

Martha Wells Hammond:

Thank you for attending our podcast. My name is Martha Wells Hammond. We are here at the PATINS Tech Expo at The Fountains in Carmel, Indiana. Our featured guest today is Deb Lorenz. She will be speaking with Bev Lau who is our Technical Assistant and Ordering Specialist at the ICAM. Deb currently is a DRM and the Assistive Technology Specialist for Hamilton Southeastern Schools. As a DRM you have been one of the top providers of the digital textbooks through the ICAM web ordering system since the system was implemented two years ago having placed orders for more than 130 digital textbooks, and like our other DRMs you have done this while performing your other functions in the Indiana Education system, as well. We thank you for that.

Deb Lorenz:

It has been my pleasure.

Martha Wells Hammond:

Could you please tell our listeners about your other roles?

Deb Lorenz:

Well, I worked for the Hamilton Boone Madison Special Services Cooperative before I went to Hamilton Southeastern Schools. I have been the Assistive Technology Specialist for going on 26 years now in those two different roles, but for Hamilton Southeastern Schools I am the Assistive Technology Specialist. I do all of the AT evaluations. I do a lot of the support for software, for hardware, for every disability including orthopedic disabilities, hearing, and vision disabilities. I work with our specialists there, then with all of our life skills, FIATS classrooms, our functional academic program and our resource rooms. We have several different initiatives for those different classrooms that we are of course working on. Then, adding the Digital Rights Manager was quite, at first it was quite taxing. (Laughter)

Martha Wells Hammond:

Well, you have taken it on and you have done a great job. We really appreciate the work that you have done. It is a remarkable career really that you are in.

Deb Lorenz:

It is. I have loved every minute of it.

Martha Wells Hammond:

At this point, I am going to ask Bev to step in because she has a few questions. I know that you and Bev spend a lot of time together on the telephone and that is why I asked her if she would like to speak with you today.

Bev Lau:

We are really thrilled that you are here with us today Deb.

Deb Lorenz:

Thank you.

Bev Lau:

We appreciate you taking time out from your own interest in the Tech Expo to do this for us and to do this for the rest of our Digital Rights Managers. I am just wondering, not only does this field that you are in require technical skills, but it requires a lot of heart, a lot of compassion and a lot of dedication. What initially drew you to this field?

Deb Lorenz:

Well, I was a special educator in my training. My first classroom had 13 students in it, grades one through five. Out of those 13 students 12 of them needed some sort of communication device. So as a first year teacher I was thrown boom right smack in the middle of quickly learning about any kind of adaptive device possible. Because you know I love technology which is good because I deal with it all the time. It was just a fun challenge. I loved every minute of it. The kids were great and just finding the right things that fit those kids with their needs at that time because that was 28 years ago you know, there wasn't as much technology as there is now. So that is really how I got started in it.

Bev Lau:

That is amazing. You took an event that would have ended some people's career and made it the beginning of a very special career.

Deb Lorenz:

Yes, well when my kids...when it came time for Thanksgiving break and I told them that I was going up to see some friends they started crying. I said what is wrong and they said you will never come back. You are the eighth or ninth teacher we have had. I was like-- oh my goodness-- so yes you are right, it was very stressful for a lot of other people.

Bev Lau:

Wow.

Deb Lorenz:

But I like a good challenge.

Bev Lau:

You must. (Laughter) Having been in this area of education for so long you have seen a lot of changes.

Deb Lorenz:

Definitely.

Bev Lau:

How did those early students access the curriculum when they didn't have all of the special things that we have today? What steps did they have to go through and what hoops did you have to jump through to get those things for them?

Deb Lorenz:

Well, I will tell you as you all know, anybody in teaching, there is never enough time in the day. Especially back then I would have to either record stories myself, which of course as a first year teacher you think you have to do everything yourself; and then all of the sudden when you find yourself sick and unable to perform because [you've been] trying to keep up with *everything*. I started creating relationships with the high schools in the area. I started creating relationships with like child development classes. Just different areas of [exploring] how can I get support with other people who need to learn at least a portion of why these needs are occurring. So you know it certainly wasn't...this stuff was not available. I had to make do with other people helping me to come up with ways to create the stuff that is now available for us to order. So yes, I have done a lot of scanning of texts, which if you have ever done that it is the most incredibly time consuming inefficient process. (Laughter)

Bev Lau:

Yes. Yes. So you learned very early in your career how important networking is.

