LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Michael Ester
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Dear Michael,

As you requested, I retract my characterization of your questioning of the role which Nathan Benn's Electric Book Company is playing as an "accusation" that it was behaving too much like a wholesaler or software provider. I am pleased to accept your correction that your leading question in the public session was open ended, and that you are not sure that any given roles will be better or worse than others. I misread the concern you expressed in our private conversation that the roles which EBC wanted to play were not clear as a concern that it wanted to play what I regarded as inappropriate roles. I did not intend to suggest in the article that you agreed with me on the need for segregation between the roles being played by the various forces in the market, but will state clearly in this correction that you do not accept the concept that some roles might be inappropriate.

I, obviously, do think that specific role combinations should be ruled out. In particular I believe that only one organization should be established as a rights registry and that such an organization should avoid playing a proactive role as a value added wholesaler or retailer of images. I now understand that you feel that the market will sort out such questions. Mea culpa.

You and I do agree, as you put it in our phone conversation yesterday "that companies need to be stating specifically what they are proposing" and that institutions such as museums, libraries and archives "need to be more informed about what they want to do" in the image marketplace. My intention in the piece in the Fall issue was to suggest some definitions that could sort out these roles. I'm extremely pleased that you could say that "from that point of view, I found your distinctions about roles useful". If the continuing discussion helps to clarify what roles exist and which are appropriate for institutions or individuals owning rights and which are useful and needed for companies acquiring licenses, I believe we will be better off.

Sincerely yours,

David Bearman

INFORMATION RESOURCE MANAGEMENT IN KENTUCKY STATE GOVERNMENT

by Charles Robb
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Since 1985, staff of the State Archives in Kentucky have been talking to other agencies about information resources management in our state, about what the responsibilities of various agencies were going to be, about the policies and procedures that were needed, and what tools could assist the process. As I describe the extent to which that management has been accomplished, I hope you realize that staff from the State Archives do not claim to have driven this process because that is simply not the case, nor is that even doable. What I hope to provide is some guidance on how to jump on the train if it turns out to be leaving the station or more importantly how to get a vehicle created when none seems to exist.

My working assumption is that information resources management is a shared responsibility accomplished through the efforts of senior administrators, fiscal officers, data processing staff, program managers, librarians, records managers, and archivists, but IRM in Kentucky began pretty much as it did in other governments it seems to me, as a mechanism for reducing or at least controlling agencies' data processing expenditures. Kentucky has a legislative subcommittee overseeing data processing in state government which, in 1984, established the Kentucky Information Systems Commission, with what was at first somewhat vague authority to plan for the management and growth of computerization. This Commission drew its members from many of the agencies represented, interestingly, on the State Archives and Records Commission; these included members from all three branches of state government and included reps from the auditor's office, the office of the attorney general, administrative and budgeting people from the governor's office, etc., and was chaired by the Commissioner of the Department of Information Systems. It is important to note that the latter department was itself established in 1982 as a central unit to oversee data processing for executive state agencies. From its creation, a representative from the Department for Libraries and Archives, my agency, has been included on the Commission.

The Information Systems Commission spent its first two years basically trying to define the most effective means by which it could do meaningful work. Critically important to my agency during that period were discussions in the forum provided by KISC and directly with the Department of Information Systems, of the joint work we

were undertaking in the course of our NHPRC-funded Machine Readable Records Project, which was initiated with the support both of the Commission and of the Department of Information Systems. Many of you may be familiar with the basic goals of our grant, but for those who are not, the project represented my agency's efforts to adapt its records management policies and procedures to the environment of electronic records. A key feature of the project was development of a mainframe data dictionary which, it was assumed, would provide an inventory of state agency databases and electronic files. I want to speak briefly about the data dictionary at this point and then return to it under a fuller discussion of some IRM tools we continue to develop.

