Today the American Memory, Tomorrow the World

In addition to its more overt plans to "organize the world's information" (see coverage about the ongoing brouhaha over Google's Book Search—formerly known as Google Print—in *SLN* 25, no. 2: p. 1; no. 7: p. 6; no. 8: p. 5; no. 9: p. 5; no. 10: p. 6; no. 12: p. 5), Google seems to be expanding its mission via other organizations: enter a stealthy donation for the proposed World Digital Library (WDL) project. On November 22, 2005, the Library of Congress announced it had received a three-million-dollar (U.S.) gift from Google to undertake some preliminary work on a proposed World Digital Library, a project that—when implemented—will offer digitized copies of primary resources from around the world.

Librarian of Congress James Billington was quick to point out, however, that there are *no strings attached* to this gift from Google. And because all of the primary resources to be digitized are old, there are no copyright problems.

Back on June 6, 2005, Billington spoke publicly about the prospect for what he was then calling a "Digital World Library" at the annual conference—the first in twenty years—of the U.S. National Commission for UNESCO.

Google is the first private-sector company to contribute money and other resources to the project. This gift is small in relation to Google's five billion dollars in ready cash. To put this in perspective, if someone had five thousand dollars in a checking account, what Google has done is give three dollars to this worthy cause.

Digital Depth to Commemorate Countless Cultures

In an article he wrote appearing in the November 22, 2005, edition of the *Washington Post* ("A Library for The New World,": p. A29; URL is listed under "Contact"), Billington noted that instantaneous digital communication will not transform the "intractable orneriness of human nature" nor heal the deep conflicts between cultures. Instead, Billington envisions the WDL as a cooperative project that would celebrate the "depth and uniqueness of different cultures." He concludes: "We have an opportunity and an obligation to form a private-public partnership to use this new technology to celebrate the cultural variety of the world."

The World Digital Library will be modeled on the American Memory Project, which began back in 1994 and has grown to include ten million digital versions of primary materials.

One interesting aspect of the WDL is the LOC's ongoing "mission drift." What began as a library for the U.S. Congress has expanded into our de facto national library. With the WDL, the LOC could become a major repository for digitized primary materials from the world's cultures.—*Tom Peters*

Contact: www.loc.gov/today/pr/2005/05-250.html
www.loc.gov/about/welcome/speeches/wdl/wdl_6-6-05.html
www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/11/21/
   AR2005112101234.html

IN THIS ISSUE

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THE ILS SCOOP BY MARSHALL BREEDING

Long-Standing Geac to Be Absorbed by San Fran Firm

Following its acquisition by San Francisco-based Golden Gate Capital, Geac has entered into a major new phase—one in which it will no longer be known as "Geac."

One of the longest-standing companies in the library-automation arena, Geac announced the estimated one-billion-dollar (U.S.) transaction on November 7, 2005. Geac has been a Canadian-based publicly traded company since the mid-1980s; it will be absorbed into the diverse holdings of Golden Gate Capital, a private equity firm. Company officials report the "Geac" name will be retired.

As a public company, Geac was traded on the NASDAQ Exchange (GEAC) and the Toronto Stock Exchange (GAC). Its buyer, Golden Gate Capital, is a private firm and ranks as a major financial organization, managing funds in excess of $2.5 billion. Details remain uncertain pending close of the transaction, which is expected in the first quarter of 2006.

The Geography of Geac

In Geac's earlier days, library automation represented a major portion of the company's business activity. Over the years the company grew into a large diversified organization with a variety of products, geared mostly toward enterprise-level financial-management systems for large corporations and automation solutions for many vertical industries. In addition to libraries, Geac's Industry Specific Applications (ISA) division produces software for local governments, public safety organizations, and restaurants.

Geac's Library Systems Division is a relatively small operating unit within the ISA section of the company; according to recent figures provided by Geac, ISA as a whole represents about nineteen percent of Geac's overall revenues, and the specific revenues from the Library Systems Division are a small portion of ISA.

Even though NASDAQ and TSE require reporting on overall revenues and earnings, the company has not disclosed financial information on individual units, such as the Library Systems Division, for many years. Few of the financial reports issued by Geac would include any mention of the Library Systems Division.

