

Tribute: Dan Tonkery 1946–2021

Thomas Daniel Tonkery – known to the information industry as just Dan – sadly passed away on 28 March after a short illness, aged 74, in the arms of his beloved wife Linda.



He was born in a coal-mining region in West Virginia and attended the local one-room school. His first job while he was in school was on the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad as a crew caller and yard clerk. This was his introduction to automation, using the key punch machine to inventory the coal cars and consignments and sending paper tape to the main company in Baltimore. (Sometimes we wonder just how much things have moved on since 1962.) His summer sales job was as a Fuller Brush man, selling kitchen and cleaning products door-to-door, and for 12 weeks he was the number one sales rep in the US, but then he moved on to selling the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Automation and selling were to continue to be the key parts of his career.

After pre-med at David Lipscomb University in Nashville, Tennessee, he studied biomedical communications at the University of Illinois in Urbana. A publicly funded postgraduate programme took him to the National Library of Medicine (NLM), where he stayed for ten years. This was the very early days of automation and Dan automated about everything he could find in technical services at NLM. His specialty was technical services infrastructure, i.e. online serials control, acquisitions and cataloging. From manual systems to automated processing, 20,000 serials were moved from paper to a mainframe system, the \$2 million acquisition budget was used to buy everything from Brazilian PhDs to Russian journals and Dan built his first online acquisitions system to handle these complex purchases. By the time he left in 1979, every technical services process was automated. Then Dan moved to UCLA as Associate University Librarian for Technical Services, where everything was totally manual, and the systems department's only function was to prepare the microfilm Union List of Serials. Within three months Dan had drawn up a development plan to develop ORION, an automated technical processing system. The system automated the 19 branch libraries, 90,000 live serials and a \$5 million acquisition budget. This was a complete transition from paper to online, and the ORION mainframe system was operated from 1980 until 2000, using CLSI for circulation and run by one programmer and two assistants.

2 He had the entire campus hard wired with coax cable and gradually all functions were decentralized to local department libraries. Soon the library was the main user of UCLA's academic computing center and Dan had sold time-sharing agreements with many local libraries, such as the Getty Museum, University of California Irvine and Redlands University. IBM was so impressed, they wanted to use the UCLA platform as their academic computing platform. In the end ORION was only replaced because of Y2K concerns.

After UCLA, he moved to Boston as Senior Vice-President North America for Faxon, working for Dick Rowe. After a successful few years, Dan wanted to move to CD-ROM, but the Faxon board turned him down. As ever, Dan took this opportunity to set up a CD-ROM development company, Horizon Information Services. They developed and worked with the Library Corporation and with government departments to put their databases online. Back in LA they sold Bibliophile, which would allow a public library to save enough in six weeks to justify buying the CD-ROM system. With partners Oliver Pesch and David Devine, they decided this was the time to sell and the 'finalists' were EBSCO and Colin Harrison's Menzies Group. EBSCO was the final winner, but at this time Colin was buying Readmore. This was 1986 and Readmore had no automation, so Dan went back 30 years and started again from punched cards.

Dan wanted to move onto PCs, but their Philadelphia-based contractor said it couldn't be done. Not one to regard this as a barrier, Dan worked with a group of programmers who then started a new company which built the serials processing system. Specifying was easy and the system was quickly up and running. This allowed Dan to increase the turnover of the company from \$30 million to \$300 million by selecting those clients that needed fast same day service and were prepared to pay for it. The first corporate customers were First Boston, followed by the Bank of New York and then 30 medical schools and most of the pharmaceutical companies. Microsoft, Boeing and the pharmaceutical companies had between five and 20 Readmore staff in their offices, fulfilling orders on the spot, all with online acquisitions, claiming and routing. At Microsoft, the staff included five cataloguers (in an office next to Bill Gates and Steve Balmer). As an example of operations there, over 1,000 copies of *PC Week* were on Microsoft staff's desks on Monday morning, flown in on a hired plane from the printers. Any industry newsletter with Bill Gates in had 12 copies automatically sent to his mother.

