

An Interview with Troy Linker

The new cataloguing standard Resource Description and Access (RDA) was released in June 2010 as a part of the RDA Toolkit. Whereas the Joint Steering Committee for Development of RDA (JSC) is responsible for the content of the standard, the co-publishers of RDA and the Committee of Principals conjointly develop the publishing policy. In the past, the German National Library interviewed the chair of JSC and his predecessor. Today, we ask a representative of the publishing party who is responsible for RDA: Mr. Troy Linker, Director of Publishing Technology of the American Library Association.



Troy Linker has been in charge of the RDA Toolkit since the beginning of the year 2010. He is Publisher for the American Library Association Publishing Department's Digital Reference imprint. As Publisher, he manages the design, production, and marketing for digital reference products including the RDA Toolkit (on behalf of the RDA Co-Publishers) and ALA's Guide to Reference. Troy's involvement with RDA and AACR2 dates back to 1998 when he joined ALA Publishing as the Director of Publishing Technology.

1. Mr. Linker, in June 2010 the RDA Toolkit was released. You must have been very happy that a long time of preparatory work led to this outcome. What did you do first after the release? Celebrate?

Linker: I think the first thing I did was cross my fingers and hope that the technology worked as it did during testing. I have been lucky enough to be involved with several digital product launches and each time it has been stressful. No matter how much testing one does there is no truer test than a live launch. The ALA Annual conference was shortly after launch, so we did have a chance to take some of the RDA team past and present out for a nice meal at a Cuban restaurant in Washington DC. We raised our glasses in a toast to all of the hard work of the Joint Steering Committee (JSC), the RDA Editor, the Committee of Principals (CoP), the Co-Publishers, and all of the reviewers and testers representing constituencies around the world that helped to make RDA and the RDA Toolkit possible.

2. Since then, there have been some critical voices - as always in times of possible changes. What about positive feedback or experiences after the release?

Linker: Evaluating and ultimately implementing RDA will require considerable change from catalogers who face increasing workloads and decreasing or stagnate budgets and resources. To implement RDA many will have to learn new underlying cataloging principals, new terminology, and a new online tool. The RDA Toolkit like RDA are both the first step

down a new and I think a better path, but both are just the first step and both will improve as time goes on, but only if the momentum continues to move the development of both forward and not backward.

3. In the past, cataloguing codes primarily came along in print form. RDA is part of the RDA Toolkit. Where do you see the advantages of an online product?

Linker: Online tools have many advantages over print tools. Like many online tools the RDA Toolkit offers full text and metadata based searching, quicker and less expensive updating and of course instantaneous world-wide distribution via the internet. In addition to these standard web advantages we have designed the RDA Toolkit to deeply integrate RDA with a collection of other cataloging related documents and tools. We have created hundreds perhaps thousands of links between RDA and RDA: Element Set View, AACR2, and LCPS. Speaking of Library of Congress Policy Statements we have integrated them into the RDA Toolkit and we plan to integrate other national library policy statements as they are developed. Finally and I think one of the most unique functions of the RDA Toolkit is the integration of user-contributed content in the form of Workflows and Mappings. Our goal was to develop technology that helps to facilitate the sharing of cataloging knowledge within the same institution or throughout the world. Using workflows users with specific expertise (for example music, serials, cartographic, etc.) can create and share procedures and processes that are searchable and deeply interlinked with RDA as well as any other internet resources. These workflows can be copied by users to be used as a solid foundation that can be customized to fit the individual cataloging practice at their institution.

4. The German speaking world is interested in an international standard. Where do you think lays the strength of the online tool in terms of internationality?

Linker: The world has become much smaller in the last few years. Cataloging records are shared much more freely internationally emphasizing the need for international standards. I am very excited about the potential for RDA's adoption as an international standard. RDA has been developed with an international audience in mind and is based on international principals of FRBR, FRAD, and ICP.

In addition to the advantages of an online tool described above the biggest and most advantageous thing about an international online tool is that with nearly instantaneous (with some delay for translations) world-wide distribution you can be assured that the standard is up to date and all users have equitable access to it. In addition unlike multiple print editions, by building the online tool once you have the opportunity to share the authoring and development costs across a larger international audience allowing everyone to benefits from lower overhead costs.

5. Nevertheless, you decided to publish also a printed version of RDA?

Linker: Yes, we did decide to publish a print version, but not at first. The CoP, JSC, and the Co-Publishers all agreed that RDA would be issued as an online only tool. An online tool is easier to develop, less expensive to update, and ultimately in my opinion the best way to interact with RDA. As the Co-Publishers developed the product, conducted focus groups and talked with potential clients we came to understand that limiting RDA to an online only tool would leave too many users out of the process. For various reasons including cost, the need for offline access, etc. users told us they wanted a print version. Ultimately the decision was made, somewhat reluctantly, that to meet user needs and to give RDA the best chance of adoption and implementation we needed to offer RDA in print. Advances in publishing technology (for example scripted PDF generation and print on demand) have also helped to make RDA possible in print.

