OCLC's Ongoing Open Season on Acquisitions

Part of **The ILS Scoop** *by Marshall Breeding*

Opening 2006 with the purchase of Openly Informatics, OCLC (Online Computer Library Center) continues its buying spree of technology companies. This company brings into the OCLC fold content components related to e-journals holdings and key technologies in the reference-linking arena.

Openly shifts its private-company status into a division of a non-profit organization. Eric Hellman, founder/president of Openly Informatics, will continue to head the activities of his former company as director of the OCLC Openly Informatics division, reporting to Mike Teets, VP of Global Product Architecture at OCLC.

Compared to OCLC, a large global organization employing about one thousand individuals, Openly Informatics is a very small company; it operates with a staff of eight. All the staff members of Openly Informatics were offered and have accepted employment with OCLC.

This acquisition of Openly Informatics follows OCLC PICA's acquisitions of Sisis Informationssysteme (June 2005) and Fretwell-Downing Informatics (November 2005), both currently operating as wholly owned for-profit subsidiaries. As OCLC grows through acquisitions, it becomes involved in an increasingly complex matrix of non-profit, for-profit, and competitive issues.

These acquisitions do not, however, affect OCLC's status as a non-profit membership-owned cooperative. The non-profit regulations under which OCLC operates allow a portion of its revenue to be derived from commercial activities.

About Openly Informatics

Openly Informatics focuses its business interests on access and management of electronic content. It has developed linking technologies and knowledgebases related to OpenURL-based reference linking. A pioneer in the reference-linking arena, Openly developed linking architectures and technologies that predate the OpenURL standard. Openly markets primarily to other companies that license its technologies and content to be resold to their library customers. It has developed OEM relationships with some of the major companies in the industry including SirsiDynix, Endeavor Information Systems, R.R. Bowker, ISI ResearchSoft, and Swets Information Services.

Eric Hellman founded Openly Informatics in June 1998 as a company focused on providing technologies and services to facilitate electronic publishing. Prior to founding Openly, Hellman served as a research scientist at Bell Labs for ten years. During his tenure at Bell Labs, Hellman founded the *MRS Internet Journal of Nitride Semiconductor Research* (http://nsr.mij.mrs.org) an early e-journal that

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relied on innovative automation techniques, which were precursors of some of the e-journal publishing and linking technologies widely used today. Openly Informatics continues its involvement with this e-journal to the present.

In December 1999 Openly Informatics announced its Link-Baton redirection service, based on the Scholarly Link Specification (S-Link-S) framework developed by Hellman and first published in October 1998. The company launched the Link.Openly journal metadata service in December 1999, which has grown to be one of Openly's core products. Throughout its relatively brief history, Openly has regularly created new products and technologies that support the management and access of electronic content.

At the time of its acquisition by OCLC, Openly Informatics offered three key commercial products, of which two are related to electronic journal metadata:

1. **JournalSeek Linking Database**—Consists of data that contains journal description data for more than 85,000 titles and the Link.Openly Server to compute links that can be used in conjunction with Openly's 1Cate LinkServer or other OpenURL-based linking environments.

2. **UHF (Universal Holdings Format) Holdings Data Service**—A database in XML that Openly maintains to track the titles and coverage held by each of the major databases and aggregators.

3. **Openly developed the 1Cate (One Click Access to Everything) Link-Server**—1Cate, a full-fledged OpenURL link resolver, competes in the same space as SFX from Ex Libris; LinkFinderPlus from Endeavor; and OL2 from Fretwell-Downing. The Sirsi Resolver offered by SirsiDynix is based on 1Cate technology licensed from Openly Informatics.

Commercial Entanglements

Unlike OCLC's recent acquisitions of Fretwell-Downing Informatics and Sisis Informationssysteme (which are operated as for-profit subsidiaries), Openly Informatics will be folded into the non-profit side of OCLC. Openly Informatics, does however, bring a variety of commercial relationships into OCLC it developed in its seven-and-a-half years as a private for-profit company.

