Vendor-Library Relations

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In keeping with the technological emphasis in this issue of ATG, we have contacted librarians and vendors to find out what technological trends are affecting relations as requirements to vendors for data transmission, demands for software/hardware compatibility, and specialized reports are increasing. The vendor cannot meet the unique demands of each customer, but at the same time, it is to the vendor's advantage to reduce costs through technical processing systems. Many libraries and vendors are now in their second or third generation of systems and vendors are now beginning to work more closely with their customers in programming designs to enhance customer products.

Allan Graham, Manager of Technical Services Marketing at Blackwell North America sees a trend toward developing acquisitions technical products as a means of enhancing and possibly increasing actual book sales. Their New Title Online Service and MARC with Books products are providing efficient technical processing of approval plans. NTOS offers customers direct access to order and claiming information. Specialized management reports continue to be of interest to their customers.

Wholesalers have created vast title databases to provide for faster order turnaround. Gary Shirk of Yankee Book Peddler reports that they experience a 89% "hit rate" for new book orders; thus, eliminating the need to input new order data and provide for faster order verification. New developments between libraries and vendors are producing capabilities for downloading through PC transfer of bibliographic records, status reports, and billing between customers and suppliers. Tape-loading for serial renewals and approval receipts now provides faster library processing for what have previously been very time-consuming transactions. A major problem for the vendor is the wide variety and number of library automated systems. Library customers are at different stages in their ability to interact with vendors, thus making it difficult for the vendor to interface systems. Amy Miller of Yankee Book Peddler has expressed her concern about the impact this has on wholesalers. She stresses that library customers need to carefully assess their needs for special products and demonstrate a willingness to compromise due to the high cost of vendor value added services. She is concerned that added services will effect advocacy for industry standards and emphasizes the need for transaction standards as a preliminary step toward open access to wholesaler systems.

Collection building activities have been enhanced through consortium resource sharing projects and products such as the OCLC-Amigos Collection Analysis CD-Rom. Book Quest/Serial Quest (Faxon) are efficient computer matching between out of print dealers and libraries. The library community is by far more "networked" than the commercial marketplace in the United States. Only a minority of publishers have technical systems which provide them with the ability to interact with vendors. U.S. vendors have observed that PUBNET provides only limited capabilities compared to automated interfaces between European booksellers and publishers. As booksellers are moving toward technical compatibility with library clients, it has become more apparent to them that there is an increasing need for technical innovations on the part of publishers.

Deana Astle of Clemson University emphasizes the usefulness of pricing and management reports. There is an increasing demand for data about books and serials. Tracking industry trends, growth and sales, and pricing data has become invaluable to acquisitions and collections managers.

The new standards for X12 data transmission (see Chaos, this issue, page 39) will allow for advanced technical processing of orders, claims, and invoicing. We have observed a definite movement toward technical compatibility between vendors and libraries, which, in turn, is providing for an entirely new aspect in business relations.

We encourage vendors and librarians to send us your ideas or recent developments for acquisitions interfaces to share with other Against the Grain readers.