6. A cataloguing standard like RDA needs to be developed, and actually, we know there are some issues that were deferred to until after the first release of RDA. Could you tell us, please, a few words on the update processes?

Linker: We treat fixes and enhancements separately from updates. We have been making fixes to the functionality of the RDA Toolkit as well as fixing typos and formatting corrections all along since the site launched in June. We have also rolled out new functions and added new documents to the document collection as they have become available. We will continue to make these enhancements and fixes as our resources allow.

Substantial updates to RDA can only come from the JSC as they did AACR2. The updating process like many things RDA related isn't finalized yet, pending the outcome of the U.S National Libraries' test of RDA and the subsequent report that will be released sometime this summer.

7. How often RDA updates will be published? How do you plan to inform the community about these updates?

Linker: We don't currently have a schedule of when these update will be issued. I expect that we will have to be flexible over the next year or so and we won't get to a point where we have a predictable update schedule until sometime in 2012.

8. There must be a close cooperation between the publishers and the JSC?

Linker: Yes, the JSC and the Co-Publishers work closely together to coordinate the authoring and now the updating of RDA. Technologically we have a process in place that is very similar to the translation process we are using for German and French translations. The JSC will use this process to communicate updates and changes to the Co-Publishers. Once these changes are finalized it will take a small amount of time to input and proof these changes before we push them out to the RDA Toolkit. The biggest technological challenge is how to communicate to users what content has changed in the RDA Toolkit.

9. The German-speaking library community has been supporting the development of RDA since its first days. Now, there are voices that say that the prices of the RDA Toolkit are prohibitive for implementation of RDA in their institutions; they think that ALA just wants to make profit. Is that true?

Linker: Yes, we have these voices in our community as well. I understand the concerns. Catalogers are asked to do more with less resources almost every day and moving from a print product to an online subscription product is more expensive. In the past catalogers could buy a print book and keep it for many years before needing to purchase a new edition. This is why we do offer the print option for those that just can't justify moving to an online subscription product.

The RDA business model is the same as the AACR2 business model before it. RDA is Co-Published by three non-profit library associations, not just ALA. ALA, representing the biggest market, takes a leading role in the publishing effort, but we are not alone. Just as it was with AACR2 10% of RDA sales is paid into a fund that supports the work of the JSC and CoP. The JSC and CoP members are not paid for their time, but they do incur expenses that are covered by this fund. The Co-Publishers are not for-profit publishers. I can't speak for my Co-Publishing partners but I believe they work similarly to ALA. Here at ALA our primary goal is to publish for the good of the library profession and to hopefully make a modest profit on our publishing investments. Any publishing profit that is made is used to fund the work of ALA and the profession. With regard to the RDA Toolkit I just updated our 5 year projection and based on our current projections ALA will only break-even on our RDA Toolkit investment after 5 years of sales.

10. How many people are working in your toolkit team?

Linker: I manage a unit of ALA Publishing called ALA Digital Reference and we are responsible for the RDA Toolkit as well as another online digital reference tool called Guide to Reference that launched a few years ago. We are a small team of 3.5 staff that splits our time 70% RDA Toolkit and 30% Guide to Reference. Although if I am honest over the last year we have invested more than 70% of our time on the RDA Toolkit. We have a sales and marketing person (Alison Elms), a managing editor position (currently vacant due to a promotion), a shared admin assistant with another unit of ALA Publishing, and me as the publisher.

11. The German National Library will translate the RDA text into German language. Could you, please, tell us how you are planning to publish the German version of the RDA Toolkit?

Linker: Basically we plan to implement a preferred language setting in the RDA Toolkit. This setting is set by the user not the institution so different users at the same institution could select a different preferred language. The preferred language setting would control the interface language (buttons, help text etc.) in addition to RDA and any other translated documents offered in the RDA Toolkit. The default language is English, but users will have the option to change their preferred language to German or French or any other language we offer. If a user changes their preferred language to German, for example, their interface, RDA, and any other document that we have in German will display in German. Any document that isn't translated will display in English. The user will not be able to compare German and English side by side but they will be able to toggle between German and English and any other supported language by adjusting the preferred language setting in their users preferences.

12. Will you publish also a print version of the German text?

Linker: Yes, we would like to publish a print version. Our current plan is to partner with a German Publisher who will manufacture and distribute the German language Print RDA. We are in preliminary talks with a German publisher, but we are not far enough along to make any public statements about our plans.

13. Do you know about plans to implement RDA in other parts of the world?

Linker: From what I understand most of the current AACR2 countries (Canada, United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand) have expressed plans to implement RDA, but are waiting to finalize their implementation plans pending the outcome of the U.S. testing. Many other countries are interested in RDA but are waiting to see what the U.S. does before making their decisions.

14. Do you have a motto that helps you to meet the permanent changes in the next few years, calmly?

Linker: Some days are more calm than others, but I do have a motto that does help me deal with change and the fear of the unknown. I can't remember where I heard it but it goes something like this "A good leader isn't always right, a good leader isn't afraid to be wrong".

Mr. Linker, thank you for answering our questions.