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# Amazon Is Eating Half.com's Lunch

Robert P. Holley

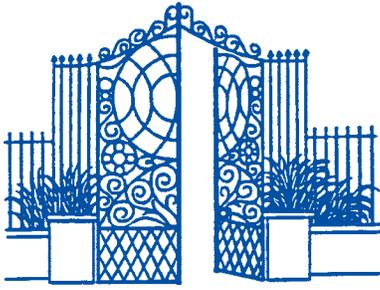
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# The CHARLESTON REPORT

## *Business Insights into the Library Market*

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### eBook News

OverDrive has announced plans to launch a new eBook reading platform called “OverDrive Read,” which will be based on open standards HTML5 and EPUB. The new platform is expected to offer significant benefits for publishers, booksellers, libraries and schools. Unlike other eBook apps or devices, OverDrive Read will enable readers using standard Web browsers to enjoy eBooks online and offline without first installing any software or activating their device. The new service will be based on software from the Australian firm Booki.sh, which was recently acquired by OverDrive. Online demos are available at <https://penelopiad-18893a.booki.sh/>. More general information is available at <http://www.overdrive.com/>.

A February survey conducted by the Pew Research Center and its Pew Internet and American Life Project found that 21% of adults said they had read an eBook in the last year, compared to 17% who reported doing so in December. This correlates with ownership of eBook readers and tablets that increased to 19% of adults compared to 10% in mid-December. Of interest, the average reader of eBooks reported reading 24 books in the past 12 months, compared with an average of 15 books by a non-eBook consumer. However, printed books still dominate the world of book reading. According to a December 2011 survey, 72% of American adults said they had read a printed book and 11% had listened to an audiobook in the previous year. To read the full report including detailed findings, logon to <http://libraries.pewinternet.org/2012/04/04/the-rise-of-e-reading/?src=prc-headline#>.

### Short Takes

Salem Press, a division of EBSCO Publishing, has announced the launch of The Library Blog Center — the home of The Library Blog Awards and the newly revised Library Blog Directory. With input from experienced bloggers and editors, the Library Blog Directory is a free, no-registration-required tool designed to help librarians discover high-quality blog content on LIS issues. The 1,300-plus library blogs may be searched or browsed by focus (e.g., Book Views & Reviews, Cataloging & Classification, K-12 Education); blog type (e.g., independent, publication, association); or blog audience (e.g., general, academic, school, public). Learn more at [http://salempress.com/Store/blogs/blog\\_home.htm#](http://salempress.com/Store/blogs/blog_home.htm#).

## TCR Reports: Medical Library Association 2012 Conference Highlights

... Reported by Dan Tonkery, President and CEO, Content Strategies, [www.contentstrategies.com](http://www.contentstrategies.com)

While I did not attend the first MLA meeting in 1898 in Philadelphia I have been fortunate to attend almost every annual meeting since 1971. MLA continues to be one of the best professional library meetings and it just gets better and better each year. This year over 2100 attendees arrived in Seattle for a wide range of programs and events. After 41 years of attending MLA I'd thought I'd seen it all. That was not the case this year.

**Continuing Ed.** MLA has developed a strong CE program and many librarians take the opportunity to attend the CE sessions. MLA has established an accreditation program for librarians to receive credits for CE. They bring together both librarians and seasoned veterans from the industry such as John Tagler (AAP) and Tom Richardson (NEJM) as instructors for these programs. Two of this year's CE sessions “Translational Science and the Semantic Web” sparked animated discussion amongst my fellow librarians.

**Strong Speakers.** MLA attendees are very committed to the programs and speakers are carefully selected by the Program Committee. When one of the main programs is underway the exhibit hall is a ghost town. According to both Jean Shipman (Director, Spencer S. Eccles Library at University of Utah) and T. Scott Plutchak (Director, Lister Hill Library at the University of Alabama, Birmingham) Steven Johnson's keynote was one of the best in recent memory. The other program that received high marks from nearly everyone was Mark Funk's Janet Doe lecture which brought down the house. Mark is the talented and versatile Associate Director at Weill Cornell Medical College. His presentation was entertaining and provocative as well as being informative.

**Exhibit Highlights.** There was a strong showing of exhibitors this year and a number of new products were unveiled. Most stunning was Elsevier's Clinical Key. This new product is a type of point of care service built on the vast Elsevier collection of medical textbooks, journals and other medical properties. Of note was the large footprint of the Clinical Key booth in the exhibit hall which seemed to scream “deep pockets.” However, it appeared that the lion's share of the cost for the product rollout went into window dressing. Elsevier staffed the booth with a gaggle of professional “booth pacers” to draw people into the booth who then either attempted to demonstrate the Clinical Key product or directed them to actual Elsevier staff. I heard enough grumbling about the very superficial demos attempted by these generic booth people to give Elsevier pause when considering this method of dealing with their customers in the future.