Openly Informatics had a number of commercial companies that licensed and resold its products and services to libraries and other organizations including:

- SirsiDynix is based on Openly's 1Cate (One Click Access to Everything) OpenURL Link-Server technology.
- Endeavor Information Systems entered into a partnership with Openly Informatics to license its JournalSeek knowledge database of electronic-journal holdings data and the Link.Openly technology as key components of its LinkFinderPlus OpenURL Link Server.
- R. R. Bowker formed an agreement in January 2005 to use Openly's technology to power its Ulrich's Resource Linker product.
- Swets Information Services relies on 1Cate technology for its SwetsWise Linker product launched in September 2004.
- In addition to its commercial offerings, Openly Informatics released a number of applications under Open Source licenses. These included OpenURL Referrer, a browser plug-in that enables OpenURL linking for items retrieved through Google Scholar.

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- EnCoRe: Enriching Courses with Reserves. A cooperative project between University of Derby in the U.K. and Openly Informatics. According to the project's Web site: "Course related requirements will be linked to internal and external electronic collections through a single inter-

face using OpenURLs via journal linking software from Openly Informatics."

Though Openly Informatics is a small company, its products and services find use in a large number of libraries by virtue of its relationships with some of the top-tier library automation and publishing companies.

Advantages to OCLC

OCLC's primary focus in acquiring Openly Informatics centers on using its data resources to enhance the capabilities of WorldCat to represent electronic content. According to OCLC VP Michael Teets, one of OCLC's key corporate objectives involves adding resources to WorldCat so that libraries can manage their electronic collections as well as they have always managed their physical collections. OCLC aims to help libraries deal with electronic resources on a level playing field with print resources. Although OCLC has long offered products and services that help libraries manage traditional resources, it has not been able to offer the same level of support for electronic resources. The content and technologies from Openly Informatics provide some of the components that will help it move toward those broad goals.

Advantages to Openly Informatics

As part of the OCLC fold, Openly Informatics finds itself in a large and stable organization with deep resources for research, development, and product support. This new relationship provides a less risky corporate environment relative to its former status as a very small independent corporation.

A number of synergies, too, will strengthen Openly's products. Data from WorldCat, for example, can be used to extend Openly's holdings databases. Areas not previously covered within Openly's knowledgebases—such as electronic monographs, digital audio books, and theses and dissertations—can be populated with data extracted from WorldCat. And, as libraries report any errors they discover, OCLC's large user base also provides the means to improve the data quality.

According to Hellman, "OCLC wants Openly to continue to do what we have been doing all along. Joining OCLC is very good for the customers of Openly Informatics. Our services will be strengthened under the ownership of OCLC."

Competitive Concerns

OCLC's ever-widening activities in automation technologies— through the acquisition of companies—does not go unnoticed by the commercial companies in the industry. OCLC's three most recent technology-company acquisitions are well within the library automation competitive arena.

VTLS president/CEO Vinod Chachra expresses some concern about OCLC's acquisition strategy. "We congratulate OCLC on this acquisition and on the vision that this and other recent acquisitions represent. It is becoming clear that OCLC is moving aggressively to be the library portal behind the search engines of the world. This acquisition will make WorldCat more attractive and useful to users and to search engines like Google and Yahoo. We wish OCLC great success as they help increase the global exposure to libraries and librarians. We remain concerned, however, about the erosion of the competitive environment (through these acquisitions) and the long-term impact it might have on innovation."

OCLC has great ambition to develop WorldCat as a global resource to help library users throughout the world discover and access the information resources that reside in its member libraries. OCLC's strategies require a wide suite of services and technologies, some of which it will develop internally; others will be gained through acquisition.

Today's economic climate favors consolidation, resulting in a fewer number of very large organizations within each business sector. As OCLC grows ever larger, it gains greater capabilities to promote library interests in a world in which commercial players encroach ever deeper into traditional library activities. OCLC's acquisition of Openly Informatics is a very small event in this picture. It becomes more significant when seen as just the latest in a series of acquisitions.

