with the agent relations situation stabilized, I could take on relationships with other intermediaries like e-journal database providers and e-book platform providers. During this time, we shaped our licenses to create deals that would complement our direct sales using business models offered by others. I gave this work the name “network sales” because we were maintaining relationships with a network of intermediaries. But the norm in publishing is to keep things fresh by doing something new, so I was eventually asked to be a leader in a new area Springer was developing for marketing called account development. The

intent of account development is to provide work to improve the discovery layer, and generally try to educate, train, and help with promotions at libraries. We are as close to sales as marketing gets, but I think we are rightly perceived as a service arm of a commercial company. For me, it is a chance to visit libraries again, work through the issues together, walk the beautiful campuses, and take pictures.

Reading over Bob’s resume, I was struck by how much work he’s done throughout his career in helping to develop information standards and best practices, including EDI, ONIX-PL, SERU, and PIE-J. When asked how he got involved in this kind of work, and what some of the rewards are, he responded:

Fritz Schwartz taught me to commit myself to understanding a new topic, often by signing up to present on that topic, and then to hurry to understand it because there was no choice! I agreed with Fritz that we would follow standards where they existed and create them where they were needed. I think it is fair to say that a very small group of us in the library, agent, library systems, and publisher world took on EDI X12 and then EDIFACT, and now others have created ONIX and KBART, to simply try and automate as many of the infrastructural transactions as we could. But when I traverse the NISO web site I see so many other standards in so many other areas of library and information science, that I know it has taken thousands of people over the years to give us the control necessary to present an organized information resource to the user community. I have learned that some standards are elegant and comprehensive, but suffer from a critical mass of technical implementation by the various stakeholders. Perhaps it is best to say that it can take several efforts to hit upon a standard that is critical enough, and perhaps also simple enough to implement, that it takes off. Recently I have assisted on the Shared Electronic Resource Understanding (SERU) work because I have seen enough long tedious licenses and worked with enough libraries to know that, at least in the US, we are safe working from an understanding. The Presentation and Identification of e-journals (PIE-J) is really a call for common sense and bibliographic integrity. Platforms should present content as it was published. A page with content of a former title, with ISSN of the former title. A page with content

for the current form of the title, together with ISSN for the current form of the title. Links back and forth between the two, and other conveniences. I think perhaps the greatest reward I ever got was hearing a librarian speak up at one ALA meeting to say that she was very grateful for electronic invoicing between her agent and her library system, because before it became available she had developed carpal tunnel syndrome in her wrists from typing agent invoices into her system, and now she could load the whole invoice with a few keystrokes in a few minutes.

Bob's current job title at Springer is "Manager, Account Development and Strategic Alliances." When he's not at the Springer New York office, or on the road, you will find him working at his home office in Massachusetts, perhaps "aggregating usage statistics for the 250 large clients I track in my Northeast/Mid-Atlantic territory, sending welcome kits to clients who are new to a product or need updated information at renewal time, arranging events for libraries – often relating to improvements in the discovery layer, and conducting discovery reviews for clients." And what are discovery reviews? He explains, "Discovery reviews are a fairly new thing for us. We evaluate library search tools as well as associated tools like Google Scholar and Google Books, doing a variety of searches to check the robustness of access to our publications." Other times, he travels to attend conferences or to make presentations. Sometimes, he says, he travels "to visit individual clients to discuss trends in how they are using our content and what we both want to do in the future." He continues:

Sometimes we are lucky enough to participate in a library open house or vendor day. Interacting with faculty authors and future student authors is fantastic. We like to have a lot of fun with these events. Giveaways, music, food, and a lot of library promotion! There is the strong sense among publishers that it is no longer enough to sell a library a package of online content. It is important to back that library with as much support as possible to make that purchase a success. I think active marketing is the next major stage for academic libraries, an aspect of which is the trend that has librarians moving out into classes and project groups. This is the online world we now inhabit. It

runs the danger of being invisible unless we take many steps to make it visible. My favorite project this year has been working with Deborah Lenares and Steve Smith at Wellesley College on an E-book Preferences survey. A survey or other research approach not only helps the library match resources to users by subject, feature, and function, it also raises awareness of information resources, and brings prestige to the library. Wellesley has done very good work implementing and promoting eBooks, and it shows in their usage results. Publishers should creatively support and sponsor library-centered research when possible. Look soon for a Springer white paper describing the results of this survey.

When asked what drew him to NASIG, Bob explained:

As a former subscription agent involved with technical matters and standards that involved publishers, library system vendors, and serials librarians, NASIG was a very natural place for me to present my early work. I liked the informal dress, the overall lack of commercial slant, and the substantive nature of the presentations I attended. NASIG is a national conference I anticipate with pleasure, and will be a place I continue to go for my professional development. I have had many of my role models become my friends through NASIG, and they pointed me to take my turn at leadership. Someday I hope to point others in the same direction.

As noted above, Bob is a creative thinker and an idea guy. When asked what his vision is for NASIG, he responded:

I would like NASIG to be an organization that carries on the conversation about the transformation of scholarly publishing, driving us down the road to a sustainable future and a new kind of librarianship. I would like in the short term to show libraries and publishers where they have common ground, such as in efforts to improve the discovery layer. I would like to encourage publishers to engage fully with the library and information community, and to this end I am building on ties between organizations like NASIG and the Society for Scholarly Publishing to develop programs where we will share a common table. I see the work of many NASIG past presidents trending this way, and I want it to continue. Whatever divide that money causes is not as

important as the health of scholarly communication in general.

Being an executive for an international publisher, hammering out information standards, and presiding over a professional organization makes for a pretty busy schedule. So what does our 2012/13 prez like to do in his down time? Bob says:

I enjoy reading collections of essays and watching soccer games, especially if my son James is playing. Visiting my daughters Laura and Libby in college is great fun. As indicated earlier, I am a campus architecture photographer, with the libraries of

many NASIG members in my desktop background rotation. I also enjoy working out on the elliptical at the YMCA with music of the appropriate beat on my iPod Shuffle.

In closing, Bob notes, "A final thank you to Steve Shadle for my presidential cowboy hat from Nashville. The folks at the Nashville airport were pretty cool with it. The changeover in Philadelphia was a little more exciting. I must think of some way to pay this forward to Joyce [Tenney, 2012/13 vice president/president-elect]."