

**NOTE: This is the text of a blog post written by Stewart Varner and published on January 4, 2016 explaining the circumstances surrounding the writing, editing and publishing of the article for *American Libraries Magazine*.**

\*\*\*\*\*

If you are a member of ALA and receive *American Libraries*, you may have noticed an article we wrote in the most recent issue (Jan/Feb 2016) titled Special Report: Digital Humanities in Libraries. Unfortunately, because the article was edited after we thought we had turned in the final version, we aren't nearly as happy to share it with you as we had hoped to be.

The edits in question were not harmless. They were quotes added to the body of the article from a representative from Gale Cengage about steps they are taking to develop commercial products which they believe will be useful for digital humanists.

We probably do not need to spell out why we are disappointed by this but, just for the record, we have two major problems:

- First, these were not superficial changes and the editors at *American Libraries* should have spoken to us before publishing them.
- Second, and more substantially, we feel it is grossly inappropriate for a magazine that is supposed to represent libraries and librarians to insinuate a vendor's perspective directly into an article without the authors' knowledge or permission. This is especially true when the vendor has a very obvious financial motive for being part of the conversation.

Let us state for the record that we did not speak to anyone at Gale Cengage about this article; we did not see those quotes prior to publication and would not have included them in our article if we had.

Importantly, the fact that Gale Cengage is involved in this is not totally random or even necessarily nefarious. Our problem is not with them as a company but with the way *American Libraries* is handling their involvement.

When *American Libraries* approached us about the article, they said "We are also conducting a survey with Gale/Cengage, so that data would be incorporated as well." This was reiterated in the official scope document for the article which stated "Writers

should also include the results of the Gale and *American Libraries* survey of faculty and librarians.” The editor at American Libraries gave us access to data from that survey and we did in fact cite some of that data in our article.

There is something else that happened that is relevant here. Throughout the writing process, the editor at American Libraries kept mentioning that they were going to give us a contact at Gale Cengage in case we had questions. On October 27th (nearly a month after we accepted the assignment and a little more than a week before it was due), the editor gave us contact information for a “Senior Manager of Public and Media Relations” at Gale. We didn’t really see how someone in that role would have much to add to our story and, because we were almost finished anyway, we decided not to bother contacting them. We turned in the first draft on November 9. For the next week, went back and forth with some minor edits and signed off on what we thought was the final version on November 16.

We became aware of the troublesome edits when we received our hard copies in mail shortly before New Year’s. Hoping that it was a harmless misunderstanding or oversight, we contacted American Libraries and asked that they take the following steps:

1. Edit the online version of the article to remove the quotes from Gale Cengage.
2. Run a correction/retraction in the March/April issue.
3. Waive their 90 day exclusive licence so that we could place our version of the article in an Open Access repository and make it available immediately.

We also mentioned that we would be writing an account of what happened for Stewart’s blog to try to clear up any confusion. We said that we would really like to end that post with a note stating that American Libraries apologizes for the misunderstanding and is working to make things right.

Unfortunately, that’s not how this post will end. This is, in part, what we received from American Libraries in response to our concerns:

“Gale is our partner in this digital humanities project. They conducted the surveys and provided the data you wrote about in the article. Having a response from them in the article was a requirement of the assignment.\* I included them in the sources\*\* in the original scope document, and I did ask you at least twice in follow-up emails (10/27 and 11/4) to call their marketing contact [name withheld] for information. You did not express any opposition to doing this, and she said she had not heard from you. Because we

were on such a tight deadline with this issue, and you had not reached out to Gale, I called them and added the quotes.”

\* We cannot find where “a response” from Gale is a requirement. They did want us to cite the survey (which we did) but there is nothing in the scope document about getting a response.

\*\* There was a list of *suggested* sources. We did not cite any of them.

They totally ignored the request for a correction. They offered to take the quotes out of the online version and add them as “pull quotes” in the sidebar but noted that “this treatment will make them more prominent on the page, even if they are no longer part of the article.” Finally, they also offered to reduce their exclusive licence from 90 days to 30 days.

We find every part of this story upsetting. As librarians, we need an organization like ALA and a publication like American Libraries to help us organize our concerns and share our experiences. This whole experience has made us question who they are really looking out for. We feel used; like our article was turned into a vehicle for a commercial message and that we were deceived into signing off on it. We are also personally and professionally embarrassed that thousands of readers will see the article but never find this blog post. What will they think of our ethics? Whose side will they think we are on?

We are also upset because we actually did kinda like the original article. We thought we did a pretty good job of covering a complicated topic and we were happy to have pulled together some solid advice from some great librarians. We were looking forward to sharing it with folks but now we’ll just wait another 30 days and start circulating the link to the original version. I hope you’ll read and share that one. But do us all a favor and just ignore the one in American Libraries.