Chronology of OCLC's Acquisitions

April 1982—Purchased Total Library System from The Claremont Colleges in California. HP/3000 based system.

May 1983—Purchased Integrated Library System (ILS) purchased from Lister Hill Center of National Library of Medicine. Development of Local Library System discontinued.

August 1983—OCLC acquires Avatar to assist in the development of LS/2000.

June 1983—OCLC Launches LS/2000 library automation system.

February 1987—OCLC acquires ALIS I and I software from Data Phase to be marketed under the new name of LS/2.

April 1990—OCLC sells Local System Division to Ameritech Information Systems.

February 1991—OCLC acquires UTLAS from Thomas Canada Limited.

June 1993—OCLC Acquires Information Dimensions, Inc., from Battelle Memorial Institute.

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OCLC *from page 1*

July 1997—OCLC sells Information Dimensions to Gores Technology Group. (IDI became part of OpenText in June 1998.)
October 1997—OCLC acquires Blackwell North America's authority control service business.
February 1999—OCLC acquires WLN.
December 1999—OCLC and PICA enter joint ownership agreement.
February 2000—OCLC acquires PAIS (Public Affairs Information Service).
October 2000—OCLC acquires Canadian-based Library Technical Services.
Oct 2000—OCLC becomes exclusive distributor for ILLiad software developed by Virginia Tech and Atlas Systems.
January 2002—OCLC acquires netLibrary.
May 2002—OCLC enters partnership with Olive Software.
June 2002—OCLC enters into partnership with DiMeMa Inc. for CONTENTdm.
August 2004—OCLC absorbs 24/7 Reference Service from Metropolitan Cooperative Library System.

December 2004—OCLC sells PAIS to CSA.
June 2005—OCLC PICA acquires Sisis Informationssysteme.
November 2005—OCLC PICA acquires Fretwell-Downing Informatics Group.
January 2006—OCLC acquires assets of Openly Informatics.

Contact: OCLC Acquires the Assets of Openly Informatics, www.oclc.org/news/releases/200601.htm
EnCoRe: Enriching Courses with Reserves, https://ulib.derby.ac.uk/encore/encore.html

Tyrannosaurus iRex

The Dutch company iRex has developed a new portable ebook reading device called the "Iliad." The device combines electronic paper from e-Ink, Inc., with wireless networking (802.11b) and a touch screen. Content can be accessed from the device via the Internet, flash memory cards, or a personal computer.

At 8.1 inches (diagonal measurement), the Iliad screen is larger than most PDAs and dedicated reading devices that launched (and crashed) in the past ten years. The first batch of devices will offer only sixteen shades of gray-no color.

The unit contains 224MB of internal flash memory, and additional memory can be added through memory cards. The unit weighs 390 grams (10.5 ounces); it's 8.5 inches tall, 6.1 inches wide, and only 0.6 inches thick. The product specification sheet claims the rechargeable battery will last for a week, assuming an average of three hours of reading per day.

The first deployment of Iliads will display or playback PDF, XHTML, TXT, and MP3 files. The type and level of digital rights management has not been released. iRex plans to begin distributing the Iliad in April 2006. No manufacturer's suggested retail price has been mentioned.

Spun out of Royal Philips Electronics NV, iRex Technologies BV's homepage of its Web site boldly declares: "Electronic paper goes beyond the functionality of printed paper, providing fast/secure updates and interactivity."

One hundred years from now, I wonder what people will make of all these Homeric attempts in the nineties and first decade of the twenty-first century (BTW, what do we call the first decade of the century, "the naughts? the aughts?") to develop a dedicated portable ebook device?

