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## A Curmudgeonly View of The Year in Acquisition

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# A Curmudgeonly View of The Year in Acquisitions

by Heather Miller (University at Albany, State University of New York)

Years seem to assume characters of their own which become most apparent as they come to a close and one begins to reflect on them. Really big years such as The Year Without a Summer or The Year of the October Blizzard remain in memory for a long time. Some years are so horrendously memorable that their dates alone are sufficient to call to mind twelve months of shared experience — 1865, 1918, 1929. Acquisitions departments have their own memories of years. There was the year of The Last Minute Budget Crisis, The Year of Staff Reductions, the Year x was hired, The Year y Went Out of Business, The Year the Approval Plan Was Moved to Another Vendor — the list could go on for pages.

What characterizes this year, 1996, in acquisitions? One could make a case for this being the year of More. It seems that a number of trends in the works for some time, and some of them in response to the demands of librarians, have hit a crescendo this year. There is a radio ad in our area touting the value of volunteer service that ends with this observation: "Thanks for all you've done. Just think what more you could do." Well, just think what "more" has done for acquisitions during the past year.

More books. This library acquired over 3,000 more books in the fiscal year ending June 30, 1996 than it did in the previous year. This wasn't because Collection Development just decided to go after books. More books were published. And, I am assured by an irrefutable source, on a calendar year comparison, that more books were published, at least in North America, in 1996 than in 1995.

More periodicals are arriving with electronic accompaniments that require decisions, policies, and procedures.

More electronic services: Doesn't it seem that every mail delivery brings news of another, wonderful, you-just-gotta-have-this electronic wonder thought up by the folks that you thought you were already overpaying? Every one of the fifteen simulation presentations listed in the program for the 1996 Charleston Conference dealt with something electronic that has come into existence or been upgraded recently — The American Insti-

tute of Physics Online Journal Service; B&T Link; Brodart's Title Information Preview Service online; EBSCOhost electronic databases; Elsevier Science's twenty-eight electronic products; GALILEO, the Georgia state-wide electronic library; the Institute of Physics with thirty-one electronic journals and other online services; OCLC's FirstSearch; OhioLink, Ohio's higher education library and information network; OVID's fulltext with graphics databases; Readmore Academic/Blackwell's Periodicals electronic journals project; Rowecom's Web-based subscription service; SwetsNet, ordering and access point for electronic serials subscriptions; UnCover's CARLweb browser; and Yankee Book Peddler's GOBI (Global Online Bibliographic Information Service). Somehow MoreNet (the Missouri Research and Education Network) got in there, too, without being listed, and there may have been others as well! Just reading the list causes exhaustion to set in! And this is not all there is — this is just a small group who chose to do a simulation at the conference!

Which brings to mind one of the most recent electronic bonanzas to reach us in 1996: JSTOR. This invention of an economist permits libraries to spend more (\$30,000 plus) of their meager monies on electronic backfiles of journals they already own in other formats.

To cut short this litany of electronic doodads and gewgaws (before it absorbs the entire issue), here is my nomination for the best new electronic service of 1996: Index Morganagus. This is the latest brainchild of the ever effervescent Eric Lease Morgan. It is wonderful because it does something that libraries need and it is free. That is really more bang for your buck! Eric's creation can be found on the web at — <<http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/~morgan/morganagus>>.

More and more services offered along with books from traditional book suppliers, no doubt afraid of being left behind in the dust or out in the cold, are offering. How about full cataloging, spine labels, security strips, reinforced bindings, rebinding of paperbacks, plastic protective covers, barcodes — you name it. If a library can do it to a book, so can a bookseller

and more and more are getting into the act.

More Internet sites: have you counted your bookmarks lately? Something exponential is going on on the Web and some of it is useful to libraries. Internet librarians are real and they are trying to sort it all out. Some of it also comes with a price tag and a license agreement which means more fun for the acquisitions folks.

More demands from patrons: they love this electronic wonderland and they want it all, right now, and can't understand why there are fiscal or technological impediments. Nor do they want to give up books and periodicals. They want them, too, and sometimes they even ask for such new/old services as having the page numbers appear on the spines of bound journals.

More reorganization: the buzzwords are still with us: working smarter, choosing what not to do, retraining, cross training, teams.

More outsourcing: paying someone else to do what we used to do based on promises. Companies that used to sell books now compete energetically to win contracts to provide books ready for library shelves. A recent contract raised more than a few eyebrows and added another library system to the fold.

More bandwagons: That old bandwagon, of which librarians are so fond, is roaring right along, gaining momentum. Let's see, when was it that every university needed an undergraduate library? And we all needed approval plans? Automation? Ditch Dewey and switch to LC? TQM? Get it before it's gone!

More money: OK, there is not enough, never is, but here and there, some libraries have actually had a bit more than they did in the darkest days of the not too distant past.

Space limits the length of the list, but this should give everyone a start on their own list of "mores" for 1996.

Libraries have been zooming into the brave new future like the stock market throughout 1996. Perhaps it is time to cool off, to level, time to reconsider innovation and quality, to rethink priorities. Will 1997 be a breather or will it be *plus ça change, plus c'est la meme chose*? 🐷