We can take the Machine Readable Records project's data dictionary development as an early instance of archivists trying to involve themselves with traditional systems analysts in the design of a system whose function quite definitely had archival purposes. Since we did not get the kind of online inventory that we wanted from the data dictionary, it might be judged that we failed in that effort. At the same time, what was accomplished was that our staff's discussions with DIS about the data dictionary forced us to define the role we wanted to play as archivists, so that both systems analysts and senior management at the Department of Information Systems could understand that role. This eventually led to an agreement between the two agencies that the functionality we desired to have in the data dictionary -- the long and short of which was to accomplish the tracking of files across their entire life cycle -- would be accomplished instead by several tools -- the data dictionary, a second database called the public records management system, and, lastly, a locator tool to disseminate information about these wonderful records and databases and how to use them.

At another level, KISC staff began preparing to undertake a broad strategic information resource planning initiative, and for that hoped to establish an information policy which would guide the management of all state agency information resources. My agency, which is comprised of librarians, records managers, and archivists, did not much like the initial policy drafts proposed by Commission and DIS staff. Our major concern was that the drafts failed to recognize that specific statutes gave our agency responsibility and authority to manage records for certain purposes. As a result of the fact that Donald Marchand, the theorist most revered by our data processing compatriots, did not call information itself a resource, we had heated discussions about whether information was an asset or a resource. I never have understood why that distinction had to be made, but the important thing is that we did not want to see our records management or our archival authority diminished. We talked and we argued, and eventually agreed upon a policy that no one was very happy with but which left everyone with new and proper sensitivity to the perceptions and responsibilities of others. We refer to this policy officially now as "our first attempt to draft an information policy." The entire process did not seem very productive at the time, but its result was that we don't have to define over and over what

we are trying to accomplish in our dealings with DIS. (We still have to do that with agency staff, but not with the people we normally deal with at DIS.)

Armed with an agreed-upon information policy and an initial set of hardware, software, and telecommunications guidelines it named the Kentucky Information Systems Architecture, KISC obtained the authority in 1986 to implement strategic planning requirements for all state agency data processing. KISC required agencies to name information resource managers who were charged with preparing biennial plans spelling out their automation expenditures. The plans were to be written by agency automation teams which included senior managers, data processing personnel, and records officers. Plans included statements summarizing the missions and functions that agencies are statutorily authorized to perform, detailed budgets for each automation project that agencies either maintain or propose to initiate in the coming two years, and documented compliance or non-compliance with the information systems architecture guidelines. Agencies were also asked to include in each project description statements detailing the impact on record keeping requirements that might be felt should a project be implemented.

The first planning cycle saw staff of the Commission reviewing approximately sixty information resources plans submitted by state agencies. Staff from DIS, Libraries and Archives, the Governor's Office of Policy and Management, and the Legislative Research Commission all reviewed these plans and were provided a clearer picture of the systems being maintained or contemplated in state agencies than had ever been available to any of us. Review of each plan included face-to-face meetings of Public Records Staff, the DIS analysts assigned to specific agencies, and agency data processing staff, who more likely than not, had been the chief contributors to the plans. In that first 1986 go round, the major thing we were saying to agency representatives was that the there were records in their systems that needed in many instances to be scheduled -- fairly unsophisticated stuff, admittedly, but at the same time, an unprecedented opportunity for staff of our agency to begin raising the consciousness of agency DP staff about the fact that management of the information resource is not limited to the owner/custodian frame of reference they were used to. It was also an opportunity to raise our own consciousness about the challenges that actually working out dispositions for automated systems would pose.

We did several other things with the information gathered from agency plans. As I mentioned, our early efforts to make the data dictionary be a comprehensive and useful container of information documenting the electronic databases of state agencies failed, but we were able instead to begin building our own database of descriptions about information holdings in a database called the Public Records Management System. By digitizing series descriptions our records analysts and archivists were preparing in the course of scheduling records through routine records analysis, and then extract-

ing information in the agency information resources plans we reviewed, we built a database describing approximately 600 systems that is sufficient for us to establish new and more appropriate scheduling priorities and to create clearer and clearer pictures of the documentation that is potentially available to us as we return to agencies to update record schedules. By comparing and relating these system descriptions to the approximately 8,000 separately scheduled series that have been adopted over the last ten to twelve years, we are able for the first time to appraise with the kind of view that archivists must have to make meaningful decisions about what is best to keep and best to discard.