It depends on how this all turns out. Either it will be seen with hindsight as a shining example of the power of persistent trial-and-error . . . or nothing but a pack of fools and venture capitalists chasing the unattainable. —*Tom Peters*

Contact: www.irextechnologies.com
Press release (PDF): www.main.nl/bbb6a_e/%7B0C21801B-D8BE-458D-B688-A204CC410926%7D_Press%20Release%20iRex.pdf

They Could've Called It "WikiDic"

Riding the wave—wiki is a Hawaiian word, after all, so the allusion to surfing is apt—of the popularity of the Wikipedia and other wikis, the venerable Merriam-Webster company has started a wiki-based open dictionary. Now anyone can post a word and/or definition to the site and have it appear in a Merriam-Webster resource.

The official name for this new resource is Merriam-Webster's "Open Dictionary," but they could have called it something snazzier, such as Merriam's "WikiDic."

Serial neologists appear to be the early settlers of this new territory in wiki world. Slang words, especially from the

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young and the Web-addicted, regionalisms, and even words and meanings coming out of nuclear families, crop up with some frequency. The guidelines for submitting an entry try to encourage submitters to distinguish between "real words" and mere coinages, but it appears that not everyone processes that message before proceeding to the input form.

The entry form asks for the word to be added to the Open Dictionary, the part of speech (noun, verb, adverb, etc.), the definition (three-hundred-character limit), the word category (a dropdown menu containing only fourteen categories—oh my), a sample sentence of how the word has been used, and several citation fields if the submitter found the word in some "media source." Users who complete the form also have the

option to supply their names or nicknames, e-mail addresses, and to choose their U.S. states of residence or their countries. Based on some cursory browsing, most of the entries appear to be coming from the more populous U.S. states, such as California, New York, and Texas. Apparently there is no indication how much editorial review is performed by Merriam-Webster staffers on incoming forms before the entry actually enters the open lexicon.

The user interface offers a simple single-box search feature, or you can browse alphabetically by category or by the most recently added words.

By the end of 2005, this new dictionary appeared to contain an eclectic mix of several thousand words and coinages. Nearly all of the words appear to be new entrants to the English language, but sometimes it's difficult to tell the mother tongue. Several words in languages other than English were spotted, so this does have the makings of a multilingual dictionary.

It is difficult to detect how seriously the Merriam-Webster company takes its new Open Dictionary. Does some linguistic lackey have the onerous task of monitoring new entries to flag some for possible inclusion in their highbrow dictionaries, such as the *Collegiate* and the *Unabridged*?

Perhaps core reference works (encyclopedias, dictionaries, etc.) will be remembered as the first wave of the patron participatory nature of Library 2.0. To paraphrase Noah Cross, the character played by the late John Huston in the film *Chinatown*, the Wikipedia, like whores, ugly buildings, and politicians, appears to becoming respectable as it ages, but across the entire wiki world, wiki fatigue may soon set in, leaving the Open Dictionary and other upstart wikis beached. —*Tom Peters*

Contact: MW Open Dictionary, http://www3.merriam
-webster.com/opendictionary
Library 2.0 on the ALA TechSource blog, www.techsource
.ala.org/blog/Library+2.0/14

LearnOutLoud . . . ForFree

The return to an oral culture based primarily on audible information and video information, as opposed to visually read information, continues apace. Late in 2005 the company LearnOutLoud announced the availability of a directory of free educational audio and video content. The five hundred or so items in this directory complement the nine thousand audio and video items that LearnOutLoud sells.

According to its Web site, the mission of LearnOutLoud.com, which is based in Santa Monica, California, is "to promote the use of audio and video educational material for personal and professional development." The company seems to be focused on individual life-long learners, and it seems to be aggregating, reselling, and helping people discover audio and video content.

LearnOutLoud's master collection of audio and video content appears to emphasize non-fiction works. The only works of fiction it carries are classics and the like. The firm's FAQ page says it has no plans to carry fiction bestsellers.

The directory of five hundred free educational audio and video items is divided into categories. In the technology section, for example, you can see and hear Thomas Friedman talk about how the world is flat, Jeff Bezos from Amazon.com talk about the planet's most customer-centric company, and Tim Berners-Lee about the Semantic Web.

