

PROFILE

JIM LAVIS

If Headington in Oxford is mentioned to a serials librarian, he or she could be forgiven for immediately thinking of that well-known scientific publisher, but that suburb is also home to the offices of Lavis Marketing, run by Jim Lavis, the subject of our Profile.

I caught Jim in the middle of preparing for his impending visit to the Frankfurt Book Fair and a few days after the official launch of A-Mail, his new mailing list venture.

Lavis Marketing (cracks about lavish marketing are now wearing a bit thin, by the way) comprises over 3,000 sq. ft. of offices and warehouse at 73 Lime Walk, at one time a horse-drawn dairy. Jim is supported by Fay his wife, and 6 other staff and describes his company's business as providing "specialist services to professional and academic publishers". This embraces marketing, promotion, trade representation, order fulfillment and distribution. Set up in 1982 Lavis Marketing now services the needs of some 35 publishers from the UK, USA, Sweden, New Zealand, China, Russia, and Canada. As well as these services (and the mailing list business) Jim is also a publisher himself (Malthouse Press, which publishes in the area of industrial relations) and joint owner of a journal, *Environmental Design*, which specialises in Islamic design.

I first met Jim when we both worked at Blackwell's in their mail order division in Oxford. He joined the company as an apprentice bookseller straight from school and remembers that the only stock he was allowed to handle for the first few months was dirty books (dusty secondhand ones that is). During his years at Blackwell's he worked both in retail and library supply, rising to the position of Director of the Mail Order Division, which involved a fair amount of travel in N. America. Close business and personal links are still maintained with the old firm. When he left them in 1979, after 27 years, he joined the CAB (Commonwealth Agricultural Bureaux) as International Sales Manager handling both books and journals, and followed this by setting-up Lavis Marketing in 1982 offering freelance representation for academic publishers.



Book Fairs figure prominently in Jim's life and he has been a regular exhibitor at most of the European venues (this year is his tenth at Frankfurt). Not only do they give him the opportunity to promote his clients' titles, but the fairs are also of major importance for making contact with new customers. It was at the Moscow Book Fair that he was approached by a Russian professor of psychology looking for a company to handle the publication of the English translation of *The Soviet Psychologist Today*. The title is to be launched in the West in March 1989 and Jim has negotiated exclusive world rights outside Russia. At the London Book Fair he met representatives of the China Ocean Press, who have since approached him to provide a full service outside China for 7 of their oceanographic and marine science journals and 1989 books and monographs.

Negotiations with publishers can prove to be a little unpredictable. Whilst it took 3 years for him to finalise a deal with one of his customers, another publisher signed up with Lavis Marketing after only a 20 minute telephone conversation without even meeting him. Whilst contracts are usually on a fairly long-term basis, Jim has enjoyed his occasional 'one-off' commission-based ventures, such as the sale of a £3,000 reprint of the Domesday Book to the Lenin Library in Moscow (which also involved him handing it over on Russian TV at the Moscow Book Fair) and the sale of 10 copies of the facsimile reprint of the Kennicott Bible (illuminated Hebrew MS) at £3,500 a copy to a Japanese publishing agency.

Until recently the publishers he has represented have mainly been of books and monographs.

(Weaving my way round the warehouse on my tour I came across such titles as *In Bed with Sherlock Holmes*, *Dictionary of Pali Proper Names* and *Falklands - the Secret Plot*.)

Increasingly, however, he is acting on behalf of journal publishers in providing a full marketing and distribution service. With the Harwell laboratory, for example, he now jointly publishes journals on fluid research, heat transfer and fouling prevention.

He has been a member of the UKSG for many years and a frequent delegate and exhibitor at the annual conference. Meeting librarians on a regular basis provides him with feedback on trends and developments, of value to his client publishers.

His latest venture - which leads Lavis Marketing into a new field but which enhances the services provided to publishers - is A-Mail. A-Mail was formed in 1987 with John Davis (Lavis and Davis?) - at one time a Data Processing Manager at Blackwell's - to provide "list rental and direct mail fulfillment" to academic and specialist

publishers. Put simply, Jim has built up a huge database of academics and their addresses to help publishers in promoting new titles.

I asked Jim how new technology might affect his business. Would electronic formats be something he would have to face? He no longer believes the projections he reads regarding publishing revolutions and indeed feels that there is now a reluctance by anyone to predict what the future will bring, because of failed attempts in the past and the rapidly changing technology. Whilst some material will appear in different formats he doubts that the book will ever completely disappear or for example that alternative technologies will have a major impact on journal publishing by the year 2000.

Amongst all this activity and travelling, does he have time for outside interests? Depending on the time available, he enjoys calligraphy, DIY, antique restoration, choral singing and gardening. He also has 3 children and 2 grandchildren.

Albert Prior