In 1989 Menzies decided to get out of the library market and sold to Blackwell's. The Readmore name had far more recognition, so Blackwell's retained it in North America and indeed many people didn't realize that the company had been sold. In January 1996, the Blackwell management changed and Dan left. During a year of gardening leave, Dan set up TDT Ventures and invested in an electronic publishing company, an online traffic school and an online restaurant ordering service in Fort Collins, Colorado. He continued to work with publishers and libraries, re-engineering their processes. During this time Faxon was bought by Dawson and the North American management badly needed help.

Dawson approached Dan to run the North American operations and with many of his ex-Readmore Colleagues, Dan set out to rebuild Faxon. They developed innovative products like Subs Depot, License Depot and Information Quest and revitalized the company. Soon Dick Rowe reappeared with RoweCom money and stock and convinced Dawson to sell the company. Dan stayed on in the US with responsibilities shared with Dick, so Dick did the corporate desktop sales and Dan remained with the academics. The desktop business was expensive and was consuming all the cash and more. In the end Dan left Faxon and RoweCom and went to work for Dixon Brooke at EBSCO. EBSCO was concerned about the library industry and was afraid that RoweCom lacked the financial strength to complete their business plans. EBSCO began planning for a possible RoweCom crash but never figured that the entire worldwide RoweCom/Faxon organization would actually completely collapse. EBSCO had hoped for an orderly decline in business and was prepared to handle the erosion over time, but that was not to be and the entire RoweCom organization was sent into bankruptcy.

EBSCO worked long and hard at getting all the RoweCom companies out of bankruptcy and handling the integration into the EBSCO company. At EBSCO, as VP Business Development, Dan helped the libraries get through the crisis with RoweCom and started his innovation again. He was responsible for the A-Z service, worked in publisher relations and for the last

3 two years focused on consortium relations. This involved travelling over 100,000 miles a year and at the end of 2009 Dan left EBSCO looking for a change of pace. He wanted to be more project oriented, write and continue his relationship with the industry.

This involved him setting up Content Strategies with Roger Edelson, a consulting company specialising in working with STM publishers and advising on marketing, selling, negotiating, distribution agreements and finding sales agents in lesser-known markets. After a few years and the demise of Swets, it was clear that the library/publisher market was changing completely, and Dan decided on a complete change of career. He purchased an old tobacco farm in Burnsville, North Carolina and was in the process of developing this with his son Andrew when he died.

He leaves a legacy of a life involved in the information industry, which as well as business, has included being involved with the North American Serials Interest Group (NASIG) for 24 of its 25-year history. He was on the board for 12 years, served as Treasurer and President. He was on the Editorial Board of UKSG's publications and worked with the Society for Scholarly Publishing (SSP). He was heavily involved in standards with the Serials Industry Systems Advisory Committee (SISAC), the National Information Standards Organization (NISO) and the International Committee for EDI on Serials (ICEDIS). After being mentored at NLM, Dan always tried to mentor a number of librarians and after 40 years there are a lot of Dan's 'mentees' out there. At our wedding in 2004, my husband Chris Leamy, Dan, Art Elias and Donna Lyon spent the whole evening dissecting the previous 50 years of the information industry. They were all innovators and I just wish I had recorded the conversation.

Dan married his colleague at UCLA, Linda Persons Fiero, in May 1981. Their son Andrew was born in 1982 and until recently was a well-known photographer in LA. In 2020 he moved to North Carolina and worked at TonkFarms with his father. Their two other sons are John, a San Francisco bankruptcy lawyer, and Steven, a San Antonio financier. They have always been immensely proud of their grandchildren, Jamie and Mollie, Jacob and Hailey.

Dan's love of golf is well known and his annual golf outings with his group of professional friends were legendary. I never attended, but whenever we could get together – be it New Jersey, Florida, Texas, Alabama or even Scotland – we would try and sneak in a few holes. Dan loved real estate, and I have been lucky enough to enjoy the Tonkery's hospitality all over the States. The other place we all loved was Italy and the Fiesole Retreat conferences were always an opportunity to get together with friends and of course enjoy Dan's favourite treat – gelato – he was connoisseur. He will be sadly missed by all his friends and colleagues.

Helen Henderson

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