

The Accidental Series: an interview with John Bryans, Information Today

John B. Bryans, publisher of The Accidental books (including The Accidental Taxonomist and The Accidental Law Librarian) at Information Today talks to Michael Upshall about the series and how it came about.

How did the series begin?

We launched this series in 2003 with two titles: *The Accidental Systems Librarian* by Rachel Singer Gordon (released in a second edition in 2012, by Nicole Engard with RSG), and *The Accidental Webmaster* by Julie Still. The series (which is now up to ten titles) has sold so well, that if an author comes to me with a proposal that fits the series I will often suggest we make it an "Accidental" book. It's likely to sell 10%-30% more copies than done as a single, non-series title.

Where did the term "accidental" come from?

The idea is fairly obvious and we are not the originators of the concept. A lot of people think of Anne Tyler's *The Accidental Tourist*, but books with "accidental" in the title go back well before that wonderful novel. Rachel Gordon, who was editing our library titles at the time, came to me with the idea initially, as a single book. I have always been a series maven (there's a story there

going back to the start of my career as a fiction editor in 1979) and with our "Super Searchers" series winding down the time seemed right to try something new.

The most recent title is *The Accidental Law Librarian* by Anthony Aycock, and it's terrific. Also a perfect example of an area of librarianship where a librarian might not have expected to land, but did. There is a strong career aspect to these books: many copies are purchased by readers looking for new work within libraries, often because they find themselves between jobs and consider it an opportunity to try something a little different.

What is the best-selling title of the series?

The Accidental Library Manager by Rachel Singer Gordon, published in 2005, is our bestseller in the series to date. However, it faces stiff competition from Heather Hedden's *The Accidental Taxonomist* which we published in 2010 and is still going strong. This one surprised me!

The series title “accidental” suggests a down-to-earth approach with immediate practical ideas for the reader. Is this the reason for its success?

A big part of the appeal of this series, no doubt, is the sense of accessibility the title quickly conveys. As to the broad range of other titles that are available, the library publishers I'm aware of generally seem quite on top of what their readers want (credit for which goes mainly to the writers we work with – those info pros who tell me their motivation for writing a book is to create the resource they would have liked to have when they were just starting out in a given role) but we can definitely do a better job helping readers make wise choices in what they read.

The Web has certainly helped – Tables of Contents and sample chapters are now widely available, and reviews are increasingly accessible online, at no cost. But competition is fairly intense, and professionals are struggling more than ever to keep up with what they really need to know (there's so much pressure to stay current), thus, we as publishers need to be as clear and honest as possible in regard to what our books are, and aren't.

The Accidental series now comprises ten titles. Do you have ideas for more titles?

Eventually, as happened with our "Super Searchers" series, we may start to run thin on topics

that have broad enough appeal to warrant a book. At this point, there are still plenty of ideas we haven't tackled yet; there are some obvious topics I've been thinking about, but I'm most interested in hearing from information professionals who have gone into "accidental" career areas and want to share their experiences.

It is refreshing to find a genuinely readable and practical guide in a series of information science titles. Are all the Information Today book titles aimed at providing practical advice?

Thanks so much for saying so! I think it's fair to say that Information Today, Inc. has always emphasized practical content designed to help information professionals on the job and in their careers; this can be seen not only in our books, but in our periodicals, reference products, and conferences. That said, there is an established and *growing* need and interest in information science theory, and we're pleased to play a role in disseminating theoretical and applied research through a series of books we publish on behalf of the Association for Information Science & Technology.

The Accidental Taxonomist is reviewed in this issue of eLucidate. Other Accidental... titles can be found at the Information Today website, <http://books.infotoday.com/accidental.shtml>