

ATG Interviews Dr. Mehdi Khosrow-Pour

President and Publisher, IGI-Global

by Katina Strauch (Editor, *Against the Grain*) <kstrauch@comcast.net>

Now what I like to do, as a marketing guy, is to research how many of these ten individuals have published papers in **IEEE** journals or given talks at **IEEE** conferences. Always, it's most of them — I've been doing this for five or so years now — and sometimes it's all of them. Then we talk about this at customer breakfast meetings at library and trade shows we go to. It's a way of dramatically illustrating how, just as in the case of patents, **IEEE** research is changing the world.

So to step back a little, when it began **IEEE** was devoted to electrical engineering. Then it was joined by radio engineering. And now in the 21st Century we've gone way beyond these disciplines to influencing all of technology itself, even medicine. In fact, a few years ago, in 2003, an **IEEE** member named **Paul Lauterbur** won the **Nobel Prize in Medicine** for inventing the **MRI machine**.

ATG: What should librarians know about **IEEE**?

JD: We hire them! We have a team of four Client Service Managers that literally travel the world — almost 60% of our business is outside North America — to train users on **IEEE** products, to tell them about the latest developments, and generally to be good ambassadors for the **IEEE**. Each one of these individuals, and to a person they are outstanding, also a librarian. Now they are working inside the biggest technology corporations, and the finest universities, in the US, Germany, Italy, China, Japan, India, Korea — you name the country, or the company, or the university, and they've been there.

In fact, I'll conclude with a great story about one of our librarian/CSMs. Her name is **Rachel Berrington** and she was at the **Jet Propulsion Lab** at **Caltech** doing a training session there a few years ago. **Rachel**'s a great person and so are the people at **JPL**. This training session happened to occur during the final weeks before they were shipping the **Mars Rover** out for launch. They had created a gold disc they were all going to sign and bolt onto the **Rover**. Since **Rachel** was there and they liked her and enjoyed the session, they asked her if she wanted to sign the disc too. She said, of course, yes, and she did. So **Rachel**'s signature is on **Rover** on Mars. Pretty cool! Not many can say that.

ATG: Finally, tell us about yourself. Family? Hobbies?

JD: I'm not an engineer, although everybody asks me that. My degree was in literature and philosophy, so you can see I've put it to good use. I have a publishing background, having worked for companies like **McGraw-Hill**, **Prentice-Hall** (remember **Prentice-Hall**?), **Pergamon** (remember **Pergamon**?) and others. I'm an old guy but I have two young kids, 11 and 14, so I'm trying to hang around to see how they turn out. I have a trophy wife (I hope she's reading this!) and I like music a lot. I now have 2,467 songs, including symphonies, on my **iPod**, and I'm trying to figure out what order to listen to them in. 🎧

ATG: Tell us about yourself. You were a faculty member at Penn State University for over twenty years, I believe. Tell us about your name. Where are you from originally?

MK: I was born in 1951 in a small town up in the Northern part of Iran called Langrood (translation: along the river) and I am one of 11 children in my family. My dad was a shopkeeper and could not afford to pay for my schooling, so at age 13, I quit high school and went to work to support the family financially. I worked from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. six days a week and also managed to attend the local night school in order to receive my high school diploma. After serving two years in the **Iranian Army**, I came to the States in 1973 as a student where I lived in Washington, D.C. for a short time and then moved to Florida where I lived for the next nine years. During my educational career, I managed to obtain a Bachelor of Business Administration degree from the **University of Miami**, an M.B.A from **Florida Institute of Technology**, a Master in Computer Information Systems from **University of Miami**, and a Doctorate in Business Administration (DBA) from **Nova Southeastern University (NSU)** with dissertation emphasis on Management Information Systems. Throughout my college years, I worked many odd jobs, such as waiting tables, driving a taxi, serving as a security guard, tutoring and computer programming to pay for my education. Upon graduation from **NSU**, I taught as an adjunct faculty member for the **Florida International University** and **Broward County Community College**, and joined the faculty of the **School of Business Administration at Penn State Harrisburg** in 1982 as an Assistant Professor. There I taught undergraduate and graduate courses in Information Systems for the next 18 years and also chaired the **Information Systems Program** during most of those years. In 2000, after 20 years of teaching, I left my tenured faculty position at **Penn State** to run **IGI Global** on a full-time basis. I had a very productive and rewarding career during my years in academia and was able to be very active in many research circles. Through my research, I authored/edited more than 30 scholarly books and journals, over 50 research articles, and chaired many professional conferences and edited their proceedings. During the same time, particularly during the past seven years, I have been able to learn tremendously through my leadership



of an innovative publishing house currently playing a major role in changing the landscape of the publishing industry.

