

## Against the Grain

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# Speak Up! Communications between Academic Librarians and Scholarly Content Providers

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# Against the Grain

*“Linking Publishers, Vendors and Librarians”*

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## Speak Up! Communication between Academic Librarians and Scholarly Content Providers



by **Erin Gallagher** (Electronic Resources & Serials Librarian, Rollins College, Winter Park, FL) <egallagher@rollins.edu>

One of my favorite TV sitcoms is **Frasier**, starring **Kelsey Grammer** as the pretentious but loveable radio psychiatrist who addresses each caller with “I’m listening.” These two words send a short but powerful signal: let it all out, because he’s ready to help. When given the opportunity to guest edit a special issue of *ATG*, I could think of no other topic nearer or dearer to my heart than communication between librarians and content providers. My first professional position as a freshly-minted MLIS graduate was a Collections Consultant for **Coutts Information Services** (formerly with **Ingram**, now with **ProQuest**). After four educational years with **Coutts**, I hung up my vendor coat and joined **Rollins College’s Olin Library** as their E-Resources and Serials Librarian.

I’ve been on both sides of the fence when it comes to library/content provider communication, so I jumped at the chance to edit a special issue of *ATG* on this timely and timeless theme. I was delighted to discover that I’m not the only one with an interest in exploring ways to make the library/content provider relationship a more fruitful and satisfactory one.

Experts from both the publishing and library worlds generously authored the articles on this special issue’s theme, sharing their good, bad, and not-so-lovely experiences. As I became more familiar with these articles, I saw many of the same frustrations and hopes expressed among both librarians and content providers. Why does communication seem to be an afterthought when embarking on a new partnership (or fostering an existing one)? How can we simply communicate *better*? What does that look like? How does it contribute to our ongoing success?

I don’t know about you, but these are not questions that were answered when I went to library school. We learn to communicate on the fly, and unfortunately, much of our communication takes place when crises arise or when we have to work through frustrating negotiations or technological challenges. Even when both parties have the best intentions, when librarian/content provider relationships are based on putting out fires, we don’t build a foundation for successful partnerships. It’s easy to see why the “us vs. them” mentality perpetuates in conversations among librarians

and content providers; but as someone who has been on both sides, I know it doesn’t have to be this way.

In my current position at **Rollins College**, I communicate with content providers on a daily basis. When working with **Coutts**, I communicated with librarians on a daily basis. Is/was some of this communication of the negative/frustrating/bang-my-head-against-my-desk variety? Sure. But a lot of it led to mutual respect, improved user experiences, innovative product development, and lasting friendships. It may seem like librarians and content providers are constantly working at odds with each other, but this is only true if we make it true. In reality, we share common goals and objectives. We share similar values and in some cases, institutional missions. Libraries

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## If Rumors Were Horses



Congratulations to **Anthony Watkinson** on the birth of his fourth grandchild, **Lucy Knight**. She is adorable.

First up!!! Well, I DID NOT send you that weird email with glasses. I don’t think you need new glasses. It was SPAM and I apologize! **Facebook** and I have never been friends the way so many of you are. Sorry sorry sorry for the Spam. I think it is fixed. ;(

Did you fill out an evaluation form for the **2015 Charleston Conference**? We are happy to report that **Nina Peri** filled out a form and was the winner of the drawing for a **free registration for the 2016 Charleston Conference!** Congrats to **Nina!**

Speaking of the **2015 Conference**, we want to know your reaction to the Conference in the **Gaillard Center**. The **Performance Hall** was an incredible venue and large which we needed, no question. We know there were some acous-

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don't succeed if content providers don't succeed, and vice versa. And much like the realization that comes after a heated political discussion around my family's Thanksgiving dinner table, we can all learn from each other.

With this in mind, it was vital that I approach this special issue of *ATG* from a positive perspective, focusing not on the narrative that places librarians and vendors in opposite corners, but on what we're already doing to build and cultivate harmonious collaborations. If you've ever attended the **Charleston Conference**, you've seen this spirit of mutual respect in action. More content providers are hiring librarians with MLS degrees and more libraries are hiring former vendors and publishers. Organizations like **NISO** are bringing together voices from all corners of the library and information world to develop standards that impact our success in providing services to users. Librarians and content providers are working together to host mini-conferences and advisory meetings with a clear, shared purpose.

