



ADVISOR INTERVIEWS

An Interview with ITHAKA's Kevin Guthrie

doi:10.5260/chara.17.4.50

By Dennis Brunning (*Contributing Editor, The Charleston Advisor*)

<brunning@asu.edu>

Tell us about ITHAKA—how it came about, what you do, why you do it.

ITHAKA was born with the growth of the early Web. Our mission came from the realization that by using these new technologies in the realm of higher education, institutions and people could work together across the system in ways that were not previously possible. It began with JSTOR; in fact, JSTOR was the first of our organizations, with a very specific focus: to see whether we could help college and university libraries with the challenge and costs associated with collections storage and access by digitizing academic journals and preserving and making them accessible on the web. As journals started to increasingly be published in digital form, we took on the issue of preserving electronic journals at scale and Portico was born; and as our experience grew, people looked to us for advice which was the early impetus for Ithaka S+R.

Today, we are one organization pursuing our mission in a whole host of ways. The mission is our glue (and my personal mantra)—“What are we doing to create less expensive, better education for people around the world?” At a high level, this is what we are all about, whether we are providing access to a vast library at a small institution in India at affordable cost, or doing a case study to educate others on ways campuses are improving educational outcomes for more kids.

Recently ITHAKA and Artstor joined forces. Tell us more about what's going on and how it impacts customers.

I think that we have a responsibility as not-for-profit organizations to make dollars go farther and to find ways to work collaboratively to drive change. Artstor was created from the experience and impact of JSTOR. The Artstor Digital Library is the conceptual equivalent of JSTOR for images and increasingly other forms of content that are managed through its Shared Shelf platform. We believe we can achieve some economies of scale by working together, reach more institutions and users around the world with Artstor and Shared Shelf, and develop new ways for researchers, educators, and students to work with multiple content types

Do you see or imagine any discovery advantages of a closer working relationship of JSTOR and Artstor?

Absolutely. The JSTOR platform is ubiquitous in colleges and universities. It is used in more than 10,000 schools and organizations in 170 countries, and is increasingly open in new ways to the public. Unlike many other online resources, 40% of its traffic represents users starting at JSTOR rather than being referred from search engines or other digital services. This means that we have wonderful opportunities to connect this user base with more materials. We have already seen this work for scholarly books where usage is skyrocketing. We believe we can achieve similar exposure for images and primary sources. We have our first joint JSTOR-Artstor labs week happening this month to try to build an integrated experience of value with users.

Is Ithaka S+R a consultancy, advocacy group, think tank? Do you have any special term for what you do, your area of expertise?

Ithaka S+R is a research and consulting group. We work in two broad areas: Educational Transformation and Libraries and Scholarly Communication. We work in collaboration with institutions of higher education, libraries, and publishers to help them solve some of their most pressing problems.

What is ITHAKA's culture like? Do the allied companies share this culture? If so, in what ways? Are there significant differences?

ITHAKA's culture is about doing good in the world and measuring results. We have a very strong commitment to our mission and to the various communities and people we work with, and you see this internally as much as externally. We are passionate, but not evangelical. We like to create new things that add value and are sustainable, and we listen and act based on evidence. We do regular “blameless post-mortems” to evaluate approaches and to improve. There is a strong desire for finding the best way and most innovative way to do things—it's in the fabric of the place, as is a healthy dose of humility.

Of course there are some cultural differences running through the organization but these are less about the different services (many people work across them) and more about the type of work people do. Software developers, analysts, and marketing people just work and engage one another in different ways. Geography is also a factor. Differences are a good thing though. We think they make us better.

Obviously, we are just learning about the Artstor culture, but they are driven people who care deeply about the mission of improving education, a commitment to collaboration with libraries and cultural organizations, and a spirit of innovation. I think it will be a great fit.

Speaking for ITHAKA broadly, what interests you in librarianship and the library industry? What is absolutely right? What is terribly wrong?

We have had a long relationship with libraries as we have sought to utilize technology to help them find innovative ways to meet the needs of their users. JSTOR was created to help libraries solve their space problems. JSTOR is now far more than a service providing digitized journals and is actively working with libraries to think about what their needs are both today and in the future.

Libraries are under enormous pressure to move from building collections for local use to developing services that connect local users to the entire networked world. We bring a particular perspective that focuses on making evidence-based decisions about new organizational structures and user services.

What libraries are getting right: they are as focused on supporting teaching and supporting research. What they are getting wrong? Not everyone in libraries is convinced that digital is the right focus. We have to move beyond building local collections to providing an ar-

ray of services that connect users with all of the resources available to them.

Walk us through how S+R approaches its world. How do ideas about projects form, get off the ground? When do you know you've done your job?

Ithaka S+R does two types of work. Our research projects come from our sense of problems that need to be solved for the benefit of the library and educational communities. For those, we seek philanthropic support to do the work that we as a staff believe is important.

We also offer strategic guidance. It is not consulting in the traditional sense, but we form a partnership with an institution that wants our help in solving a specific problem. We work with that institution to define a scope of work, a timeline, and the desired deliverables.

We have been conducting national faculty surveys since 2000 to monitor changes in faculty behavior and practices in the scholarly communication area. More recently, we have made available the survey methodology to individual institutions who want to learn more about their local faculty.

Finally, for many of our projects, including the national faculty survey, we work with advisory committees to frame the project and to review our reports. This is simply an extension of our interest in working in partnership with libraries to address their problems.

In reality, our work is never done. We do work, though, from a strategic plan, and we constantly revisit our priorities based on what we learn from the library community.

JSTOR and Artstor work with valuable intellectual property. How do you understand trade-offs among rights holders and an Open Access view of intellectual property?

