American Libraries Committee Meeting Minutes  
Saturday, June 28, 2014  
1-2:30pm  
LVH, Conference Room 4  
Las Vegas (ALA 2014 Annual Conference)  

Attending: Laurie Borman (Editor & Publisher/committee staff liason), Sandra Hirsh (committee chair, 2013-2014), Lee A. Comings, Jenny Maddox Abbott, Phil Morehart (Associate Editor), Brenda Pruitt-Annisette, Marc Truitt, Don Chatham (Associate Executive Director), Mariam Pera (Associate Editor), David Tyckoson, Susan Weaver.

1. Welcome/Introductions

   Don Chatham shared the news that Ernie DiMattia, head of the ALA Publishing Committee, had passed away on Thursday.

   Sandra added an item—discussion of specific goals/charge of this committee in addition to its advisory role—to the end of the agenda.

   Sandra added an item—remarks from Laurie about the mission of the magazine.

2. American Libraries overview: finances, redesigns, more—Laurie Borman

   Laurie explained the mission of the magazine: to be the voice of the profession. She noted its various outlets:
   - 6 print issues and 7 digital supplements
   - AL Online
   - AL Live—which has an average of 2,000 viewers per episode
   - AL Direct
   - AL social media—more than 30,000 followers on Twitter

   Part of the mission of the magazine is also to offset member dues costs by producing revenue. Laurie said she would provide ad/finance numbers summary on ALA Connect group.

   She discussed the redesign of the print magazine and also the AL Online website to be mobile-responsive. She also noted the switch of vendors for the flipbook version of the magazine from Zmags to Page Suite.

   Laurie also shared that AL Direct will be undergoing a reimagining process. AL Direct has existed for 9 years and running. It needs to refresh itself like any digital medium, she noted. This reimagining is prompted by a drop in readership—open rate for the newsletter is at about 20%, when a good average is 40%; two-thirds of the people who open it only click one thing. There has also been a drop-off in advertising. AL has a new ad rep within the team (Katie Bane), but AL Direct hasn’t recovered. Laurie noted the need for more reader engagement and ad revenue.

   Currently, 35% of AL Direct readers are on mobile devices. The majority of e-newsletters have 5-8 items per issue. She said there is a possibility of adding a news sidebar to the website so eliminate this section of AL Direct.
Laurie asked the committee for its input and ideas throughout the redesign process for both the website and AL Direct, and said staff would be working toward putting more aggregated news on the AL website versus in AL Direct. She added that AL would be hiring a firm to evaluate what happened in 2013 to cause a large drop in AL Online visits, although advertising numbers haven’t dropped significantly.

The discussion then turned to JobList, which is staffed between AL and ACRL, with shared revenue. Laurie reported it has been doing better than expected. In fact, all ad revenues have either improved or stayed the same. Marc asked about job postings that may not be happening in a paid environment. Laurie explained that many postings are required to be posted somewhere officially, depending on the city or institution, and they often require a print ad. Listservs also often post job ads. David commented that the two aren’t mutually exclusive; some postings may be on both. Lee added that he had found his current position through JobList shortly after graduating. David also expressed support for the idea of having a defacto central place/job bank for the profession.

Commenting on the redesign, Susan asked how librarians of a certain age demographic may receive information and suggested forming a focus group. Bridget suggested using the kitchen-table conversations as a venue for testing redesign ideas. Marc asked if AL content is platform agnostic. Laurie explained that there were 5 templates for AL Direct meant to work across platforms, and that it was an important factor to keep in mind for the web redesign.

3. Review last two issues of *American Libraries* (June 2014 and 2014 E-Content Supplement)

Discussion of the May 2014 issue occurred on a phone call but only 3 committee members were able to attend. Looking at the June issue, Marc noted that there were two full pages of Letters in “Comment Enabled” and asked if the issue brought up at Midwinter had been resolved. Mariam explained that those letters had come in over a period of months, but there had not been enough content to fill a section and justify print—so it wasn’t necessarily an improvement in the number of Letters AL is receiving. She then asked the committee for their thoughts on possibly using social media accounts to sign in to AL online. Marc expressed that he doesn’t use social media and doesn’t want to, and would prefer AL maintains a forum for people who do not to be able to offer substantial comments in other formats. Sandra commented that the pace of comments in print is too slow and perhaps the magazine needs to use a hybrid of submitted letters along with posts from social media.

