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Celia Scher Wagner

Blackwell's, Celia.Wagner@Blackwell.com

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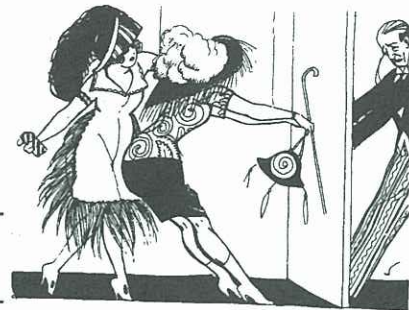
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Academic Book Trends — Late Expectations - (Un)Expected Publication Dates

by **Celia Scher Wagner** (Manager, New Titles, Blackwell's)
<Celia.Wagner@Blackwell.com>, <celiaw@acbc.com>



As most members of the book world know, publishers generally announce titles prior to publication, citing Expected Publication (EP) dates for those titles both in their catalogs and in the information they provide to the Library of Congress for c.i.p. (Cataloging in Publication) records. Vendors and reference providers usually display these dates in their online databases, allowing libraries to predict with some accuracy when forthcoming books will appear.

The question is: with how much accuracy? How often are books actually published when the publishers predict they will be?

We surveyed our database of all titles covered for the academic library market, looking for those that met these two criteria:

- We ordered well in advance of the originally-announced (publisher-supplied) Expected Publication date as shown in c.i.p.

- We received a copy of the book

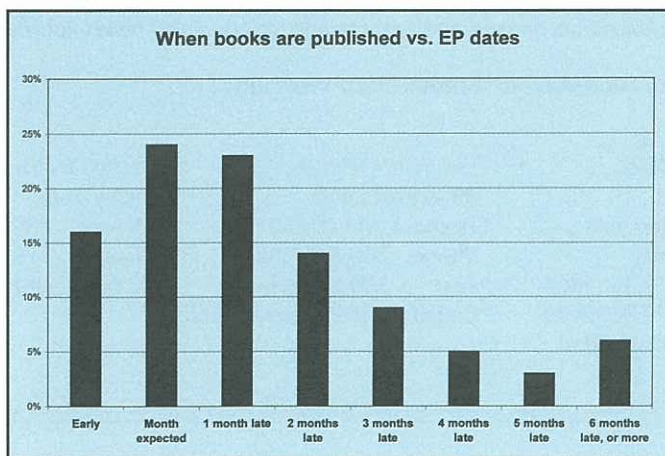
In other words, we eliminated books which never arrived, and which, conceivably, never were published.

The results are shown below. Forty per-

cent of titles arrived either the month before they were expected, or in the expected month. The other sixty percent arrived at least one month late. Six percent arrived more than six months late, despite repeated claiming once the original EP date had passed. Although the chart does not show it, the curve falls off very slowly after six months. If a book missed its EP date by six months or more, it probably missed by more.

(A colleague of mine remarked that, to him, this distribution has that real-life ring of truth. When he misses a deadline, he is either a little bit late, or totally out of the ballpark.)

What are the implications of this graph for vendors, and for libraries? First, EP dates need to be seen as suggestions only—more than half of the time, they are too optimistic. Second, vendors (and publishers) need to be vigilant about updating EP dates, and replacing slipped dates with the next best guess, so that libraries can feel confident the dates they see are only reasonably optimistic, not wildly so.



Other Side of the Street from page 65

problems that information providers have faced in their quest for digitization was a lack of standards. Several prominent organizations (see <http://openebook.org/who.htm>) have worked closely to create an open eBook standard—a specification for eBook file and format structure based on HTML and XML, the languages used to format information for Web sites. The goal of the specification is “to quickly create a critical mass of compelling content...and the content will be compatible with a wide variety of reading devices.” (See <http://openebook.org/>). These new standards will also enable better searching of individual titles. Customer demand may also force publishers to put up sample chapters, entire titles and other qualitative material to entice readers to check out or purchase information. The Amazon.com model with comments from the publisher, author, and reader will become commonplace. The FAT bibliographic record will eventually include audio, video, and chats with the author. All of these enhancements will be of benefit to the user and provide the user the means to make personal judgments regarding a title's applicability to their own

situation. Beauty will definitely be in the eye of the beholder.

The Governance Issue

A serious question about the earth's largest digital library is how will it all be governed. The growth of the Internet seems to be a perfect example of what could happen. The Internet's growth, as it appears today, seems revolutionary. However, the day-to-day, year-to-year reality really portrays an evolutionary path. As needs arose, people and organizations stepped in to address those needs. Systems, relationships, and products came about, in many instances, because the compelling need to collaborate far outstripped merely parochial interests.

Likewise, if information providers embrace the earth's largest digital library concept, systems will be built, procedures will be implemented and cooperation will come about. The cooperation should, however, be inclusive. Librarians alone cannot build this enormous system. Publishers, wholesalers, online and traditional bookstores, and other information enablers must have a say in the process. Perhaps, the system might become much like the zip code system for shipping management software. The earth's largest

digital library information will come as part of any good information management software and will be updated regularly as part of the software maintenance fee.

Concluding Remarks

Ideas are the seeds for future developments. The earth's largest digital library is an idea that must be examined closely. One of the more problematic aspects of arguing against an idea use present day models to caution against implementation. Using the old “It'll never work” paradigm makes complete sense because under current circumstances it couldn't work, or it would already be in place.

The real question is: “What are current trends telling us about the future?” Several current trends indicate that computer use is on the rise, Internet use is on the rise, more digitization of materials is taking place, the current generation of youngsters consider a computer to be like a toaster (just another appliance), and the quantity and variety of information is on the rise. The mix of what is needed seems to be in place.

Let's bake the access methods to the earth's largest digital library, and let our users eat their information cake.