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## TCR Reports – MLA from page 1

**Advice for Exhibitors.** Exhibitors need to understand that the attendees at MLA are serious highly trained professionals and they expect to be able to visit a booth and get a professional demo, and not be exposed to a canned presentation that only highlights the product's features. Attendees are looking at products that must solve their day to day problems and don't wish to waste their time with professional show staff who next week will be working the new refrigerator shows in Las Vegas.

**On the Lighter Side.** No MLA would be complete without the very entertaining Open Access International Rock Band, the Bearded Pigs who played a double header in Seattle. I am not sure when the Bearded Pigs started playing MLA but T. Scott Plutchak and his band members always put on a great show and many MLA attendees danced the night away. The group is made up of a few talented medical librarians and a few publishers who have a love of music and do a great job of entertaining a loyal group of fans.

## TCR Quotes

**“All conditions are now in place for Google to participate in developing digital books in France and contribute to spreading French culture,”** said Google Books France Director Philippe Colombet, referring to the company's recent deal with the French publishers' association SNE which ended Google's six-year legal battle over copyrights. <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/714278.shtml#>

## Don't Miss This!

Powerpoint slides and outlines from presentations at the 27th NASIG Annual Conference in Nashville, Tennessee, June 7-10, 2012, are now available at <http://www.slideshare.net/NASIG/tag/nasig2012#>.

Summaries of the closing session and business meeting are also available at <http://nasig.wordpress.com/#>.

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*The Charleston Report* is written for publishers, vendors, product developers, merchandisers, and wholesalers who are interested in expanding their library market. Readers will gain insights in effective marketing to libraries, early alerts to library trends, access to library leaders' future plans, library budget projections, library strategic plans, technology directions, and publications needs.

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## By the Numbers

**13.4%...**The increase in books sold through mid-May vs. one year ago by roughly 500 members of the American Booksellers Association who were surveyed by Nielsen BookScan. Of note, the ABA also added 55 new members bringing its total to 1,567, marking the third straight increase for the trade organization that serves independent booksellers. *BEA Release, Associated Press*, June 4, 2012.

**300,000...**The number of institutional records in Ringgold's Identify database as of June 1, 2012, where unique records represent institutional entities that are acquiring scholarly and professional content. Records also contain details of each organization's hierarchy as well as a range of additional metadata, including classifications. Ringgold has announced that its Ringgold Number will be joined by an ISNI (International Standard Name Identifier) later this year. *Ringgold Press Release, Liblicense-1*, June 1, 2102.

**133 and 216 million...**The number of tablets expected to be shipped in 2012 and 2013 respectively, according to Morgan Stanley which recently revised their original estimates upwards by 57% and 122% based on actual sales data showing tablet shipments exceeding estimates by over 20%. The company also based its increases on a survey of "purchase intentions" which were much higher than anticipated. <http://tabtimes.com/news/ittech-stats-research/2012/06/01/morgan-stanley-revises-tablet-forecast-way-says-windows-8-has#>

## Mark Your Calendars

**July 21-24, 2012 — American Association of Law Libraries 105th Annual Meeting and Conference**, Boston, MA. Details and registration information at <http://www.aalnet.org/conference#>.

**August 3-4, 2012 — Mississippi State University Libraries eResource and Emerging Technologies Summit (MSU-LEETS)**. For more information, contact MSU LEETS Co-Chairs: Amanda Clay Powers (apowers@library.msstate.edu) and June Garner (jgarner@library.msstate.edu).

**October 4-7, 2012 — 2012 LITA National Forum**, "New World of Data: Discover. Connect. Remix," Hyatt Regency Downtown in Columbus, Ohio. Now open for registration at <http://www.ala.org/lita/conferences/forum/2012#>.

**October 22-23, 2012 — Library Directors Digital Strategy Summit**, Monterey Marriott, Monterey, California. A special event at the 2012 Internet Librarian meeting, this 2-day summit is a forum for library directors, CEOs, and CIOs of academic, public, government, and special libraries to problem-solve, discuss, and network with colleagues. More details at <http://www.librarysummit.com/2012/#>.

**November 7-10, 2012 — 31st Annual Charleston Conference**, "Accentuate the Positive!" Early Bird registration now open through September 14th. Details at <http://www.katina.info/conference/#>.