ATG: When and why did you start **IGI-Global**?

MK: While I was focusing much of my time during my tenure at **Penn State** on teaching and research, I also had a tremendous desire to become involved

in the practical business side of my training. Utilizing my eastern and western values of hard work, determination and commitment, combined with intelligence (my equation for succeeding in anything in life is; Success = Hard Work + Determination + Commitment + Intelligence), in 1988 the same year that I became a U.S citizen, I started **IGI Global** (formerly "**Idea Group Inc**") in the **Commonwealth of Pennsylvania** with less than \$5,000 of my own savings. As a scholarly academic publisher of books, journals, reference publications, case studies, and conference proceedings in the areas related to the utilization and management of information technology resources, I aimed for the company to uncover concept-driven publications not yet produced by large STM (Scientific, Technical, and Medical) publishers whose investments at the time weighed heavily on hardware technologies and the technical side of computer science. During the next twenty years, **IGI Global** managed to publish vast volumes of research and innovations related to issues revolving around the applied side of technology, as well as organizational, managerial, and societal aspects of information technologies in modern organizations worldwide. The primary mission of the company from conception was to expand the body of research in all academic programs, tagging information science as an interdisciplinary field. I always believed that information technology is not the domain of computer science or accounting fields, rather it is the domain of all academic disciplines including education, social science, and humanities, as well as business, engineering, and natural science programs.

With this rooted initiative, it has been the ongoing business motto of **IGI Global** to further this endeavor and base this objective to expand research on "Highest Quality," "Excellent Service," and "Positive Image." Every employee of **IGI Global** has pledged to these commitments and a plaque indicating their commitment sits on each employee's desk.

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ATG: *You have had at least one other name for your company — Idea Group, I believe. Why did you change it?*

MK: As the company became more global in its coverage of topics and diverse contributing authors, editors, and customers representing researchers and scholars from more than 100 countries, it became more obvious that the company had risen to truly be a global publishing house. As a matter of fact, close to 50% of our authors and editors represent research institutions outside of North America. In January 2007, we modified our name to **IGI**, which is an acronym for “**Idea Group Inc.**,” and added the word “**Global**” to represent the globalization of our focus. I always tell colleagues and our customers that the **IGI Global** conversion is the same as when **IBM** decided to go from being called “**International Business Machine**” to **IBM International**.

ATG: *IGI Global has six imprints. Tell us about them. How many books and journals do you publish in total? Number of books published per year?*

MK: **IGI Global**’s initial imprint was “**Idea Group Publishing**” which is now known as “**IGI Publishing**.” The primary focus of this imprint is to publish reference titles with strong emphasis on topics related to information technology utilization management and knowledge management, software technologies development & applications, multimedia and business process engineering. In 1997, **IGI Global** acquired **IRM (Information Resources Management) Press** to publish innovative, emerging and more specialized reference titles in niche technologies and fields on a fast track basis, which allowed researchers in the field to learn about these breaking technologies and applications much faster. In 1999, **IGI Global** acquired **Information Science Publishing** to address the ever expanding need for reference titles in the fields of online and distance education, utilization and technologies. During the past 9 years, **IGI Global** has been publishing reference titles in all aspects of online and distance education, with its well renowned four-volume *Encyclopedia of Distance Learning*, and continues to publish 20-25 new titles annually in this area. In 2001, **CyberTech Publishing** was launched by **IGI Global** to publish titles with a strong focus on practical, organizational and managerial issues of information technology applications in organizations. In 2003, **IGI Global** launched “**Information Science Reference**” (formerly “**Idea Group Reference**”) to publish comprehensive reference titles in all topics of information technology starting with well recognized titles such as the *Encyclopedia of Information Science Technology* (five-volume), the *Encyclopedia of Digital Government* (three-volume), and the *Encyclopedia of Information Technology and Gender* (two-volume). **mToday**, the **Information Science Reference** imprint publishes comprehensive reference titles under four categories “**Encyclopedia**”, “**Handbook of Research**”, “**Premier Reference**

Source”, and “**Multi-Volume Collection**.” **IGI Global**’s newest imprint, “**Medical Information Science Reference**,” seeks to publish interdisciplinary reference publications with direct emphasis on bio-medicine, bio-informatics, and healthcare information systems research.

