

Ex Libris Staff SFX (2000-5) Questionnaire -- Albert Oller

1. *When did you start working for Ex Libris? How did this come about?*

--I started with Ex Libris in the Spring of 2001, after getting a tip from a professor at Simmons GSLIS. The professor told me I wasn't her first recommendation, but I was immediately available, so I got the job. Later on, her first recommendation joined Ex Libris in another capacity, and we are friends to this day. I do think I interviewed well.

2. *What was your job title, or, more generally, what did you do? Were there particular projects you were involved in?*

--Title: SFX Librarian. Primarily I searched for web publications, and took recommendations from customers, so that SFX could expand its OpenURL library. My main duty was to transform the various web publication sites' article-links into a logical-system so that the programmers could create an accurate search-to-article connection.

I am particularly proud of working with the SFX programmers to create a unique automated system to identify newspapers and magazines that didn't have official ISSNs, but to which we could reliably provide access to our customers. We called them XISSNs. The programmers playfully named the process "The Albertron".

Thinking especially of the 2000-2005 time period...

3. *Why was SFX as successful as it was? Why did customers go with SFX rather than other systems?*

--SFX was successful because there was a small group of intelligent and dedicated people who wanted this product to work, not just succeed, but to work as intended.

I have no idea about why any library chose other systems. I'm guessing prior contracts, because SFX was clearly superior and "SFX" became a synonym for OpenURL, much in the way that "Google" is used for a search-engine today.

4. *Who were the main competitors?*

--I never considered competitors. I only tried to make SFX better. I'm a grunt.

5. *Comments on the role of SMUG users group?*

6. *Were there particularly interesting/valuable customers that you remember?*

--I think some Harvard participants were interesting but I'd have to dig around to find their names. I do particularly remember Mr. Baerveldt from Indiana University as being forward thinking. (Full disclosure: I worked with Larry Baerveldt at ByWater Solutions.)

7. *Are there particular interesting, fun, or odd things that you remember?*

--Yes, but you don't want me to go there. I was probably the oddest thing in Ex Libris (see the shaved head).

I had a corner/window cubicle. I had a small table that I built and marblized myself. I visited a few years later, and Vlad, who overtook the cubicle, still had the table and some of the plants I had brought. I liked that.

Over the phone and e-mail, I was scared of Dana. When we ultimately met in person in Watertown, it was great. When I went to Israel, she and her husband invited me to their home. That was true humanity.

Seriously, the diversity and intelligence of everyone was inspiring to me. I learned so much about the world, both through business, and through having lunch with people.

8. *When and why did you leave?*

--I left because I was young, arrogant, and ignorant. At the time I thought I deserved better consideration for what I had done. Now I realize that I wasn't qualified for what was needed for the development of Ex Libris/SFX.

Although I have learned much more since leaving, I do wish I had stayed with Ex Libris.