# Hot Topics from the Society for Scholarly Publishing, Arlington VA, May 30-June 1, 2012

...Reported by Judy Luther, *Informed Strategies*, <[judy.luther@informedstrategies.com](mailto:judy.luther@informedstrategies.com)>

Over 850 attendees set a new record for the size of the Annual Meeting of SSP whose members include those working in all areas of the creation, production, distribution, and consumption of research content. Four themes focused on challenges for publishers and librarians — being Social for customers, Mobile for delivery, Agile in development, and Global in sales. Collectively the keynotes and panel discussions clearly addressed the extent to which changes in the environment are shifting priorities in publishing.

## The Journal Repositioned

What role does the journal play with Open Access content freely available? The Center for History & New Media at George Mason University (GMU) recently launched the Journal of Digital Humanities which features “the best scholarship, tools, and conversations produced by the digital humanities community in the previous quarter.” The content is selected by the editors of Digital Humanities Now (also created by GMU) which scans the field to identify noteworthy Open Access content that is driving advances in the discipline. Those pieces that are considered sufficiently impactful to be included in the Journal receive additional evaluation, review, and editing. In an era where more content is freely available, the role of the journal in this model can continue to serve as a vehicle for credentialing authors and providing an efficient experience for readers.

## Value Is in the Links

Lee Rainie, Director of the Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project pointed out that we are all nodes in someone’s network. The value is in the links connecting people just as it has been in the links connecting documents. The most popular concept he referenced is “email bankruptcy” when someone acknowledges that they just can’t keep up and tells their friends that mail will need to be resent if a response is needed.

## Altmetrics – Stay Tuned

So how do we measure this space between people and between documents? Initiatives are emerging that seek to quantify social media metrics at the article level:

- <http://www.plumanalytics.com/> founded by 2 former Serials Solutions employees — Mike Buschman and Andrea Michalek

- <http://altmetric.com/> won the Elsevier competition for best app and offers a fee based service
- [http://total-impact.org/about#toc\\_2\\_1](http://total-impact.org/about#toc_2_1) created by Jason Priem (PhD candidate UNC Chapel Hill) and Heather Piwowar (postdoc at NESCent with a Sloan Foundation grant)

Such services may include Twitter, Facebook, blogs, and mainstream media, such as *NY Times*, *New Scientist*, etc. These are still early days so expect a lot of development to occur which will introduce new measures to balance the traditional journal impact factor (Citation Indexes) and journal article download data (Project COUNTER).

## What’s a Publisher Good For?

Young scholars often value speed of publication and may prefer feedback from their peers and mentors instead of a lengthy peer review process. Many will openly post the article they submit and some question the traditional role of a scholarly journal, believing that the process needs to change substantially.

## Publishing as an Ecosystem

The broad view of the publishing environment ranges from factors affecting authors through the entire supply chain including libraries and readers. Rafael Sidi, VP, Product Management, Applications Marketplace & Developer Network at Elsevier, described another new ecosystem that provides tools and solutions to support the researchers’ need to collaborate, to search and to manage their workflow. This perspective has led to actively cultivating the development of apps.

## Role of Metadata

The new breed of discovery services (Summon, EBSCO Discovery Service, ExLibris Alma, WorldCat Local) are constructed from metadata provided by publishers and replicates the functions of an interface for a Digital Library which poses questions about investing in future development. Bernie Rous, Director of Publications at the Association of Computing Machinery (ACM), acknowledged that “OA was winning.” ACM’s response is their newly developed “Author-izer” which creates a link for authors to use on their webpage or institutional repository that will link visitors directly to a free copy of the definitive version of the article so that the ACM can track this usage data.

## Check It Out!

*The Charleston Advisor’s* April 2012 issue (v.13, no.4) featured a special review section devoted to Islam and the Middle East. Among the databases and products reviewed are:

- Encyclopedia Iranica
- Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim World
- Encyclopedia of Women in Islamic Cultures Online
- Oxford Islamic Studies Online
- The Middle East Online: Series I: Arab-Israeli Relations, 1917-1970

Also featured in the issue was another comparative review of “Five Scholarly Open Access Publishers” by Jeffrey Beall who was recently featured on this topic in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (<http://chronicle.com/blogs/brainstorm/on-predatory-publishers-a-qa-with-jeffrey-beall/47667>).

