

December 2003

## ATG Interviews Bob Schatz

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### Recommended Citation

Montgomery, Jack G. (2003) "ATG Interviews Bob Schatz," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 15: Iss. 6, Article 19.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.4210>

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## (Director, Sales and Marketing, Franklin Book Company, Inc.)

by Jack G. Montgomery (Column Editor, *ATG*, Western Kentucky University) <jack.montgomery@wku.edu>

**ATG:** Bob, how did you come to work with Franklin Book Company?

**BS:** The short answer is that the planets all came into alignment to provide a great opportunity for me to help direct a great company. The longer answer is that I've been aware of Franklin for some time, through my acquaintance with Manny Deckter, the company's President, and a long-standing friendship with Linda Moran, FBC's Director of Customer Relations. For some time I've been tracking the success of this rather remarkable domestic bookseller, so the lines of communication were already open.

**ATG:** Can you tell us a little bit about the company's history, its founder and Franklin's overall business philosophy?

**BS:** The company began in 1969, primarily serving special libraries in the Philadelphia/New York area. This is a great place from which to begin, because of the demands placed on vendors by special libraries. Franklin is used to meeting some rather exceptional requirements in terms of turnaround time, so we were ideally suited to meet the needs of academic libraries when we expanded our customer base. Manny Deckter acquired the company twenty years ago. His multi-faceted philosophy of business is still very much the guiding force within the company, and was what attracted me when we discussed the possibility of my joining Franklin Book:

- Pay attention to every detail; they are all important to both our customers and to Franklin.

- Listen to what the customer needs, and look for ways to say "yes" before you jump to "no."
- Never forget we're booksellers to libraries, not merchandisers; we don't "move units," we sell books. Learn the craft of bookselling. Know what goes on in publishing. Pay attention to the particular needs of libraries.

**ATG:** What, if any, specialized training, experience or education did you receive before getting into the book business?

**BS:** Now, that could turn into a very long story, but I'll spare you most of the details. I came out of Library School (U of Oregon, class of December 1976) with \$14 in my bank account. My first job with my new MLS was shelling tacos in a fast-food place in Eugene for minimum wage. Later I went back into retail bookselling, supplemented by waiting tables and doing some freelance advertising writing. I eventually went to Academic Book Center to see if they had any leads on library jobs, and ended up spending the next twenty years within that organization, where I eventually became VP for Sales. The library degree and all those years of retail and wholesale bookselling became the foundation for my work now as Franklin's Director of Sales & Marketing.

**ATG:** Who do you see as primary customers of Franklin Books? Are you organized to respond to a certain patron group?

**BS:** While special libraries are still important to the company (we have the IBM book contract, for instance), academic libraries have

become our largest customer group. We've established the same service options as the big companies, and internally we're organized primarily by those service areas: firm orders, standing orders, approval plans. There are other departments that cross service lines: automation/Web-support, accounting, sales. In most cases, customer service is handled within the specific service areas, so customers can talk directly with those most likely to have access to information that will quickly, and correctly, solve problems that arise.

**ATG:** So far, what has been notable in your experience in dealing with libraries? Have there been any unexpected issues?

**BS:** We've always been aware of the complexity that surrounds library book-buying needs. The issue for us today, and the one that is creating tremendous opportunities for Franklin Book Company, is the extent to which libraries today feel that service quality from booksellers is eroding. That keeps us focused on developing new services (our approval plan, for instance, was created three years ago), and on constantly looking for ways to improve existing services. Even though we have a minuscule market share compared to companies like Blackwell's and Yankee Book Peddler, there's still plenty of unmet demand among the libraries we serve. Our biggest challenge now is keeping up with our own growth. In a very depressed market, we have a great deal of optimism about the future of the company, though we have no illusions that the industry as a whole will likely not be a cheery environment in the coming years.

**ATG:** From a vendor's standpoint, what is one thing you wish most librarians knew but sometimes seem to forget or need to learn?