IGI Global is scheduled to publish approximately 250+ new titles in 2008 under its current six imprints, which is an exponential increase from the 10 new titles published by the company in 2000. In addition to books, **IGI Global** currently publishes 30 scholarly quality peer-reviewed journals, which will increase to 60+ by end of 2008. The company plans to expand this collection to 100+ journals by the end of 2009. The entire collection of **IGI Global** journals can also be found in its online aggregated database, **InfoSci-Journals**. **IGI Global** is also the publisher of the most comprehensive collection of 400+ real-life cases studies in all aspects of business information technology management. All **IGI Global** cases are available in its aggregated database, **InfoSci-Cases**. Given this growth, I think it is fair to say that **IGI Global** has emerged as the industry leader in creating and disseminating knowledge in computer science and information technology management.

ATG: *Can you make any predictions about the future? Will print on paper in book form survive?*

MK: When it comes to the role of technology in any industry, particularly publishing, I can be a bit biased due to my technology background, but at the same time, I am realistic enough to understand that the forces of technology are not the only motivator in shaping consumers’ choice, as there are many other forces involved, such as societal, organizational, governmental and cultural, as well as how readily businesses embrace change.

In regard to the status of print vs. electronic formats, libraries are able to benefit from advances of electronic technology and are hence offered more content in electronic formats, which in turn provides an added ease of access, economical efficiency, less storage required, among other benefits. However, one has to realize that a library’s existence in many institutions contributes in a major way to the organization’s livelihood, such as its ability to be used for fund-raising purposes for the organization in whole. Major universities bring in millions of dollars by using the library as an academic shrine where donors, mostly alumni, foster the growth of the organization through providing financial benefactions in support of the library’s consistent expansion of its collection of millions of print publications, where if stored electronically, could be held in a fraction of the space required by the current huge infrastructure! Another current force against the total use of electronic technology is the credibility of scholarly publications that are only available in electronic format. As former faculty of a major research university and editor-in-chief of five major peer-reviewed journals, I can attest that many P&T (promotion & tenure) committees of our major research universities still do not accept published

manuscripts in only electronic format as viable research, and it is for this very reason that many of my colleagues make sure that what they are submitting is also published in print! Another force contributing to this dilemma is the fact that there are still many library users and patrons who would like to find publications in print in the library due to a variety of demographic reasons or simply preference.

In my opinion, we are in the midst of a transition in understanding, accepting, and utilizing electronic formats, since during the past several years this movement has accelerated significantly. However, I have trouble with the prediction that within the next 10 years everything will be in electronic format! The truth of the matter is that both print and electronic format will continue to be in demand with more willingness toward electronic format, but electronic will not wipe out print format. A good analogy can be the introduction of rental and on-demand movies. On-demand movies may provide movie goers much more flexibility vs. a trip to the movie theater, but despite the availability of movies in these new formats, there are still many movie theaters and many individuals who prefer the traditional venue experience. One might consider this to be archaic, but one also has to realize that it is part of consumer behavior and sometimes it takes a long time to change this behavior.

IGI Global’s strategies to contribute to the above movement have been very proactive. Starting with our first journal published in 1988, we have always offered libraries free electronic access to our journals when a library subscribed to the print. Under our current business model, we offer electronic subscriptions under a less expensive pricing. To expand our model, starting in 2005, **IGI Global** began offering unlimited access to electronic format free of charge for the life of the edition to the entire university community when a library purchases a print version of any of our comprehensive reference titles published under our **Information Science Reference** imprint. We are now also offering the same for titles published under our newest imprint, “**Medical Information Science Reference**”. Furthermore, since 2003, **IGI Global** has been serving the needs of research libraries through its family of aggregated online databases such as **InfoSci-Journals** which is our collection of journals; **InfoSci-Books** which is a collection of all of our books that consists of close to 800 titles; and **InfoSci-Cases**, our collection of case studies. As a publishing house believing in the power of innovation, we have been contributing our share in helping our customers take advantage of technological developments within the scope of their needs and acceptance of these new realities.

ATG: *Where do you sit on the Open Access fence?*

MK: In my heart, I am still an academician and student believing in the easy exchange of knowledge to all researchers all over the world. However, I also believe that there are certain direct and indirect costs associated with dissemination of information in any format.

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In my opinion, with advances in the Internet and some of the excessive greed of major publishing houses, the **Open Access** movement is a natural phenomenon for fair cost that also includes backlash to some of these for-profit practices. Having said that, some of my colleagues in academia believe in the extreme side of the spectrum, in which there should be no charge for accessing research knowledge. This is the same contention made by many people about the music industry, where arguments for no costs are applied to any and all music they wish to access, regardless of the costs associated with production of that music. Yes, some musicians share their music free of charge to anyone, but by the same token, there exist volumes of commercially produced music where both the artist and the production company have invested in the work and therefore expect some returns on their undertaking. Given this, it is not truly fair that a consumer questions why these constituents are not providing their music free of charge. At **IGI Global**, we have been very mindful of the issue of **Open Access** by offering our journals and comprehensive reference titles in electronic format free of additional charge. Through this model, we firmly believe that we

have already recovered our investment on the title by selling the print version and therefore, there is no need to charge our customers an additional fee for the electronic format. I wish more publishers would begin following our business model to facilitate additional access to research. Furthermore, currently **IGI Global** is experimenting with a few new models which would allow us to become a more active player in the **Open Access** movement.