As you will read in the articles that reflect this special issue's theme, suspicions and misconceptions threaten to divide us, but we are already engaged in ways to combat this negative narrative. In the spirit of cordial communication, these articles bring together the expertise of librarians, publishers, and vendors. Perspectives and individual experiences vary, but each new voice fortifies a common theme: it's not enough to communicate only

in times of crisis or when we need quick fixes; we must commit to shifting the narrative to one of long-term sustainability and mutual respect. Perhaps we all have something to learn from Dr. Frasier Crane about being willing and ready to listen to each other.

I'm proud to present the following stellar articles on this special issue's theme.

To set the collaborative tone, **Meredith Babb**, Director of the **University Press of Florida** and **Judith Russell**, Dean of University Libraries at the **University of Florida**, start us off with "Why Libraries and University Presses should Support One Another." In their piece, they pull back the curtain on the relationship that develops between a library and a university press when the press is hosted by the university the library serves. Thanks to this fortunate shared environment, **Meredith** and **Judith** reveal their collaborative efforts, shared values, and the ways their similarities and differences have led them to realize they are "...two sides of the same coin that are essential parts of a vibrant university ecosystem."

In "Vendor Strategies for Libraries," we hear from **Doralyn Rossmann**, Head of Collection Development, and **Kirsten Ostergaard**, Electronic Resources and Discovery Services Librarian, both from **Montana State University Library**. Through their combined 25 years of library experience, they've gained valuable insight on managing vendor expectations and fostering advantageous relationships. Read on to learn about how they leveraged challenges in vendor communication into a set of Vendor Relations Guidelines with the intent to "...promote transparency, encourage understanding,

and make optimal use of time and resources spent with library/vendor interactions."

Continuing with the theme of perspectives from librarians, **Sarah Forzetting**, Head of the Ordering and Payments in the Acquisitions Department at **Stanford University Libraries** (and my former colleague during my **Coutts** days) presents the "Do's and Don'ts of Hosting Content and Service Providers at your Library: A Few Tips for your Next Meeting." **Sarah** has also been on "both sides of the library meeting table" and shares her wealth of knowledge on how best to maximize the short windows of in-person time librarians and content providers manage to squeeze in to their packed schedules. We can all benefit from **Sarah's** practical tips for do's and don'ts before, during, and after meetings.

We've heard from librarians and we've heard from publishers; now it's time to hear from both. In "Pushing the Vendor to Improve Customer Service," **Stacey Marien**, Acquisitions Librarian at **American University**, and **Bob Nardini**, Vice President of Library Services at **ProQuest** (formerly of **Coutts** and also **Charleston Conference** celebrity) provide a spirited "point counterpoint" take on librarian/vendor communication. **Stacey** introduces the challenges they (the "customer") faced in switching primary vendors and of communicating with a new troop of representatives. **Bob** counters with the challenges inherent in developing positive relationships with multiple librarians from a vendor's perspective (punctuated with **Tolstoy** references). Does it pay to be a "pushy" customer? Can librarians and vendors get along after a tumultuous start? Read on to find out.

**Michael Arthur**, Head of Resource Acquisition and Discovery at the **University of Alabama**, and **Stacy Sieck**, Library Communications Manager with **Taylor & Francis Group**, keep the collaborative momentum going with "Cooperation is Key: How Publishers and Libraries are Working Together to Achieve Common Goals." Not only did **Michael** and **Stacy** turn a once-strained relationship into one that is positive and fruitful, they also took their collaboration a step further by co-hosting a two-day library-centric workshop and publishing event. Read how working together toward a common goal (organizing an event) led to more effective communication and proactive involvement for both parties.

Not all librarian/content provider communication happens at the individual level. **Lindsey Reno**, Acquisitions Librarian and Subject Specialist at the **University of New Orleans**, shares a unique viewpoint in "Stemming the Tide: The Role of Subscription Agents and Consortia in Library Communications." Drawing on her experience with the **LOUIS Library Consortium** in Louisiana, **Lindsey** presents a compelling argument for how and why communication from a consortia or a subscription agent benefits both the libraries receiving the information and the content providers offering it. According to **Lindsey**, the future of consortia library communication could lead to "...more time building libraries, resources, and infrastructure that will serve the needs of the future." Who doesn't want that? 🌊