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1997 from a Bookseller's Perspective

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Against the Grain

"Linking Publishers, Vendors and Librarians"

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1997 from a Bookseller's Perspective

by **Daniel P. Halloran** (Academic Book Center) <danh@acbc.com>

The beginning of a new year is always a time for hope and optimism. Looking back through the past year, in contrast, it's natural for us to focus on some of the things that went wrong, the occasional missed opportunity, or other negative events that affected our professional and personal lives. From a professional standpoint, however, I would have to search long and hard for the negatives in 1997. In fact, it's apparent to me that this past year brought to fruition a number of important trends, and they will coalesce into guideposts for developments in the next few years.

Among these trends and developments are:

- The widespread interest in outsourcing certain technical services functions.
- The commitment to Web-based technology among the larger library booksellers.
- The central role of approval plans in libraries, including smaller libraries that traditionally had used other collection management tools.
- The emergence of consortia as fun-

damental platforms for resource sharing and other forms of cooperation.

• The creation of a new university in Florida that combines all of these trends to form at least one model for the future.

What has motivated these trends and developments? The apparent answer is cost, or stated more broadly, the attempt by library administrators to control costs, use budgets more effectively, and manage the human, technological and material resources better than ever before. But behind this cost control effort is something far more interesting. The amount and the variety of information is growing explosively. Libraries are charged with the mission of collecting and making accessible all this information in a variety of formats, and the task is becoming more complicated. For instance, a simple CD that children buy in retail stores has all sorts of implications when a library purchases the same product: How can it be shared among patrons? What are the fair use restrictions? Can it be copied and networked? How is it protected against theft? Each of these questions requires a different

response, based on the many different producers of the information or the information itself contained on the CD.

And someone, or several people, have to make policy regarding these issues, and then manage those policies. The task gets more complicated in the electronic and database environment, and then there are the added requirements of knowledgeable li-

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If Rumors Were Horses

Well, it seems like something always happens while we are "in press!" We have just learned that **Williams & Wilkins** has agreed to be acquired by **Wolters Kluwer** in a transaction valued at about \$375 million. Apparently, there will be an integration between **Waverly's** business and **Lippincott-Raven's**. It is anticipated that **Kluwer** will maintain a "substantial operating presence and work force in Balti-

more." The consolidations continue. See this issue, p. 30 for **Judy Luther's** article on consolidations and mergers in our industry. Also, in the future, the energetic and awesome **Mary Brandt-Jensen** will be writing a column for **ATG** on mergers and acquisitions in the industry. And there's more, **Rob Richards** (see **Biz of Acq**, this issue, p. 68) sends word over the **lawlibrary listserv** that there is an updated version of "A Legal Publisher's List: The Shape of Legal Publishing Today," available at <http://www.colorado.edu/law/lawlib/ts/legalpub.htm>.

Bradford Wiley II, Chairman of the

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Bookseller's Perspectives

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brarian guides to facilitate the research efforts in these new electronic environments. Contrary to some thinking on this subject, I believe the roles of librarians as navigators in the electronic and Internet worlds will grow as fast as these worlds themselves are growing. After all, both ordinary patrons and sophisticated faculty are making a transition from books and journals to a whole host of non-book and electronic formats as they use library resources. Who will help in this transition if it is not the library profession?

In 1997 it became mainstream thinking that libraries had to make a real change in the way they did a lot of their work, and the library book and journal suppliers recognized this in a number of ways. Because these changes in traditional library management are new, the process of change is not always perfect. Take outsourcing of technical services as one example. The Hawaii project, in 20/20 hindsight, appears to have been misconceived and mismanaged. As a result, some of the worst fears of librarians who oppose outsourcing were heightened. ALA has decided to appoint a task force to examine and make recommendations on outsourcing issues. Librarians in individual institutions are learning how to plan outsourcing more effectively and how to manage the process. Major library suppliers are hiring librarians with technical services experience, recognizing that bookseller-supplied services have to equal or exceed the quality of these services that were performed inside libraries. This is good. It indicates that we are all taking the outsourcing issues seriously and working together to get the whole process right. In the last few years the debate within the library community was about whether certain functions could be outsourced. In 1997 the debate has centered not on whether to do it but how to do it well.