A Window Opening?

Although the sale of Geac to Golden Gate involves the demise of the company as a whole, it may represent a path to survival for its individual operating units. In recent years, Geac has mushroomed in size via the acquisition of many companies; the resulting assemblage proved to be an attractive candidate—over the course of the last five years, Geac's stock price had increased by 270 percent—for the even larger firm, Golden Gate Capital.

Golden Gate will disassemble Geac, merge parts of it into other businesses it already owns, and form, at last, one new wholly owned company. Geac's ERP products will be merged into a Golden Gate-owned company called "Infor." Geac's financial applications and the entire ISA division will be spun off into a new, yet-to-be-named company, which will be wholly owned by Golden Gate. A new CEO will be named to head the new company, and each of the ISA divisions will continue to operate independently of each other as they did under the Geac name.

The shift from public to private, once a rare event, has become more common in recent years. Not only do the recent Sorbanes-Oxley regulations impose more stringent reporting practices and oversight, but many companies also feel that pri-

vate ownership can give them more flexibility in management and better access to investors.

Within the library automation arena, the acquisition of DRA by Sirsi Corporation serves as another example of a public-to-private transition.

The sale of Geac follows the resolution of a dispute with one of its major investors, Crescendo Partners (CP). CP had owned about five percent of Geac's stock, and because of CP company officials' concerns about the way Geac's company officials might handle future mergers and acquisitions, CP had gone as far as to attempt a proxy fight to gain one or more seats on Geac's board of directors. The dispute was resolved in advance of a proxy ballot, and the head of CP was voluntarily appointed to Geac's board; the sale of Geac went forward with the full support of Crescendo Partners.

Geac's Library-Automation Background

One of the early commercial companies involved in the library-automation industry, Geac, in the early 1980s, produced proprietary mainframe computer systems that provided automated-circulation capabilities for libraries. The Geac 8000 and 9000 automation systems stood among the leading products in the eighties. These systems were based on proprietary hardware and operating systems—a strategy that did not survive in the 1990s, as standardized hardware platforms and Unix-based applications became the norm.

By the mid-1980s, Geac experienced severe financial difficulties and had lapsed into receivership. The company emerged from receivership in October 1987 and resumed normal operations following a $16.2 million investment from the Canadian venture-capital firm Helix Corporation.

Given that the systems Geac developed were destined for obsolescence, the company bought its way back into the library-automation field through the acquisition of other companies with products that could extend Geac's reach into the future.

In August 1988, Geac purchased the Honolulu-based company ALII, which had developed a Unix-based automation system called "Advance." Geac was successful in developing and marketing Advance in both North America and Europe, and by the mid-nineties, Geac had recovered as a company and had even achieved full financial health.

In December 1992, Geac acquired the company CLSI and its popular "Libs100PLUS" library-automation system. Geac

subsequently renamed the product "PLUS" and continued to develop and market the system.

Geac's next acquisition occurred in early 1995 with the purchase of ODIS NV, a company based in Belgium that developed the VUBIS library-automation system. At the time of the acquisition, ODIS had sold VUBIS to about twenty-five libraries and took in about seven million dollars (U.S.) annually.

By the mid-1990s, the primary technology trend involved client/server-based automation systems. Both of Geac's major systems, ADVANCE and PLUS, followed more of a host/terminal approach. Geac announced its intentions to develop a new client/server system, to be called "Geos," in June 1995. Those efforts moved slowly, and though Geac produced Web-based front ends and graphical clients for some if its modules, neither PLUS nor ADVANCE became full-fledged client server systems. Today, PLUS and ADVANCE are ranked among the legacy systems destined to be replaced.

With waning effort going into development of PLUS and ADVANCE, Geac instead focused its attentions on its VUBIS product line acquired from ODIN. The company developed multiple generations of VUBIS, culminating in the current product "Vubis Smart."

