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Group Therapy / Book Costs

Rosann Bazirjian
Syracuse University

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Group Therapy

Column Editor, Rosann Bazirjian (Syracuse University)
Hey y'all out there! Do you have any gripes or what?
So... everything perfect? If so, tell us about it. Try LIBRVB@SUVM.bitnet or FAX (315) 443-9510.

You will remember in the last issue of ATG (September, v.5#4), there was a gripe submitted by Marlene Barnola (College of Charleston) about prices which are not listed in Books in Print. We have received the following response from Baker & Taylor —

VENDOR RESPONSE to Gripe Submitted by Marlene Barnola

Submitted by Wendell Lotz, Vice President, Product Development, Baker & Taylor Books

The B&T Link family of products offers a number of solutions to the dilemma of not knowing a price before placing an order. The Title Source, a CD-ROM database of over 1.5 million titles, contains pricing data up-to-the-day prior to the date each monthly disc is mastered. Because the database is rived from Baker & Taylor's business file, it reflects the price we last paid to the publisher. Since publishers will always invoice with their latest price, prices on The Title Source reflect the latest prices available from the publisher and it is not necessary to count on the cooperation required in EDI transfer procedures.

Baker & Taylor purchases in advance of publication over 60,000 titles annually, including titles for its Approval Program. For these titles, prices are obtained before the purchase order is placed and are immediately added to the database. If for any reason we cannot locate a price, we will provide an estimated price based upon our previous experience with the publisher, binding, and subject area.

For textbook and net price publishers Baker & Taylor works with the publisher to determine a suggested list price. Similar to many retail items in other industries, although the reseller is free to sell at a price of its choosing, the manufacturer has a list price in mind when determining the net price.

Finally, if prices updated monthly are not satisfactory, B&T Link, Module 1 (ordering software) includes an Inquiry Only function allowing a library to query the Baker & Taylor database via an 800 phone line and receive back the latest price on our database within five minutes.

And here is our new gripe for this issue —

GRIPE:

Submitted by Dottie Marcinko, Head, Acquisitions, Auburn University

My gripe is about the cost of books.

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While we can’t complain as vigorously about monographs as we have about se-
rials, it’s still a problem. The increase in
the cost of books in the last ten or twelve
years has far outstripped inflation. I don’t
want a scholarly answer or a three-page
response, but does the fact that the pub-
lishing industry has not moved offshore,
as have our basic manufacturing indus-
tries, account for the difference in the
rate of increased cost of books compared
to the other items I purchase on a regular
basis? Toasters are cheaper than ever
but the basic paperback book is now six
or seven dollars.

---

VENDOR RESPONSE:

Submitted by John Smith, President,
Total Information

Here at Total Information we’ve re-
cently tried to understand the same phe-
nomena. Over the years we’ve always
measured our productivity by the stan-
dard of gross sales per employee. This
number has gone up over the years quite
impressively. However when we try to
measure the actual units sold per em-
ployee there is a much smaller advance
in improvement. Our costs of delivering
the average book to a customer have
risen along with the price of the average
book.

I believe the reasons are the same for
the price increase of books and lack of
achievement in unit productivity in the
jobbing industry. Books, which quickly
go out of date or out of print, are intel-
lectual products produced in very small
quantities by thousands of publishers,
ordered one at a time by customers.

Except in the case of gigantic bestsellers (selling over 1,000,000 cop-
ies) there is little economy of scale available
to the publisher. Almost all the cost
of producing a book is intellectual
(authoring, editing, design, marketing,
advertising, sales) or distribution (ship-
ning, wholesale markup, retail markup).
I am sure that the average library spends
far more money processing the average
book (from selection to shelving) today
than it did in the past. (Try dividing the
budget of the Technical Services depart-
ment by the number of books processed
for your own cost.)

Of course if any consumer believes a
toaster is too expensive he has the right
to buy a competing toaster that is priced
more to his liking. If, however, a con-
sumer believes a book is overpriced, he
has the choice not to buy it, and go with-
out.

These twin engines of high intangible
input and monopoly pricing guarantee
that books will continue to outpace the
consumer price index.

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PUBLISHER RESPONSE:

Submitted by Donald O’Connor, Lib-
ary Sales and Promotions Manager,
Routledge, Chapman, Hall

Read any good Toasters lately?
There may be a small savings in hav-
ing books typeset offshore, but that ac-
counts for a very small portion of the
costs involved in producing books. Rents,
salaries, promotion and advertising, roy-
alties and either profit or surplus, are all
taken into account when a book is priced.
Publishing is labor intensive, involving
many people editing and checking copy,
a process that is not easily automated, as
you know if you have used a spell-
checker on your word processor. A slight
decline in the cost of manufacturing
would not have a drastic effect on the list
price, if rents and salaries and advertis-
ing costs are increasing.

Probably the greatest single factor that
influences the higher cost of books to
libraries are declining print runs of mono-
graphs. Routledge currently prints about
one-third fewer monographs on an ini-
tial print run than we did, say, three or
four years ago. But again, all the fixed
costs are apportioned equally to a smaller
number of books, thereby increasing the
cost of each book. When we do see po-
tential in other markets for sales, we
print more books and are able to price
downwards.

Libraries have always been our big-
gest market, and we are keenly aware of
the pricing issues. Our pricing on do-
meric books are average and prices on
books that we import from our London
office have actually decreased by almost
15% in the past year in response to li-
brarians’ concerns about prices.

We know all publishers want to keep
prices within the reach of their custom-
ers and new technologies may help bring
prices down. We are looking at ways to
make short runs of monographs more
 economical and pass the savings on to
libraries.

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The Politics and Problems
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Jean Madscn, Fontbonne College,
St. Louis, Missouri
Palmer Press • Nov. 1993 • 200pp
0-75070-206-0 CL $69

Death Anxiety Handbook
Edited by Robert Neimeyer, Ph.D.,
Memphis State University
Taylor & Francis • Oct. 1993 • 312pp
1-56032-038-9 CL $54.50

Relativity in Our Time
Mendel Sachs, Department of Physics
and Astronomy, State University
of New York at Buffalo
Taylor & Francis • Oct. 1993 • 165pp
0-7484-0117-2 CL $49.50
0-7484-0118-0 PB $19.95

Ergonomics for Beginners
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J. Dul, TNO Institute of Preventive
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