

# Mini-profile:

## a day in the life of a consortium manager



**TOM SANVILLE**

Director of Licensing and Strategic Partnerships, LYRASIS, pictured with ICOLC's talking lobster mascot

Remember in the movie *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, our two outlaws kept saying, "Who are those guys?", referring to the posse relentlessly in pursuit. No doubt in similar fashion you might ask the same question of that band of folk who manage and govern library consortia. Well, they are the relentless posse dedicated to making libraries more than they can be than if they all act individually.

Library consortia have been around for years, of course, but in the last 15 to 20 years they have taken on added importance as a tool for library success. Many of the familiar consortia came of age in the 1990s. From well-staffed and centrally financed, to all-volunteer and library-funded, consortia of all shapes and sizes have exploded at the national, provincial, regional or state levels. They range in form from government agencies to self-supporting not-for-profits.

There may not be a typical consortium or a typical day for those involved in consortia affairs.

It's a multi-tasking, diverse daily menu. But even as I have recently moved from OhioLINK to LYRASIS, a day feels much the same.

I start my day by about 7:15 am – a habit developed a long time ago when my three boys were young and I would regularly leave a bit early to help coach their youth soccer teams. Those days are long gone but it's still up 'n at 'em early, and now I stay late as well. I'm all alone, which is great. That it means I can analyze, uninterrupted, the pricing of a major vendor and its impact and suitability across the diverse set of member libraries. As is often the case, it takes time to work some Excel magic on the numbers. In this instance, the vendor does not have it right and an e-mail with an Excel file attachment are prepared to suggest a better approach.

Before the morning gets too far on it's time to pop the first of several Coke Zeros. I'm one of a large number of Americans who never took to coffee or tea so get our caffeine intake through soft drinks

morning, noon, or night, warm or cold. The morning mental engine is now fueled and revved up. By lunch time I'll re-pop the top a couple more times.

The daily e-mail barrage starts. Those from members or other consortium staff I try to answer as quickly as possible so their work is not impeded, especially where there is confusion about vendor prices or terms, or what services are available. Here's an e-mail from the ATA (Alliance for Taxpayer Access), the coalition leading the charge to ensure that US federally-funded research is made openly accessible. As ATA periodically does, it is asking for letters and e-mails to be sent to key Congressman as an important vote approaches. I forward this e-mail to the community to stimulate letters from library directors.

Other staff are trickling in as evidenced by their e-mail traffic adding to the electronic din, along with more of the routine procedural and informational detail and confusion that accompanies anyone's work day. Next is a call with other staff members to discuss plans for an upcoming reference services conference we sponsor. This is the type of thing many consortia do to provide forums for education, collaboration, and discussion of best practices. My involvement is called on to help solicit vendor support as exhibitors and sponsors.

One more major call to conduct this morning: a five-way, four-location conference call with representatives from a major publisher on their proposals to license their e-books. This is not the first discussion we've had with them and it won't be the last before we – maybe – will be able to take a proposal to our community. Economic times are tough, we have to be more discriminating before we advocate to our members that we have negotiated a high value proposal. Maybe we made some progress but why does it seem to be harder than it need be?

*Tom addressing a meeting of ICOLC*



I'd like to say lunch is a leisurely affair with colleagues, filled with conversation loaded with great thoughts. But, nope, lunch is grab a sandwich and drag it back to the desk while doing more e-mail and more e-mail. And yes, a Coke Zero.

Next I turn to a regular activity and one I do more frequently of late – re-casting the financial projections. What are we spending as an organization and will our funding sources hold up? What if continued weak library budgets force more cuts in licenses, etc., etc? I bury myself in more Excel files, playing 'what-if' games, anticipating financial scenarios and financial cliffs we might fall off. With so much money tied up in annual licenses but the financial fortunes of libraries changing much more frequently, looking ahead and planning for the worst is a necessary evil.

I'm not alone in this regard and I see a few e-mails from ICOLC (International Coalition of Library Consortia) colleagues on the ICOLC listserv summarizing their travails and concerns. With over 500 colleagues on the list, it is a rich source of collaboration and advice. One, from Hildegard Schäffner (*see her mini-profile in this issue*), details some bad publisher pricing behavior and asks if any of us have had similar experiences. Responses have been both pro and con so far. I respond on the con side – we have not had similar problems. Consortia experiences with any particular vendor vary greatly.

Next, bad news! An e-mail report (and telephone call from a member library director to make sure I did not miss it) about a publisher sales representative's direct e-mail to member libraries that seems to contradict a group pricing program. This generates an immediate flurry of e-mails between me and a high-level publisher manager and a rapid e-mail to the community to straighten it all out. Just one more small, but typical, fire to put out.

The day is winding down but I grab other staff to discuss the status of plans to coordinate use of discovery and digitization services from several vendors. Consortia are not just about content and licensing. More effective and widespread use of technology at the most affordable cost is also a high priority. We don't move mountains today but push the mental peanut up the hill just a bit by clarifying next steps.

Still more to do, but I'm toast. I promise that tomorrow I will only work on strategic projects. Right!