Launched in April 2002, Vubis Smart has experienced steady sales—especially in Europe. The company recently

> **Not only do the recent Sorbanes-Oxley regulations impose more stringent reporting practices and oversight, but many companies also feel that private ownership can give them more flexibility in management and better access to investors.**

announced it had exceeded 200 sales of Vubis Smart worldwide. Only a few of the sales have been in North America, though the company remains optimistic that Vubis Smart will gain ground in this market.

In the mean time, the customer base of both ADVANCE and PLUS continues to erode rapidly. At one point, these systems were used in thousands of libraries, and the annual maintenance payments represented significant income for Geac—even in the years when product sales had ceased and the company devoted limited resources to continued development of ADVANCE and PLUS.

THE ILS SCOOP

A small number of libraries that haven't been able to secure funding for new automation systems will continue to run ADVANCE or PLUS for a few more years, but the vast majority of libraries that had previously installed PLUS or ADVANCE are migrating to new systems or have done so already. In North America, almost all of those libraries have gone with systems sold by Geac's competitors.

Impact on Geac Customer Libraries

The sale to Golden Gate may or may not have a drastic effect on the libraries that run Geac's automation products. The libraries still on ADVANCE and PLUS were well aware of the need to move on to a new system: the restructuring of the company bears no impact on that reality.

The real question involves Vubis Smart. Will this product continue to be a viable into the future? Although the Geac name may go away, this product and the Geac Library Systems Division should survive in some form.

The plan announced by Golden Gate places the ISA within a new company structured much like it was under Geac. It remains within the realm of possibility that yet another company, one with more affinity for libraries, may acquire the Library Systems Division. If the Library Systems Division remains intact within the former Geac ISA, its prospects seem about the same as before the acquisition.

As noted above, the details of the structure of the company holding the former Geac Library Systems Division will not be known until the sale completes in early 2006. In the mean time, any predictions fall within the realm of speculation. Readers can expect an update early next year once this information becomes available.

Contact: www.geac.com/object/pr_110705.html

The Raw Power of SUSHI

As electronic content represents ever-growing investments of library funds, it's essential to constantly measure the usage level of each resource. Almost all license agreements now include requirements for publishers to provide libraries with monthly usage statistics for each subscribed title. These statistics reflect important metrics, such as the number of searches performed; number of citations viewed; and the number of articles downloaded by individuals associated with the library's institution.

In recent years, through an initiative called "COUNTER" (Counting Online Usage of NeTworked Electronic Resources), a variety of interested parties have created a set of specifications and practices that bring some consistency to the process of delivering usage statistics. The initial version of the COUNTER guidelines took effect in January 2003, and since then, they have been widely adopted by publishers and providers of electronic resources licensed by libraries.

Even with the consistency of data provided by COUNTER, the process of gathering statistics remains laborious. COUNTER guidelines specify that the publisher provide an administrative Web site, which only an authorized library representative can access to view and download statistics. The statistics can be provided in delimited files or in spreadsheet format. Given the large number of publishers with which a typical library does business, the process of visiting each one's site each month represents a time-consuming and tedious task.

SUSHI Standard to the Rescue

The Standards Usage Statistics Harvesting Initiative, or SUSHI, provides a standard protocol that can be implemented—by which collecting statistics becomes an automated process—within a library's electronic resource-management (ERM) system. SUSHI takes the form of a Web service, which stands as the preferred architecture for exchanging services and data among diverse computer systems. SUSHI emerged as an initiative facilitated by NISO (National Information Standards Organization) among a group of vendors, libraries, publishers, and other stakeholders.

A number of publishers and automation vendors have announced support for SUSHI. Innovative Interfaces announced its Electronic Resource Management 2006, the third major version of this product, will include support for SUSHI. Ex Libris indicates it has successfully concluded proof-of-concept testing of SUSHI with its new Verde ERM. On the publisher side, EBSCO and Swets have announced the capability to support the SUSHI Web service as well.

