

Book Review: Negotiating Licences for Digital Resources

Fiona Durrant. London: Facet Publishing, 2006

Professional books are usually made up of either or both of two strands. Either they tell you where the world is heading (the futurologist approach), or they tell you how to manage with the world as it is (the cookbook approach). It's much rarer when the two interact, and you get a justification for doing what you do.

Fiona Durrant's book, published last year, is a cookbook. From the title onwards, it's pretty clear what you are going to be given. Does the book enable you to negotiate for digital resources? I would give it a qualified "yes". As far as techniques of negotiation go, Durrant's book is admirably clear. All the main aspects of negotiating are covered., from contractual details, to communicating with staff, to meeting strategy, including, for example, helpful suggestions on conciliatory or confrontational language. All the content about negotiating techniques, and about facial and body expressions are useful. Interestingly, for example, the author points out that the publisher may not have knowledge (or at least such good knowledge) of competing products as the purchaser. In the strange world of private information products, where little public information is available about quality of service, it can be surprisingly difficult to evaluate other players in the market. So in this case the purchaser can usefully point out to the vendor what specific services they want that their competitors provide.

But even within the core area of negotiation, one of the most important aspects is the contract, and I was disappointed here. Since Ms Durrant is based in a major London law practice, it is disappointing for her to begin Chapter Two, The Contract, by saying "this chapter cannot offer legal advice or interpretation as the author is not a lawyer" She then proceeds to give a chapter full of legal advice, so I can only presume that statement at the head of the chapter is to reassure her employers. The advice she gives seems eminently sensible.

Perhaps it's a bit churlish to expect more from a book devoted to negotiating licences, but I did expect more. The book is short and doesn't use its allotted space as sensibly as it could (over a page is devoted to the layout of the meeting room) and could have benefited from a wider perspective on digital resources and how they are used. More importantly, there are many books on negotiating skills on the market. This one I expected to be different: as an information specialist, the author is ideally placed to add value to the whole information delivery chain. Lawyers use the information that is bought and sold as described in the book, but they unlikely to be aware of the different ways in which information can be delivered. There are many ways in which information providers can provide better tools to enable that information to be retrieved rapidly and then used effectively, for example, by using tracking tools to measure successful and unsuccessful search strategies. But there is no mention of the information specialist's role in this process, which should be (1) to have a good grasp of all available tools to measure usage (COUNTER exists for usage of journals, so why doesn't a similar principle exist for other subscription-based services?), and (2) to understand the specific information-gathering strategies of her customers (the lawyers) and the extent to which the services meet those strategies. Information vendors may have difficulty gaining access to these customers, but the information specialist in a law firm is in daily contact with them.

And, finally, I was astonished to see of all people, John Ruskin quoted on how to negotiate. Ruskin was a fine writer and critic, but since he never had a full-time job in his life, I doubt his ability to comment on the art of negotiation. In fact Ruskin's quote "It's

unwise to pay too much, but it's worse to pay too little" is misguided, being based on the idea that price is some way related to the quality of the service. Ruskin's advice may be more appropriate for buying a craftsman's labour. If you pay a craftsman too little he may starve, but I think it unlikely that Factiva, with a turnover of \$281m in 2005, will go under if you negotiate too hard with them. In light of Megan Roberts' article on major information providers in the January 2007 issue of eLucidate², I think a case could be made for information providers being asked to do considerably more for the money they are paid.

More useful would be the commonplace advice that there are only two types of negotiation – those where you are going to deal with the other party again (such as licensing digital resources), and those where you are not (such as buying a house). If your negotiation is of the former type, it is not helpful to negotiate so hard that the other party feels the transaction was unfair.

Michael Upshall

Book Review: Ambient Findability

Peter Morville. Farnham: O'Reilly Press 2005.

Peter Morville is a librarian, and follows the usual librarians' line that there is Google and that there are librarians, and people use the former when they should be using the latter. If only people asked the specialists, they would be better informed, etc. etc. So far, so good; but Morville then continues with an anecdote about how he cured his back pain, after going to the doctor and being given lots of pills, which didn't cure the backache, by then finding a solution on the Internet via Google – a solution he chose, Morville admits, without any evidence to justify it. Comments the author: "Believe it or not, this is the new face of healthcare. As access to medical information grows, it's increasingly in our best interests to find our own answers". I agree wholeheartedly with most of that sentence, but I part company with the last bit. What I can state unreservedly instead is: "As access to medical information grows, we can become better informed about what is in our best interests.". That small shift, from knowing the choices to finding our own answers, is a huge conceptual leap. It may be one small step for a man, but it's expecting an awful lot from Google.

So is Morville's latest book worth reading? Certainly, given that Morville was co-author of one of the best-known books on information from the 1990s³. There is one big idea in the book, that of Mooer's Law. Calvin Mooer in 1960 stated: "An information retrieval system will tend not to be used whenever it is more painful and troublesome for a customer to have information than for him to not have it." The repercussions of that hypothesis are enough to warrant a book on how to find things, and Morville is entirely justified to make Mooer's Law the centrepiece of his book – the "Law" (I don't know if it has ever been validated by experiment) is sufficient to justify, for example, the current craze for search engine optimization, because your information can't be used if your users cannot find it.

² Lexis Nexis on Trial: a report on findings. *eLucidate*, vol 4 issue 1, January 2007, pp 3-8.

³ Morville and Rosenberg (1998): *Information Architecture for the World Wide Web*