All of this information came to us during the first biennial planning cycle; we went through another cycle two summers ago and are in the midst of a third one right now. In the current cycle, state universities have been added to the net, meaning that entirely new information resources are being described this time. In the coming months, we'll be in our "these are records" mode with university staff during review of their first IRP submissions.

As importantly, in the current planning cycle, agencies are able for the first time to submit automation project descriptions from their plans in electronic format, using diskettes that were distributed with plan instructions. KISC staff have divided the information they are seeking into more discrete data elements, with the result that their ability to summarize and manipulate the data gathered is substantially improved. Data from plans that our staff once had to key into our internal database is now being compiled on a file server at the Department of Information Systems. In the next planning cycle, the entire agency plan, including agency mission statements, should be keyed by agency staff.

I should say I found this fact a bit discomfiting at first, because like most archivists I have a proprietary attitude toward the materials I collect, even when, unlike many archivists, I collect meta-data rather than data itself, in most instances. But since I have been added to the list of users who can review and update information in this planning database over a network that will be linked to my department within a matter of weeks, I really don't mind that the data is not in my hands. I am actually hoping that use of the several different software packages employed for the administration of this process will cause enough conflicts that it becomes more apparent to DIS and to KISC staff that all of this information, including what's in the data dictionary, should be in more sophisticated distributed relational format that would more fully capitalize on the value of what we're holding.

I mentioned earlier that a third tool has been part of KISC's and my department's strategy since early in the machine-readable records project, that tool being an on-line locator of information about systems and manual files. It has been an abiding goal to combine and make broadly accessible systems information from the central data dictionary, information provided by the strategic

planning process, and information gathered in the course of the identification, description, and appraisal of record series, through electronic means. I spoke in somewhat more detail and probably more lucidly about this at last year's NAGARA session, but I want to mention again that Library and Archives staff have undertaken and recently completed work with Department of Information Systems staff on a menuing structure and agency name and subject authority files for a system called the Commonwealth of Kentucky Information Retrieval System or C-KIRS for short, by which we mean to disseminate much of the information I've been describing today, and most particularly summaries of agency functions, system and file descriptions, lists of archival holdings, and so on, over the ever-expanding statewide system. The software package chosen for this is a Digital Equipment Corporation product called Videotex, whose specialty is its easy to use interface and whose Achilles heel may be lack of sophisticated subject searching capability. Databases that my agency is helping construct will be available through the same interface and software as those being built by our state's Department for Environmental Protection to provide public access to lists of toxic waste sites, and the Department of Personnel which will post job opening lists. I am both excited by this tool and gratified that my agency made the latter two databases more accessible through our contributions in the area of vocabulary control and subject indexing.

So, I consider that some good things have happened in the course of our working out a role for ourselves in IRM. While there were some things which we did not accomplish in the past six to eight years -- you may have noticed that I am not dwelling much on scheduling coups, or the numerous databases we have brought under our control -- I would contend that we have taken proper advantage of the opportunities we should have. What is most important to me is that we have at least partially gotten out of the mode of telling the data processing community what is wrong with their management of information and into a mode or a relationship that allows us to make contributions that everyone sees are contributions. Being on the can-do side of this argument for once seems pretty nice.

C.R.

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Robb's paper, as it appears here, is a barely edited version of an informal talk he gave at the 1991 NAGARA Conference. I asked him to allow me to print it because I think the creativity of the small staff of the Kentucky project demonstrates some of the ways that public records officers could be pro-actively involved in the electronic records arena. I welcome contributions from others with interesting case studies.

the Editor