ATG: You are located on “Chocolate Avenue” in Hershey, Pennsylvania. Do you like chocolate? What are your hobbies? What do you read in your spare time?

MK: As you may know, **IGI Global**’s main operations are in Hershey, Pennsylvania “The Sweetest Place on Earth,” with an additional editorial office in New York City. Yes, we are on Chocolate Avenue where we are just a few blocks from the **Hershey Chocolate Factory** and often, the scent of fresh chocolate meets us at our office doorstep. In regard to liking chocolate, surprisingly, I personally do not like chocolate, but my wife, **Beth**, enjoys it enough for the both of us. My hobbies primarily include listening to music, which I truly believe overcomes all social and cultural boundaries. I like all types of music, including classical, rock (classic and alternative), jazz, country, particularly **Johnny Cash**, and even rap. I love swimming and traveling. Also, I like to read

social and political satires. I recently finished reading **Thomas Friedman**’s latest book “*The World is Flat*.” Yes, I read it in print format and not on **Amazon**’s new **Kindle**!

Finally as a part of my job of managing **IGI Global**, I also try to keep up with research in my field of study, and actually devote two days a week on my schedule to keep up with my writing and editorial work. I recently finished a *Handbook of Research on Public Information Technology* (two-volume) with my colleague **Prof. David Garson** of the **North Carolina State University**, which is due to be released in February 2008. In my spare time, my wife and I manage a non-profit private charity foundation entitled the “**World Forgotten Children Foundation**,” providing nutritional, educational, and medical assistance to handicapped orphaned children in third world countries.

Thanks for giving me this opportunity to share with you and your readers about **IGI Global** and my views about our industry. As much as I strongly believe that technology is allowing many societies to achieve much greater power in the dissemination of knowledge, at the same time, the technology is also contributing to widening the economic gaps between developed and underdeveloped nations. Perhaps this is the most important global issue challenging all of us as the citizens of this World. 🌍

ATG Special Report — Libraries & the Digital Commons: Eight Principles for an Emerging Ecosystem¹

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With the prospect of increasingly open access to research on the horizon, academic libraries should be poised to embrace the challenging question of what they can do to support their campuses in this new, evolving environment. Yet we are only beginning to understand what we need to do to adapt to support and foster open access. We will need new models and new ways of thinking — new frames of reference. This article provides such a new frame of reference by exploring the idea of “**The Commons**” as applied to digital scholarship, through the lens of the principles needed to manage a biological commons.

The idea of the commons as a shared public resource that is free to individual users is deeply historical. A commons is a public good, a resource that is not significantly depleted by each additional individual use — like public streets, lighthouses, law enforcement, or the **Boston Common**, which was opened up to all citizens of Boston in 1634 for grazing cattle. Internet access to research has been talked about as the new “**Digital Commons**.”²

Stewardship of the Commons

In a 1968 *Science* article, biologist **Garrett Hardin** developed a metaphor that drove thinking about the commons for several decades. He argued that “freedom in a commons brings ruin to us all,” referring to this as “the tragedy of the commons,” his thesis was that a commons would inevitably be overexploited until it was depleted and finally destroyed.

More recently, however, another biologist has made the case that the “tragedy” metaphor for the commons was erroneous. **Princeton**



biologist **Simon Levin**, in his 1999 book *Fragile Dominion: Complexity and the Commons*,³ argues persuasively that management of a shared resource does not inevitably lead to its destruction; a commons can work if you have agreed-upon rules for its management.

Levin’s book offers eight “commandments

of environmental management,” or essential management lessons for the biosphere as commons. His focus is on managing the planet as a commons, but by extending his principles from a biological ecosystem to a socioeconomic ecosystem — scholarly communications — we can, as **Levin** says, create a “framework for sound practice” in managing our digital commons. This article will explore the implications of each of **Levin**’s principles for managing a biological commons has for the digital commons.

Principle #1: Reduce Uncertainty

Levin argues that to sustain the biological commons we need to reduce uncertainty, which he says can be achieved through:

- Minimizing reliance on one mode or one source
- Monitoring and investigating to obtain new information all the time
- Spreading risks by broadening the scale or scope of our activities

He concludes that diversification is “imperative for survival.”

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