Deb Lorenz:

Yes. Yes. Learning how to build relationships and rely on other people and you know, find those people who are going to help support what you want to do with kids who have such great needs.

Bev Lau:

Wonderful. Wonderful. That hasn't changed yet either has it?

Deb Lorenz:

No it hasn't because there is always something else.

Bev Lau:

You still learn a lot from other people. When those digital textbooks began to become available what kind of a change did that make for you and for your students?

Deb Lorenz:

Well, for me it was another thing to add to my schedule which at first, of course, is you have to find that balance again. You have to find when you can order, how you can get it and understand the parameters of the new law*; and how that affects everything. In terms of when you actually give that text to a kid and they can use technology to access that textbook. I mean it just opens up an incredible world for them. I have not had any of the textbooks that I have downloaded [and} given to a student where they just have not been "oh this makes it so much easier." Either they understand it or they can get to it. They can turn their own pages. They can have it read, whereas before they had to have somebody

sitting right next to them reading. That in and of itself just raises their level of confidence and they begin to understand that [think] “hey, there is a way for me to be independent.” That is incredible for them.

Bev Lau:

Yes, independence is very important for all students...

Deb Lorenz:

...oh yes...

Bev Lau:

...but especially students who need assistive technology I think.

Deb Lorenz:

Yes.

Bev Lau:

How about your students? We may have asked you how many you serve, but I am not sure we did. How many students do you serve and what are their grade levels and their ability levels? What type of children do you work with?

Deb Lorenz:

Well, we work with 3-year-olds through 22-year-olds so we have preschool classes, kindergarten all the way up through seniors, as well as *super* seniors because Indiana serves all the way through their 22nd year.

Bev Lau:

So “children” was not the right term; *student* is though, yes?

Deb Lorenz:

Yes, sometimes I call them kids and I used to have a boss who told me, “They are not goats, Deb.” (Laughter) You know every so often it slips and I say it. However, we have a great number of age groups. We also serve every possible disability and of course disabilities are just a multiple varied amount of all the other things that are out there. We just choose to put them in a disability group so that we can provide services for them. We provide services for all of those different areas. As far as kids...students. (Laughter)

Bev Lau:

As the mother of a special education adult...

Deb Lorenz:

...Yes...

Bev Lau:

...we still say "kids" sometimes. (Laughter)

Deb Lorenz:

It is a slip sometimes. We have a student body of over 10,000 students; so knowing that the one to two percent of that 10,000 I would say, you know, it is probably pretty close to 1500 students that I serve off and on. Now, obviously they are not all in my caseload at the same time. However, I can kind of tell you that I usually order like, at the beginning of school, I will order for anywhere from 15 to 25 kids as a DRM. Throughout the year as we get move-ins, etcetera, it may be another student or two every other month or every month. It kind of depends because we do have a lot of move-ins, being right on the outskirts of Indianapolis. On top of that, I know that I do about 60 to 65 AT evaluations a year. So those students are on my caseload for that year and of course doing some follow-up the following years. You just keep adding those 65 kids every year and it gets pretty large.

Bev Lau:

That is making a change in a lot of lives.

Deb Lorenz:

That is true and I love that, definitely.

Bev Lau:

I've noticed, as a person who deals with orders, I see your orders first-hand and I notice that you order a lot of ePub formats. Does that mean that a lot of your students now have access to an iPad or a similar device?

Deb Lorenz:

Yes, we order ePubs because our district is definitely going to that one-to-one iPad model. We are kind of in the process of it. However, in choosing to go that direction it sort of has pushed a little bit more of the iPad in some of our assistive technology areas because you know I can provide an iPad for a little bit less than even I can provide an AlphaSmart.

Bev Lau:

Oh yes.

Deb Lorenz:

It does so much more. In knowing that our district was going in that direction, yes you are right, we do a lot of ordering of ePubs because of the iPad movement that our district is taking.