It is difficult to discern if LearnOutLoud has a strong social, political, or economic agenda, but it is worth noting that there is some attempt to portray various sides and opinions. For example, cheek-by-jowl with Lawrence Lessig speaking about free culture sits Jack Valenti holding forth on creativity, commerce, and culture.

The principles behind LearnOutLoud.com are unknown, but the organization has incorporated some nice Web 2.0 features into its site, such as forums, blogs, and reader/viewer/listener ratings and reviews. —*Tom Peters*

Contact: www.learnoutloud.com/free

Quanta Leap: $100-Laptop Mfr. Selected

As reported in the last issue of *Smart Libraries Newsletter* (see page 5), a not-for-profit organization, One Laptop Per Child (OLPC), is committed to developing and deploying millions of laptops to school children in developing countries. These laptops will cost approximately 100 USD.

A manufacturer for these millions of inexpensive, hand-cranked, Linux-based laptops with wireless connectivity has been chosen. Quanta Computer, Inc. of Taiwan has reached a business agreement with undisclosed terms to make the first five to fifteen million units.

OLPC plans to sell these laptops by the millions to governments and education ministries for distribution to needy children—but obviously there are other potential customers, such as individuals, libraries, and not-for-profit organizations.

There appears to be contradictory information about plans to sell these laptops to these other potential markets in any country. A bold-font statement has been added to the homepage of the project's Web site: "Please note that the $100 laptops—not yet in production—will not be available for sale. The laptops will only be distributed to schools directly through large government initiatives."

But a sentence in the December 13, 2005, press release states: "A commercial version of the machine will be explored in parallel." If the $100 laptop proves workable, durable, and valuable to users, Quanta or some other manufacturer will develop something similar for the worldwide retail and institutional markets.

Quanta claims to be the largest manufacturer of laptop PCs. The manufacturer's major clients include Dell, HP, and IBM. —*Tom Peters*

Contact: http://laptop.media.mit.edu/2005-1213-olpc.html

RULE BRITANNIA?

The quality and veracity of communally created and maintained online information resources continue to be questioned. You need not be a card-carrying curmudgeon to wonder about the truth value and writing style of reference resources that anyone can edit.

A recent investigation by *Nature* magazine into the accuracy of information contained in Wikipedia found, in general, based on peer review of forty-two articles, instances of major and minor inaccuracies are not much greater than found in *Encyclopædia Britannica*.

Fifty articles on a broad range of scientific subjects from both encyclopedias were sent out for blind peer review. According to the online version of the article, the reviewers "were asked to look for three types of inaccuracy: factual errors, critical omissions, and misleading statements." Forty-two usable sets of responses were returned.

Based on this small sample, the *Nature* reporter found the average number of inaccuracies in a *Britannica* article on a scientific topic was approximately four; in the Wikipedia, about three.

A total of 162 inaccuracies were found in the 42 Wikipedia articles, compared to 123 in Britannica. Only eight serious inaccuracies were found in the entire set of 84 articles—four in each encyclopedia.

There are some obvious limitations to this analysis. Only scientific articles were reviewed, not articles on the various fronts of the culture wars, including politics, religion, and the arts, where competing agendas and tastes can result in articles being sabotaged or held hostage.

Nature's analysis also did not examine coverage of emerging fields and new concepts. It would be interesting to know if the Wikipedia offers faster and more thorough coverage in these areas than *Britannica* and the other traditional encyclopedias.

The article reports Wikipedia plans to begin trials soon of offering two versions of an article. The "stable" version will have achieved a certain level of quality. The "live" version will be open to review until such time that it clearly improves upon the stable version. According to the article, which partially cites some research by Alexa, Wikipedia has become the 37th most visited Web site. —*Tom Peters*

Contact: "Internet [Encyclopedias] Go Head to Head," by Jim Giles, www.nature.com/news/2005/051212/full/438900a.html

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