*Ed Note: TCA is pleased to offer Jeffrey’s current review and all his previous reviews on an Open Access basis at: [www.charlestonco.com](http://www.charlestonco.com).*

## TCR Op Ed: “Amazon Is Eating Half.com’s Lunch”

... Reported by Bob Holley, Professor, School of Library & Information Science, Wayne State University, <aa3805@wayne.edu>

A quick search of “Amazon versus eBay” shows that Amazon is winning handily. This judgment is even more accurate when comparing Amazon with eBay’s book and media site, Half.com. Amazon and Half.com are quite similar because merchants on both sites sell for a fixed price and don’t have to worry about collecting their money, one of the main complaints against eBay.

I’ve been selling on both sites since 2009 and have had substantially the same inventory since 2010. Compared with 2010, unit sales for Half.com for the first three months of 2012 have declined from 30% to 17% of my total sales through the two companies. The declines are even worse for revenue — from 18% to 7%. I’m seriously considering abandoning Half.com to simplify my inventory control. As for the library world, I get library and vendor orders from Amazon but never from Half.com.

From the seller perspective, Half.com has advantages. Their fee structure is independent of volume, so I would recommend any seller with only a few items start there. Amazon’s commission structure is brutal for the casual seller since the company adds \$1 for each sale unless sellers sign up to be a “power seller,” which begins to make sense only after selling 40 units each month.

For buyers, shopping on Half.com is easier because the buyer won’t find multiple copies under different listings. Unfortunately, this is also one of its main weaknesses since a seller can’t create a new entry. On Amazon, sellers can create new listings for any book and for most media. Amazon thus has a much larger stock with 35.2 million book listings (not items) versus 9.4 million for Half.com. For depth of stock alone, Amazon is much more appealing to the serious buyer since sellers can add older, more esoteric items. Half.com only ships domestically and makes it harder to offer expedited shipping compared with Amazon’s international marketplace and ability to offer expedited shipping by item.

Amazon can also offer buyers a better deal with their hundreds of thousands of penny books — \$4.00 for a book including shipping. I once even saw a book for \$.02 with free shipping if the customer bought another \$24.98 worth of other eligible stuff. Half.com imposes a \$.75 minimum, which is no longer competitive for many popular items in abundant supply.

The main reason for Half.com’s decline, however, is likely to be that buyers think of Amazon when they think of books. My theory is this: Amazon allowed outside vendors on its platform in competition with its own new merchandise because doing so has helped create its reputation as the one-stop book vendor. “Look on Amazon first if you want to find a book.” Amazon is then guaranteed a profit by the high commission rate described above because many, myself included, would prefer to earn more by selling more, even if the commission rate is exorbitant.

Finally, I don’t really like eBay and Half.com. Amazon, for all its faults, projects the image of a friendly company. It offers free telephone support for sellers with questions even if getting there requires persistence and luck, and they admit to having technical glitches. At least to me, Half.com and eBay project the image of always being right and that any mistake is my fault because I didn’t follow their procedures correctly; they never have technical problems. Half.com also sends me nasty messages about not completely following their rules. Once I even had a support person email me — a librarian and former cataloger — that a different dust jacket meant it was a different edition and couldn’t be listed.

When eBay acquired Half.com in 2000, eBay planned to integrate the company and then shut it down but changed their plans because of seller protests and the profitability of textbook sales. Instead, eBay appears to be letting Half.com die a slow death.

### Colloquium on Rethinking the Future of Scientific Communication

In March 2012, Nader Rifai of Harvard Medical School and *Clinical Chemistry*, Michael Keller of Stanford University Libraries, and John Sack of HighWire Press hosted a meeting on the Stanford University campus to which 19 editors, librarians, publishers, graduate students, and leaders in the technology and communication industries were invited.

As background to the colloquium, the conveners posed the following observations and questions:

The format of communicating scientific information through professional journals has changed very little since the late nineteenth century. Recent advances in information technology have revolutionized search and discovery of scientific information. Yet, neither the migration from paper to electronic publishing, nor the explosion of social media tools, has significantly altered the basic presentation format of scientific findings. By comparison, the popular press has

undergone a transformation to better present and relay complex information to the general reader, whose expectations about how to find and use information may now be significantly different than they were just a few years ago. Why haven’t scientific research journals undergone this same transformation? How can we take advantage of technologies that exist and those that don’t as we look to the future of scientific communication?

At the meeting itself, a broad range of topics were discussed ranging from the desire for increased access to data, coupled with better ability to filter information and annotate electronically, to the merits and limitations of the peer-review process and the transitioning of today’s static publication format to an interactive one.

To read the executive summary and highlights of this enlightening meeting, log on to: [https://lib.stanford.edu/files/Colloquium.Summary.Final\\_.pdf](https://lib.stanford.edu/files/Colloquium.Summary.Final_.pdf).