Bev Lau:

The iPads are small. They are portable. They are cool.

Deb Lorenz:

They have the cool factor which is way different than assistive technology in the past, because there were kids who would say, you know, "I don't want to carry that. That is too big." Or "They are going to make fun of me. I don't want to be seen with that." And you know what most kids are like: "Give me that iPad."

Bev Lau:

Yes. Yes.

Deb Lorenz:

"Let me have this big grin on my face while my friends don't yet have theirs."

Bev Lau:

Yes. (Laughter)

Deb Lorenz:

You know. (Laughter)

Bev Lau:

That is very true. That is nice to bring a level of excitement to their educational experience.

Deb Lorenz:

Oh my gosh because usually in special education we are so far behind and it is so cool to be kind of leading the way in that and having our students...in fact, I have given a talk to a couple of our kids who, you know, the teachers and the parents said "Oh my son won't, my son won't" (use the device) and I said, "You know, let's do the evaluation. Let's see what happens" and in fact, I said "You know you are going to be one of our pioneers in this area because over the next two years all of your buddies are going to have this in their hands, and they are going to look at you and say 'Wow! You have had that for a couple of years; can you show me?' Man, his face just brightened, and he goes "Oh, that is cool."

Bev Lau:

Yes. Yes

Deb Lorenz:

You know for our special education kids who sometimes just lag behind and feel so incompetent and therefore, have that lack of confidence they are just like "Oh yes, I will do that. I will do that." That is a whole huge, different ballgame.

Bev Lau:

Yes it is. It is amazing how fast some special needs kids adjust to the technology. We have a handicapped child at home and we recently bought her a cell phone. It is amazing to see her use it.

Deb Lorenz:

It is.

Bev Lau:

A child who can't read and write can find her way through the menu. She knows what letter her favorite friend's name starts with and she can dial. It is amazing.

Deb Lorenz:

It is amazing. You know we have all of these digital natives including all of our special education kids.

Bev Lau:

Yes.

Deb Lorenz:

I mean they are truly digital natives. Man, as adults we have some catch-up to do so that we can truly lead this generation on into the future that they need for themselves and their kids, you know.

Bev Lau:

Yes, that is our challenge to get there ahead of them so that we can show them how.

Deb Lorenz:

Yes, we don't run as fast as we use to.

Bev Lau:

No we don't. (Laughter)

Deb Lorenz:

It is sometimes a little difficult. (Laughter)

Bev Lau:

I noticed that some of your orders are also for NIMAS files which is a format that works on a PC primarily, with Read:OutLoud. So that is telling me some of your students are still working with PCs and is that still working well for them?

Deb Lorenz:

Yes it is. Of course they are saying "Okay, when we get our iPads, what does that mean for us?" So they are looking forward to, you know as we do, this move (to iPads), but the Read:OutLoud works great. We can install it at home on their home computer, in the classroom and they have access to that textbook whether they are at home or school even though they do not have an iPad. That is nice.

Bev Lau:

That is true. Very good. There is a third type of file that I noticed that you have used in your orders and that is Classic Audio formats for Learning Ally. We are just curious as to how that works for your students. I know the human voice recordings are so very nice so how has that worked for your students?

Deb Lorenz:

Well you know one of the things that some students do complain about is that computerized robotic voice. They just don't deal with it as well. Not every kid, but you know some students are just like, "I don't quite understand as well," when they are reading with that kind of voice, especially this year since we have added the Learning Ally app. Just being able to have that true continuity of being able to get the files and have them work on the iPads or even with the ReadHear software, it gives us a whole different way of providing that same textbook in a way that works for the comprehension of those students who don't like that computerized voice.

Bev Lau:

Yes, that is the beauty of the Learning Ally files, the real human voice.

Deb Lorenz:

Exactly.

Bev Lau:

I don't think any of the files that you had ordered have been available in this format, but at this point Learning Ally now has a human voice recording with *text* available on the screen and *graphics* available on the screen. Now they have a huge inventory of books in their repository and it is not going to be a fast process for them to change them over. Amelia Bedelia is one book that I have downloaded as a test product that has the graphics, highlights the text, has the human voice recording, and I would imagine that your students will be delighted with that when more of that is available.