As the personnel needs of libraries change in response to the changes in information formats, approval plans are increasingly seen as an effective collection management tool. Smaller academic libraries, and larger public libraries, are viewing carefully conceived approval plans as alternatives to book by book selection methods. This is prompting changes in the way vendors design and manage their approval plans. It is now essential to expand and refine non-subject parameters, and do a much better job of monitoring readership level. Specialized approval plans, like author-based fiction plans or small press plans, are gaining adherents. Some libraries are asking vendors to monitor important review sources and automatically supply books that get good reviews. As these approval plans become more sophisticated, there will be in-

creased cooperation between book suppliers and libraries. In 1997 we have seen a customer ask us to check their holdings in their OPAC, before supplying certain types of books on approval. The line between book selectors in libraries and those outside is blurring. There are all sorts of pitfalls that this type of cooperation presents, not the least of which is the fact that book suppliers are motivated by profit and librarians are motivated by other factors such as collection excellence and the need to serve their unique community. But there are areas of commonality, and the emergence of a sense of collegiality in solving the problems inherent in our separate roles is a welcome trend.

Perhaps 1997 should be called the year of the Web. The major academic library book suppliers are offering Websites that are really useful. We are all going beyond mere searching and selecting functions, giving our customers the ability to manage their approval and firm order business online, at their own convenience. The first steps to providing a truly seamless, paperless ordering system were introduced in 1997 by **Yankee Book Peddler** and **Academic Book Center**. **Blackwell** launched their interactive Website and promised rapid development of advanced

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features in the first part of the new year. It became obvious that librarians are comfortable in the Web world, and they are demanding as well. They want Websites that work quickly and provide the same kind of customization that has traditionally characterized booksellers' array of services. These three book suppliers demonstrated a commitment to this in 1997, a trend that is certain to continue into the next millennium.

Consortial library cooperation came of age in 1997. With the successful completion of the **TULIP** experiment and the **OhioLink** project getting off to a good start, as just two examples, library administrators are creating new models for inter-library cooperation. In South Africa and Australia, library consortia came of age with agreed agendas and real projects identified. In Russia and some CIS countries another form of cooperation was born with the acronym **ILJAC**. This effort will facilitate the flow of information between Russia and other former Soviet countries, and the major information providers in the West. In Asia, particularly Hong Kong, library cooperation is being formalized. Some library book suppliers view these developments with trepidation. In Great Britain, for instance, a consortium of universities in the southern

part of the country negotiated what all agree is a ruinous discount, resulting in part in the closure of the vendor who made the winning bid. As I said above, none of these changes taking place result in complete success. We all make mistakes, and the better managed libraries and vendors learn from those mistakes. Agreeing to supply books at discounts that are so high that profits disappear hurts all involved. The demise of a respected bookseller who makes this kind of mistake is regrettable, but it's also a harsh lesson for all of us. Consortia offer an opportunity for cooperation on many fronts, including negotiating pricing. I believe that these opportunities for library suppliers to increase their sales can be managed realistically within an environment that brings benefit to all parties involved in the process.

1997 saw the opening of the **Florida Gulf Coast University**. We at Academic partnered with **OCLC**, **SOLINET** and **FCLA** to provide a fully processed and cataloged shelf ready collection on opening day. Working as a team, we were intimately involved in a new kind of university library, featuring a heavy reliance on electronic resources as well as a rich collection of books and journals to support the teaching programs. While there

were some traditional ordering methods using paper, the majority of books were supplied in an entirely electronic environment. We provided a Website that enabled the librarians to select and order books, monitor and manage their approval plan, and track their funds. Working with our partners, we created a database of an order

and on the shelf titles in the OPAC, and we accomplished this without a cataloging department in the library. The success of the FGCU project shows that librarians and vendors, working together but under the firm direction of library administrators, can create a fine library collection in a new and efficient manner. Is this the model for all libraries, or for all new libraries? I believe it is a model for many libraries. It is certainly worthy of discussion and examination, and no doubt there will be plenty of that. But meanwhile the FGCU librarians are providing faculty and students with the resources they need in 1997 and in the future.

A new year, and indeed a new millennium, lie ahead of us. If 1997 was a reflection of the past, it was the year when debate and discussion about new concepts, new ways of working and cooperating, resulted in concrete steps toward the future. If 1997 is an indicator of the future, it predicts a customer-centered vendor community working as part of a team with librarians and other organizations in the library community. In other words, a review of the highlights of 1997 means that the next few years look very promising for all of us involved in libraries. 