**BS:** Those of us in the commercial side who conduct ourselves professionally really are colleagues and deserve the same respect as fellow librarians. I think too many librarians still see us either as a necessary evil, or not worthy of much consideration and it's frustrating. Some of us in bookselling, I think, really want to be of assistance, and to be part of a larger library environment that provides knowledge to society. From my vantage point in sales, I see struggles all the time just to get appointments, let alone the opportunity to find and create positive synergies. Sometimes that frustrates me.

**ATG:** Do you find it difficult to compete with large companies/vendors?

**BS:** If anything, the opposite is true. For all the value that large companies promote to libraries, they don't necessarily provide levels of service that meet all needs. There are a great many libraries of all sizes, from ARL to very small college libraries, that are looking for better options, which creates opportunities for companies like Franklin Book Co., Inc. What pleases me, as Director of Sales & Marketing

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bookselling services but also integrate our selection, acquisitions, and shelf-ready processing services into the workflows of libraries. This integration must help libraries reduce their costs while getting the material into the hands of users faster.

Much of our development is focused on these issues. And that is not just IT related development but people development as well. We need people who thoroughly understand how libraries operate and can talk intelligently about how to integrate tools that aid selection, acquisitions, etc. Setting up workflows and integrating those into the various computer systems is a key element of success now.


Once we have established efficient ways for libraries to select and acquire material we can further improve library cost reductions by making more things available including non-English language material, non-book material, and electronic information.

To tie this all back to the Everett's and Academic situation, you can see that this requires significant resources. It will be harder for smaller companies to finance and provide these services in the future.

**ATG:** Dan, you have been with Blackwell's a good while. How will these changes affect our role in Blackwell's?

**DPH:** First, I have never had more fun nor worked as hard as I have for the last five years. I started in this business with Richard Abel many years ago. Having the opportunity to come back to this company after so many years and help prepare it for the future is a great deal of fun. Blackwell's has the resources, people, capital, systems, and the commitment that allows me to be creative and challenged.

I serve as the President and CEO of Blackwell's Book Services as well as a member of the Blackwell, Ltd. Board of Directors. I am involved in strategy at the highest levels of the book business, not just libraries, but retailing and a bit of publishing.

The recent changes will only make the job more challenging and FUN! 



for the company, is Franklin's willingness to step up to that challenge. Entering the approval market, for instance, was a bold move. What other smaller booksellers have developed comprehensive approval plans in the last ten years? When Nova Southeastern University approached us to help them acquire a shelf-ready opening day collection for a new library, we created a tech services department to handle their needs. That department now serves a growing number of our customers for whom we provide processing and cataloging, including original cataloging. As a company, Franklin has a history of boldness, of trying new approaches. That makes it much easier to compete with big companies.

**ATG:** What would your say is the greatest challenge facing the small book vendor today?

**BS:** Losing your enthusiasm. This business is tougher than most, because of the very low margins and a lack of significant economies of scale; each transaction requires a lot of handling to be done right. Over time, especially in trying economic conditions, the world can get pretty discouraging for companies that are failing to find ways to grow. That discouragement can seep into the fabric of the company and affect quality of service and relations with customers. That's where the downward spiral begins. I'm fortunate to be working in a place that energizes me, personally and professionally. I almost feel guilty (almost) telling people how much fun I have in my work. For me, working at Franklin Book Company is a great way to be both a librarian and a bookseller, but I'm not sure all my colleagues on the vendor side of things are having as much fun as I am. That's not to say we don't have challenges. All businesses do. We're just doing our level-best to turn them into opportunities.

**ATG:** I've seen your Website and it looks great and navigates smoothly! What do you envision for the future of your online ordering/ interactive Website?

**BS:** We're looking to add more content, so the information is of even better use to our customers. We're also constantly looking at the flow of processes on the Website, in order to keep its use as efficient as possible. There's always room for improvement. Even if those improvements are measured in individual keystrokes, incrementally those add up to have a positive impact to our customers.