Deb Lorenz:

That is going to be another incredible step. Definitely.

Bev Lau:

Yes. Good. I am glad to see the technology and the human touch coming together like that.

Deb Lorenz:

Definitely. Because computers are wonderful. And 'back in the day' we always wondered what kind of robots would be taking over things. However, as I have told my students who use like Dragon or Siri on their iPads, you have to remember that you are simply talking to a computer or a robot. You are not talking to a human being who has the ability to get that information in their heads and then process it.

You have to slow down. The same is true when a computer is reading to us. Sometimes it is not exactly the way we want to hear it.

Bev Lau:

Yes.

Deb Lorenz:

Yes. I am excited about all the ways that technology is changing for our students.

Bev Lau:

We are too. We see it coming down the pike and we are all just so excited about it.

One other thing that I wanted to talk about is, that we talked on the phone one time about, is whether you could order multiple formats of the same file. I know with like with the Braille and the large print people are limited to select a format because those processes are very, very expensive. The books are expensive to create and they are fairly fragile, but with the digital files you are free to order as many formats as you want. So if you have a student who is new to the system and doesn't really know; "Am I going to want a NIMAS file, am I going to want an EPUB, would I work better with a PDF, is there even an HTML available?" You can order any and all of those for the same student. Is that going to be a benefit for you?

Deb Lorenz:

Well I will tell you, I called you on that specific student because I was unsure. When you complete the NIMAS paperwork it says chose a format and so in just the way that it is worded I was thinking "Oh dear! I think I have chosen the wrong format for this student. I don't know whether I can order a different one..." So you had clarified that for me. So I am telling all DRMs out there if you find out that you have ordered the wrong one, it is awesome to be able to order another format, give it a try because, yes, we get it in and we start using with our student, and oh man it is just not working the way we wanted it to. We have other options that we can still go for: that is incredible for our students, as well as, you know the staff who are trying to support them in their classrooms.

Bev Lau:

Good. We appreciate you getting the word out and we are trying to get more education out on that too because I think other people had the same question.

Deb Lorenz:

Well you know some of us are rule followers, especially us first born. (Laughter) Sometimes you have to explain to us that the walls are not quite as small as we thought they were. (Laughter)

Bev Lau:

Well good. We will do that whenever we can. (Laughter)

On a scale of one to ten, as a DRM, how would you rate using digital textbooks, with ten being the best and one being not good? Where do you think it falls?

Deb Lorenz:

Well, for students, definitely a ten. They have needed them for so many years and the access has just not been there. As a DRM, knowing what it does for my students, it is definitely a ten. As a DRM, learning the system and that kind of thing, I think it has built its way up. I mean it is a learning process.

Bev Lau:

Yes.

Deb Lorenz:

We learn by our mistakes and the things that we have had to order and oops, had to order again... or you know, downloaded and tried to convert and it didn't quite work. Over the last two years, let's put it this way: not that I ever didn't want to talk to you, but at first it was just at that point, a little bit of confusion and a little bit of frustrating and time consuming. But it is no longer there. You know we have built a relationship, but also the process has definitely become much smoother and it is very convenient. You guys are just so easy to work with.

Bev Lau:

Well, good. Thank you. We feel the same way about you.

Deb Lorenz:

Thank you.

Bev Lau:

We are also excited that the process is becoming easier. This is our second anniversary of the new system that we installed for the ICAM web ordering system and it is so much more intuitive than the one before.

Deb Lorenz:

Yes it is.

Bev Lau:

You can see very clearly what we have and you have a chance, if we don't have it, to put in a Special Request and have a lot of it taken care of automatically. In most cases if you order a file and it is in our repository, you are going to have it within the hour.

Deb Lorenz:

That is very true and with the new system it has made it so much easier. You have to learn a few tricks. Instead of only going by the ISBN, put a couple words in or the author's name. Don't give up and just put one ISBN in and say oh it is not there. In the old system I just felt like "Okay they have nothing I need," because nothing pops up.

