



## *A Profile of Richard R Rowe*

*Chairman, President and Chief  
Executive Officer, RoweCom*

We managed to track down Richard "Dick" Rowe at the Frankfurt Book Fair after the now traditional lunch hosted by RoweCom at the STM Meeting. At the lunch Dr Rowe had made some controversial remarks to a group of distinguished publishers and consultants. Since one of these was that he considered pay-per-view a bad thing for libraries and publishers, we started by asking him just where he positioned himself in the information chain. Dr Rowe describes himself foremost as an educator, although his first intention was to train for the Methodist ministry following in his father and grandfather's footsteps.

Richard Roy Rowe was named after his maternal and paternal grandfathers. His father's father, Richard Charles Rowe was a cabinet maker from South Wales who moved to Polperro in Cornwall before emigrating to Iowa with his teenage son, Dick's father, Charles Ronald Rowe. Dick's mother, Elva Margaret Gilliland, was raised on an Iowa farm near Albia and was a school teacher in a one room rural schoolhouse before meeting her future husband at a church social.

Charles Rowe became a Methodist minister (as did his cabinet maker father, many years later) and as such moved around Iowa, so Dr Rowe was educated in a variety of places in Iowa, including Burlington, Grinnel and Clarinda. The family moved to Salt Lake City when Dick was twelve and then on to Los Angeles where he lived in San Fernando Valley and attended North Hollywood Junior High School. He graduated from High School at Chula Vista near San Diego. He started at UC

Berkeley and graduated from UCLA with a degree in psychology. He then moved to Boston University where he took a degree in the psychology of religion and spent a further year in the doctorate programme in social psychology at Yale. Continuing his peripatetic education, he finished his doctorate in clinical psychology at Columbia. He spent his summers, during his school years, in such various jobs as driving a bulldozer in Alaska for a gold mining company, working on a wheat farm in Colorado, building a community in southeast Missouri, and leading a student exchange group in the Soviet Union.

His first job after his doctorate was as Director of a mental health research project in the US Virgin Islands. He then moved to Lagos, Nigeria, to become Director of Test Development and Research in the Office of the West African Examinations Council. It was here that he developed his life-long interest in the cross-cultural aspects of educational research. At that time 200,000 examination papers for secondary school graduation each year were collected from five West African nations and sent to London and Cambridge to be marked. The process took a full year for the results to be returned. With help from the Ford Foundation, the turn around was reduced to three weeks and the tests were made more responsive to local conditions. In 1963, the people of Nigeria were full of optimism and thrilled by their independence. Soon, however, trouble arrived, during Dick's three years he and his young family lived through two bloody civil wars. His younger daughter Susannah was born in Lagos. Despite those difficulties, Dick

considers those years to be one of the high points in his career.

After Africa, he was invited to teach at Harvard. He was on the psychology faculty and served as Associate Dean for Administration and Finance. He also helped found, and served as the first Director of Harvard's newly formed interfaculty doctoral program in Public Psychology. The program trained clinical psychologists to apply their understanding of human behaviour to public and community issues rather than purely personal problems. He is proud, for example, that one of his graduates is the creator of Apple's interfaces for the disabled. Another graduate of the program now works for the U. S. Secret Service, studying the psychological profiles of past and potential presidential assassins. A third graduate offers consulting services to help organisations manage cultural diversity in the workplace.

On leaving Harvard, Dick became the Founder and Director of the Cambridge Office of the American Institute for Research, which focused on public policy research and services related to the families and children. This research included such diverse topics as a national award winning TV series on the experiences of a disabled child; studies of adolescent parents and a national campaign designed to improve the quality of children's snacking between meals.

In 1979 his career changed when his father in law "Bud" Davis wanted to retire, and asked him to take over the Faxon business. He did not want to "sell magazines" until he realised that this was an opportunity to facilitate connections between readers and writers. Dick has always been a leader in the application of new technologies to the information industry. He spent 14 years at Faxon, introducing such innovations as email in 1980. In 1981 Faxon went online creating its own private "internet" system for its major clients. That year he also organised a conference with 12 major STM publishers, proposing the creation of a collaborative electronic publishing group. Although the publishers turned down his suggestions at the time, within a few months ADONIS was born, which is why he claims he is sometimes known in publishing as "the Father of ADONIS". Much of what was discussed at that time is now commonplace in the industry.

Another innovation was the Faxon Institute. This was founded as a result of the need to understand the ways to improve scholarly communications. It was clear that technology was going to change the way scholars and businesses communicate. There was a need for libraries to be proactive, to lead the changes rather than be left behind. Dick strongly believes that libraries are positioned to have a major influence in the ways knowledge is created and shared throughout the world. Librarians must think carefully about the kinds of information systems we need as a society and then to take action to create those new services. The Institute was designed to give thought to these issues, and the company's purpose was to implement those solutions.

The end of this era came in the fall of 1993, when, as a result of an acrimonious divorce, a judge decided that his wife should run the business. After he left, the new management team ran into financial difficulties and Faxon was, within a year sold to the Dawson company. Dick continues to "grieve" about difficulties experienced during that time by so many employees, clients and publishers after he left the company he had built from \$69 million to \$560 million over 14 years. He felt that there were, and still are, some who held him responsible and yet there has never been a context in which he could explain his interpretation of the events. He is pleased that once again he can work with some of those "dedicated staff who 'hung-in'" with the wonderful clients, and publishers who continue to have respect for the vision and goals they share.

In the meantime Dick considered a number of career options, and decided that the future was the Internet. He started to build an internet-based business to anticipate the shift to delivery of e-content. His first attempt was a PC-based tool linked to the Internet with the data residing at the client. This did not scale easily because of the problems of keeping the data current at many different locations. As the internet matured it became possible to convert to the extranet model RoweCom now uses. The strategy for RoweCom has been to grow internally through sales and marketing, but also by strategic acquisitions. It was whilst hunting for these acquisitions that, almost by accident, he acquired the Dawson subscription business, which had acquired Faxon

in 1994. On a business trip to continue acquisition discussions with another company, he cold called the Chairman of the Dawson Board. As it happened, he was available the next evening, and to his surprise and delight the Chairman brought along the CFO. By the end of that first evening there was an agreement in principle and in two weeks the basis for the final agreement.

In five years RoweCom has become a leading infomediary between knowledge intense organisations, like leading universities and corporations. The core mission of RoweCom is to enable organisations to thrive by allowing their knowledge workers the resources that individuals need to work efficiently.

In the future he sees his role evolving, leaving the day to day management more in the hands of the current executive team, a young, dedicated and able group. With no interest in golf, over time he expects to invest more of his effort in a new RoweCom Institute, thinking, writing more, and serving the information community where he can be best used.

The centre of his life is his children, all

talented, but in many different ways. Katherine is a professor of English Literature at Bryn Mawr (and mother of his first two grandchildren); Susannah is an ophthalmologist (and Robert Wood Johnson Fellow) who has followed in his footsteps and has worked in Africa and Asia as an eye surgeon; Timothy is Founder of the Cambridge Incubator and MIT graduate, an incubator for Internet infrastructure start-up companies; Christopher is a senior at Hampshire College working on a sustainable architecture for environmentally friendly food production and Jonathan is the family artist and musician, building musical instruments and making jewellery.

He is and remains an educator at heart, concerned about the digital divide and how information can be provided in an economically sound manner to the information poor. He envisions a strong trend towards the convergence of education and information and would like to contribute to this in any way possible.

*Helen Henderson,  
Joint Editor designate of Serials*