Contact: www.library.cornell.edu/cts/elicensestudy/ermi2/sushi/

The Digital Divide and the $100 Laptop (Crank Included)

Last November in Tunis, Tunisia, United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan and Nicholas Negroponte, from MIT's Media Lab and *Wired* magazine, demonstrated a working prototype of the one-hundred-dollar laptop. Part of the United Nations World Summit on the Information Society, this project was designed primarily for children in the developing world. Annan's and Negroponte's demo featured a rugged-ized laptop that generates power from a hand crank (like an old-fashioned telephone or record player). The machines—which run on a Linux operating system and are equipped to provide users with wireless network access—should become available sometime in 2006 or early 2007.

One Laptop Per Child (OLPC), a non-profit organization, has been created to coordinate this initiative. According to the project's FAQ section on the Web, the founding organizational members of the OLPC include ". . . AMD, Brightstar, Google, News Corporation, and Red Hat."

Slated to be purchased by governmental and non-governmental organizations, the laptops will cost approximately $110 to produce and then will be given to school-aged children. Initial discussions have been held with Brazil, China, Egypt, and Thailand. Negroponte hopes sales of one million units or more will become common.

Even without a profit margin worked into the equation and high sales volumes, one must wonder how this initiative was able to achieve the target $110 production cost. One area that received considerable attention was the display. States the FAQ section on the project's Web site, "The first-generation machine will have a novel, dual-mode display that represents improvements to the LCD displays commonly found in inexpensive DVD players. These displays can be used in high-resolution black and white in bright sunlight—all at a cost of approximately $35." The crankable laptops also *will not* be capable of holding large amounts of data.

Negroponte said that commercial versions would be available at slightly higher prices, which would help subsidize the primary distribution to children in developing countries.

This new laptop could help libraries of all types in the United States address persistent digital divide issues here at home. Libraries could purchase several of these laptops for in-library use and circulation without worrying too much about damage and loss.—*Tom Peters*

Contact: http://laptop.media.mit.edu/

VRD AND WEBJUNCTION CONJOIN

The Virtual Reference Desk (VRD) online reference service has become part of Web-Junction, which describes itself as an ". . . online community where library staff meets to share ideas, solve problems, take online courses—and have fun." According to the press release, "Virtual Reference Desk Joins WebJunc-tion" (see URL under contact), the merger of VRD and WebJunction ". . . represents an expansion of the ongoing partnership between Syracuse University's Information Institute of Syracuse and OCLC Online Computer Library Center."

OCLC insists the VRD and OCLC's own QuestionPoint online reference platform will remain completely separate.—*Tom Peters*

Contact: www.vrd.org

BUY THE NUMBERS

The autumn of 2005 produced a bountiful harvest of new and recycled pricing and distribution schemes for electronic books. Although most of these schemes are directed toward end users, they may affect the pricing and distribution models offered to libraries and library consortia.

The Amazon Pages project, scheduled to begin early in 2006, will allow readers to purchase online access to variously sized chunks of books, such as chapters, sections, or pages. Amazon founder/CEO Jeff Bezos says the copyright holders will determine what other rights—in addition to giving a reader the right to view the chunk online—will be extended to users. For example, copyright holders will decide whether or not an Amazon Pages customer will be able to print or download what he or she purchases.

An Amazon Upgrade project was announced as well. It goes something like this: if a person purchases a printed book through Amazon, for a nominal additional fee ($1.99 was mentioned as an example), the purchaser can acquire online access to the e-book version. Presumably, this offer will be valid only for newly purchased books, not for previously owned copies, which is a booming segment of the overall book trade.

Random House, the largest general trade publisher in the U.S., also announced plans to sell electronic versions of its publications online on a per-page basis. Early indications are that none of its content will be available for printing, downloading, or copying.

This flurry of related announcements in the early years of the twenty-first century remind me of Charles Dickens and the widespread nineteenth-century practice of initially publishing novels "by the numbers" in serials.

In the case of the novels by Dickens, a number usually consisted of three chapters. The first and last numbers of a novel published serially usually were double numbers consisting of six chapters. Sometimes it would take a year and a half for a Victorian novel to appear by the numbers. Rumor has it Dickens and other novelists sometimes started publishing a novel by the numbers without really knowing how it would end in the following year.