Bev Lau:

Yes. Yes.

Deb Lorenz:

So yes, you are right. Don't give up if you have put something in and you haven't found something.

Bev Lau:

Yes.

Deb Lorenz:

It is way easier to find things and you just have to be a little perseverant in your seeking.

Bev Lau:

Yes. Yes and never be opposed to placing a special order because if you can't find it we will do everything we can to find it. If it is not from a source that we can get for you directly we will at least tell you who you can go to, to get it.

Deb Lorenz:

That is a really good point because at first there were times when you would say "Well, we don't have it, it is not available." I am like, oh what does that mean, you know. It was wonderful for you to just give me a call and say "Hey Deb, let's talk about this book that you are needing," and I appreciated so much for you kind of doing some of the leg work when I am running between buildings doing all the other parts of my job. You said "Well, here is what you need to do and here is a website where you can complete a form," and I was like, oh wow, what a relief.

Bev Lau:

Yes.

Deb Lorenz:

That was incredible.

Bev Lau:

Well and part of what has made that possible for us is that so much of the system is automated now that we have time to go out there and look for things that we didn't have time to do before. It has given us the freedom to help better.

Deb Lorenz:

Well, I certainly appreciate it and I am sure if any of the other DRMs have kind of run into that situation, please ask for your help, for the ICAM's help in that because you guys have been wonderful in doing that for me.

Bev Lau:

Well good. That is what we are there for. We want to come to work and do that every day. Learning curves are there with every technology and you have been through the change from the old system to the new system. How does the training work for you? Have you been able to find the training that you need and when you needed? Sounds like you are receiving the support you need, but has the training been adequate? It is very short because the system is now so much more intuitive.

Deb Lorenz:

Yes. That is true, but I really think just knowing that I can call you guys and say "Okay now, what I saw was this, and this was the way I took it, is that correct or not?" And having you explain it a little more or saying "Hey Deb, log on to this and let's look at it together." So please don't be afraid to ask questions if you are a DRM.

Bev Lau:

Yes. Very good. Very good. Probably my final question here; we have our little stories about the Star Fish here. I think everybody in this area of education is familiar with the Star Fish stories where you save people one at a time, you know.

Deb Lorenz:

Right.

Bev Lau:

Do you have any Star Fish stories? We would love to hear them.

Deb Lorenz:

Oh gosh. I have several Star Fish stories, but I think that there are two or three of them that were kind of the same way. They were elementary kids who were just struggling with the reading. Social studies and science were their absolute hated subjects because they knew they couldn't read. They were getting to the age where having somebody sitting next to them all the time was just not looked highly upon by their peers. So they were getting really pretty bad attitudes about having that support, although they needed it. They were three kids from totally different elementary schools, but they all three responded the same way. When I opened that textbook and said "Now *here* is where your textbook is," and they were like "Right here on this...and it reads to me too?" And they looked at the instructional assistant as I was doing the training and they go "Ha I don't need you right next to me anymore." (Laughter) The instructional assistant gave them a thumbs up and said "That is okay with me."

Bev Lau:

Awesome.

Deb Lorenz:

All three of them just kind of responded in that same way with that light in their eyes again and a smile on their face. The resource teacher of one of them said "You know, I have not seen since that child

walked into our building, his eyes light up like that and a smile on his face.” It was exciting for everybody who was sitting at the table.

Bev Lau:

That is amazing.

Deb Lorenz:

It is.

Bev Lau:

That is just amazing. Well I tell you what I know: the Tech Expo is out there waiting for you. We so appreciate you taking time away from it to be with us. Just want to let you know you have been a wonderful partner with the ICAM in providing better learning experiences for our children. We want to commend you for your dedication and your excellent work in the field.

Deb Lorenz:

Thank you.

Bev Lau:

Thank you for the difference you have made for these students.

Deb Lorenz:

Well, I am so glad to know that you guys are out there to help us and to partner with us. We could not do it without you, as well. That is for sure and our students thank you.

Bev Lau:

Thank you. It has been a pleasure Deb.

Deb Lorenz:

Thank you. My pleasure too.