I take your question to mean how do we think about or pursue a more open agenda while working with the rights holders who own the content that largely comprises JSTOR and Artstor.

Since the very first conversations, we had with rights holders, we have practiced a delicate balancing act. To be successful and to build lasting resources, it has been critical to understand the perspective of rights holders, to value their contributions (which are real)—and to find ways to deliver value to them. Most rights holders we work with are motivated to reach the widest possible audience they can for their works, while also ensuring they have sufficient means to fund their operations. While the issues are different, the same approach and understanding holds true for our relationships with libraries and users; we strive to balance the three to good ends.

Our ability to balance access with rights has ultimately been about establishing trust, taking reasonable risk, and using evidence to make decisions, all within the context of our mission and commitments. We have worked very closely with rights holders to do this, and it has enabled us to vastly expand access to JSTOR over time and to do so in ways that we know are sustainable and that our rights holders support.

What talent do you seek now and what or who will you be looking for in the future?

In the knowledge economy, so many places struggle with talent. It is really hard, but wonderful in so many ways because competition forces you to be your absolute best. We have really begun to focus on talent in a significant way—both attracting it and retaining the best

people. Now and down the line, we need people to do a wide range of roles, but a large portion of our staff are people who build products—they talk to our users and our partners, they test and develop ideas collaboratively with them, they build great software and experiences, and they constantly measure results and strive for improvement. We are committed to this way of creating things; it is agile and lean. This takes knowledgeable developers, quality assurance people, designers, and brilliant product managers. We know these are the same people many places are looking for, so it is challenging; but we have a wonderful mission, strong culture, and people who are good at what they do. We have made some great recent hires. Our new VP Product built amazing digital offerings at Consumer Reports and our VP Marketing led the digital transformation of Harvard's communications.

Portico is one of ITHAKA's companies and a very interesting one at that. Tell us more about it and some of the "what if" scenarios built into its role and purpose. Are LOCKSS or CLOCKSS competition?

Created in 2002, Portico was founded to build a sustainable digital archive to serve the academic community and to enable publishers and libraries to feel secure and to realize tangible benefits as they transitioned to greater reliance on digital content.

Content in the Portico archive comes directly from members of the scholarly publishing community who wish to participate in the archiving service. Portico currently preserves content through three distinct services—one for e-journals, one for e-books (including some reference works), and one for digitized historic/digital collections (d-collections). In addition, Portico participates in research that prepares for the community's future preservation needs. Currently, more than 20,000 e-journals, 500,000 e-books, and 140 digitized historical collections are committed for preservation in Portico, and 960 libraries around the world have chosen to participate in Portico.

Portico is a "dark archive." This means that access to content is restricted, and primarily occurs only under conditions where an item is no longer available from the publisher or any other source. Portico considers this to be a "Trigger Event" and provides campus-wide access to the lost content to Portico Participating Libraries through the delivery site. In addition, publishers have the option of naming Portico as a perpetual access mechanism to fulfill claims by Portico Participating Libraries who formerly purchased or subscribed to content. Portico is certified as a "trustworthy digital repository" by the Center for Research Libraries (CRL), recognizing that Portico has developed a high-quality, sustainable digital preservation service that the community can rely on.

An important part of Portico's mission involves collaboration with colleagues in the preservation community, including LOCKSS and CLOCKSS, to address important challenges and research questions that will help us improve our current work and prepare for the future. Some of these future challenges that we believe will require collaboration include making progress on preserving the Long Tail of small publishers, and understanding the requirements for preserving new forms of complex, born-digital scholarly communication.

Take us to 2020 for ITHAKA, Ithaka S+R, JSTOR, Artstor, and Portico. What should customers expect and what may surprise them?

We will be working alongside our communities to solve their challenges in surprising and affordable ways. They will see us increasingly as strategic partners—not simply in Ithaka S+R where we pro-

vide research and guidance—but across our services.

We kicked off what we are calling “JSTOR 20/20” initiative at ALA this year to re-engage library leaders in solving today’s challenges together, just as we did when JSTOR began in 1995. We are visiting libraries to talk through emerging, difficult areas like data mining, open access, the digitization, preservation, and distribution of their collections, and making a positive analog to digital transition for scholarly books. We will be using our strengths across services—for example the JSTOR platform and our Portico digital preservation infrastructure and experience—and matching these with the strengths of institutions, organizations, and even individuals to make a difference.

I expect we will also continue to have a large focus on the broader issues of college affordability, which in many ways relates to the question of completion and outcomes. ■

About Kevin Guthrie

Kevin M. Guthrie is an executive and entrepreneur with expertise in high technology and not-for-profit management. Kevin was the founding president of JSTOR (1995) and Ithaka (2004). JSTOR and Ithaka merged in January 2010 to form a new organization (ITHAKA) with a mission to help the academic community use digital technologies to preserve the scholarly record and to advance research and teaching in sustainable ways. ITHAKA provides three externally facing services: JSTOR, the research, teaching and learning platform, Portico, the digital preservation service, and Ithaka S+R, the strategy and research enterprise focused on helping the scholarly community make a successful and sustainable transition to digital and network technologies. ITHAKA has offices in New York, NY, Princeton, NJ, and Ann Arbor, MI.

Previously Kevin started his own software development company serving the needs of college and professional football teams, and later served as a research associate at The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, where he authored *The New-York Historical Society: Lessons from One Nonprofit’s Long Struggle for Survival* (Jossey Bass). His diverse background also includes experience as a professional football player, a sports broadcaster and producer, and a consultant for an Oscar-winning motion picture.

Kevin holds a BSE in Civil Engineering from Princeton University and a Masters in Business Administration from Columbia University. He lives in New York City with his wife, Sari Chang, and their three children. ■