**ATG:** How many staff do you currently employ and how is Franklin generally organized?

**BS:** There's a certain seasonality to this business. On average, our staff numbers around fifty, and we're growing. We're experiencing growth in all our service areas, though standing orders have really taken off in the last year, so we've added staff to handle the increased volume. We recently added staff in customer service and approvals as well. Especially in a down market, it is really gratifying to welcome new employees. As a measure of success, providing jobs can be a very rewarding experience.

**ATG:** Do you see Franklin taking a position in the whole e-books trade? Do you envision making e-books a part of your inventory?

**BS:** We're not opposed to the idea. Personally, I don't know why eBook producers would need companies like Franklin to market their wares. If they come up with a model that welcomes our involvement, and is financially viable, we'd be open to exploration.

**ATG:** Where do you see Franklin going within five years? What directions have you considered taking?

**BS:** I hope we go firmly into the past in the next five years. By that, I mean that li-

braries are as in need as ever for companies that understand good, old-fashioned bookselling. I remember a time when booksellers were valued as much for their knowledge of books and publishing as for their turnaround time. In the last 15 years, I think a warehousing kind of mentality has overtaken the industry. While some efficiencies have resulted, at least on paper, I think the overall quality of what booksellers provide libraries has eroded. Our goal is to maintain the best of the past while continuing to modernize our systems and procedures. If the science of bookselling leaves no room for the older art and craft of bookselling, libraries and their users will be the ultimate losers. Our task is to make sure the best parts of the past are included in the future we offer the libraries we serve.

**ATG:** Where do you find your greatest sense of professional accomplishment?

**BS:** I love libraries, and I love selling books. The combination provides me with a great sense of challenge and accomplishment. While I don't think I'm suited to just any business, I've found a meaningful home in bookselling to libraries. Helping a company like Franklin Book grow and better serve its customers is very rewarding. If we can continue to compete effectively against the big companies, and I'm convinced we can, then watching Franklin grow will bring a great sense of accomplishment.

**ATG:** Finally, what do you do with your "copious free time?"

**BS:** Visit my home (I'm on the road a lot), read, go to movies, worry about the future of America, watch our daughter turn into a delightful and interesting adult.

**ATG:** Bob, thank you so much for your time. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

**BS:** Just thanks for giving me the opportunity to share the Franklin story. I'm honored. 🐶

## Adventures in Librarianship — New Dumster Collegiate

by Ned Kraft (Ralph J. Bunche Library, U.S. Department of State) <kraftno@state.gov>

### Preface

Dumster's New Collegiate Dictionary, 12th edition, builds on the scholarship of past editions and corrects nearly half of the mistakes in the 11th. For instance, readers will be pleased to see that we have changed the citation of "ploural" to the technically more correct "plural." And where the phrase "new trality" may once have been, for a very short time, acceptable, we have settled on the more broadly prescribed: neutrality.

In a daring move, our editors have broken with tradition and overthrown the tyranny of "alphabetical order." Dumster's 12th has been organized by a "length of word" standard de-

veloped by our editorial engineers. This puts shorter words such as "a" and "t" toward the front, and mightily long words such as "quantumization" and "individulosity" toward the back. The editors feel that this approach is not only more cost effective, but will add a certain serendipity to the dictionary experience. With a nod to democracy in action, our lexicographers have added to the 12th edition new words selected by a reader referendum. These new words plug obvious holes in our language and will be useful to students and laymen alike. For instance, we can now call a small apartment a "condominimum." An annoying young person is now a "juvenirritant." And we can feel

both correct and well read when using "thebutant" to describe an uninformed theatergoer.

For the 12th edition, Dumster chose contemporary usage over archaic whenever faced with disputed definitions. Guidance for much of contemporary usage came by way of Mr. Anthony Soprano, a charming character who goes by "Snoop Dog," and my niece, Amber. Consequently, "ax" has to do with questioning, not the chopping of wood. "Baked" has much to do with intoxication and little to do with bread. "Nephews" are no longer related to you by blood. And "bomb," which was once a very bad thing, is now a very good thing. We believe these changes will help increase essay exam scores in our nation's high schools and community colleges.

The use of pictorial illustration has been  
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