Marc then asked how far it would be to say that the print publication itself isn’t fast enough. There was a discussion on advertising, print versus digital. Sandra said that digital allows for tracking and is often more appealing to advertisers for that reason. Don commented that it may depend on what the advertiser is hoping to get. He added that AL’s audience is segmented—every member gets the print magazine; not everyone gets digital products. Laurie added that advertisers like the print magazine and it costs just under $1 per copy to product/print. Marc added that it seems AL is going in the opposite direction of many other publications in that
regard. Don made the case about a difference in circulation of specialized versus non-specialized audiences.

Jenny noted that the speed of production may not be the issue with not receiving letters, but rather that people don’t feel an urgency to write in because of the content; it’s good and they like it, but perhaps it doesn’t start a conversation. Bridge made the point that younger people are often still getting information in print because they’re tired of screens. Susan said she takes AL with her for pleasure reading. Sandra also said she enjoyed the conference issue.

There was a point of order that there was a half hour remaining for the meeting.

4. “American Libraries Live”—Observations/Comments

Laurie noted that AL Live continues to be very successful, with approximately 2000 attendees per session and strong social media and advertising support. Committee members like the programs that they have attended, but noted that improvements can be made in regards to the appearance of presenters’ screen areas (on-screen distractions can be removed, lighting could be better). Laurie said she would take all suggestions to Dan Freeman.

David said it was a great way to provide content, and Jenny shared that she thinks they are more fun to watch live as opposed to the archive. Sandra asked if there was any possibility of making AL Live a member benefit.

Laurie said that AL Live is possible only because of technology and Dan Freeman’s connections at Northwestern University. It would be really expensive to produce, so advertising revenue is an important factor. She said it’s also a nice bonus for people/members who complain about costs of everything—like webinars. David suggested making the live broadcast open to members and then opening the archive a week later to everyone else (similar to AL Direct). He also suggested including a membership pitch at the end of each episode. Committee members seemed to think this was a good idea.

Marc then asked if there had been any comments or questions about Will Manley’s retirement as a columnist for the magazine. Laurie said there had been a few questions which she addressed personally. She then discussed the magazine’s newest feature, The Bookend, which replaced Manley’s column on the back page.

There was also discussion on the inspiration for The Bookend. Phil said The Bookend is a chance to spotlight members and the things librarians are doing. Laurie added that it gave the magazine an opportunity to highlight people in small libraries.

5. American Libraries Direct—George Eberhart
This agenda item was tabled for the committee’s next meeting (virtual) because George was unable to attend.

6. Updates on Committee Members’ Actions in Support of *American Libraries*

David shared that he and his wife have vanity plates for their cars related to libraries/information, and suggested a social media/Pinterest campaign of capturing library-related vanity plates.

Sandra encouraged committee members to review the AL website before the next committee meeting to come back with feedback as the redesign unfolds.

7. ALA Council Liaison—Andrew Pace

Andrew was not in attendance.

8. Hot Topics We’re Seeing in Libraries (Discussion)

Some of the ideas discussed included data-driven decision-making, one-person libraries, customer service in the library, and vanity plates.

9. Motion to approve minutes of AL Advisory Board committee meeting from ALA Annual Midwinter in Philadelphia. Motion accepted. Sandra gave Lee a rundown of how committee business happens outside of conference. The next issue of AL (July/August) is online-only, and the next meeting will be set in mid-September, where George might speak about AL Direct and would also be an opportunity for website review.

There was discussion on whether web-conferencing was the best method (Blackboard versus teleconferencing).

The committee also acknowledged Susan, David, and Bridget for their service since their terms were ending.

10. The meeting adjourned at 2:34 p.m.