Providing access to readers to books in less-than-complete chunks is an old practice. Available technologies, distribution systems, and economics always have informed, to a greater or lesser extent, how even the best that has been thought and said gets disseminated. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries not all authors, publishers, and readers used or accepted the practice of publishing novels serially by the numbers, but it was a fixture of the publishing landscape of that time.

It remains to be seen if, in our time, authors, publishers, other copyright holders, distributors, end users, and, perhaps even libraries, will accept these "buy the numbers" schemes for e-books and other related digital content.—*Tom Peters*

Contact: "Amazon, Random House Throw Book at Google" (CNet News.com), http://news.com.com/Amazon,+Random+House+throw+book+at+Google/2100-1025_3-5931569.html
"Newsmaker: Amazon's Bezos Hits the Books" (CNet News.com), http://news.com.com/Amazons+Bezos+hits+the+books/2008-1025_3-5938295.html?tag=st.num

SFPL's RFID Report: A Cautionary Tale?

Libraries continue to scrutinize both the promise and potential pitfalls of using RFID (radio frequency identification) technologies to better manage their collections. In October, the San Francisco Public Library (SFPL) Technology and Privacy Advisory Committee issued its
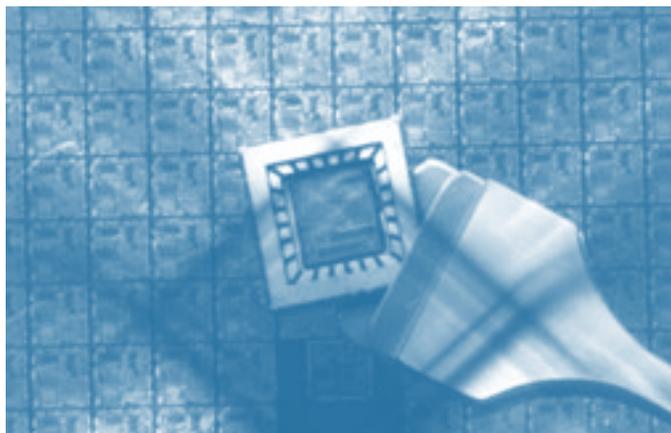
report on this subject. The seventy-six page summary report is available online in PDF format at the URL listed under "Contact" as the conclusion of this article.

According to the executive summary, the SFPL became interested in RFID technology as a way to achieve several goals including ". . . reducing repetitive stress injuries, increasing the efficiency of circulation and collection management processes, and improving security." The committee was formed and the study undertaken to address concerns expressed by members of the public regarding privacy, cost, and health issues related to the use of RFID technologies.

In June 2005, funding earmarked for an RFI process for RFID vendors was diverted to meet other needs, but nevertheless, the committee decided to complete its work. The writers of the report caution, "Almost all aspects of RFID in libraries require further investigation, whether those aspects are potential benefits or disadvantages."

Privacy issues and concerns were a major area of focus in the examination of RFID. The Committee recommended that ". . . privacy risks should be addressed throughout the

library's operations and in particular when new systems (technical or other) are introduced." The committee also recommended the SFPL conduct a thorough privacy audit.

The summary report does not claim to be exhaustive or definitive, but it does contain good summaries of the various aspects of RFID. The references and classified bibliography are worth a look, too.

Evidently no vendor of RFID systems designed for libraries is using non-proprietary methods, which means that RFID systems from different vendors are not interoperable. —*Tom Peters*

Contact: www.sfpl.org/librarylocations/libtechcomm/RFID-and-SFPL-summary-report-oct2005.pdf

More Mass Digitization: Microsoft and British Library Partnership

Yet another massive digitization project involving for-profit technology companies and established cultural-materials institutions has been announced. Microsoft and the British Library have reached an agreement through which Microsoft will fund the scanning of 100,000 public domain works from the British Library's collection of approximately 13 million.

The digitized books will be searchable and viewable through the forthcoming MSN Book Search resource. —*Tom Peters*

Contact: "Microsoft Scans British Library" (BBC News, bbc.co.uk), http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/technology/4402442.stm
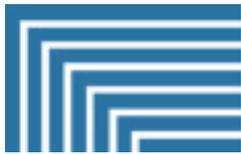
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Google's Part in the LOC's World Digital Library Project

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