Talk of the Trade

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Recommended Citation
DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.4136

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in some format of a title does not mean it is ready to print; even presence of a PDF file, while a help, doesn’t prepare for all the different potential print methods (or even some of the basics). This will likely change over time, but will be slow and back catalog will present serious questions about level of investment warranted.

• Quality isn’t at offset levels. Particularly for graphically intensive titles, digital print technologies range from adequate to murky. Again, this is in part dependent on the source materials, but also on print quality. This too is likely to improve over time.

• Setup and support costs are not zero. Beyond setting up files, the process of continuing rights management, author management, marketing and distribution are not zero. Thus, publishers have to decide whether it’s worthwhile to continue to invest behind a title even if the print run economies support very short print runs. This issue will always exist.

At the same time, online resource like Alibris have increasingly brought together a wider range of materials (used in print, remainders, OS, OSI and OP titles from global sources) with a broader range of ways to purchase them (directly shipping from the seller, consolidated with purchase orders and invoices, through major distributors and wholesalers). The technologies here are a lot more straightforward, if challenging once you’re dealing with over 30 million books.

Choices

One of the more interesting points of conversation and debate was where different libraries handle the “cutoff” on trying to still acquire a title based on its OP/OSI status, and how they handle resolution after the cutoff.

A wide variety of practices exists regarding when or if to “give up” acquiring a new copy of a title from traditional sources. Some libraries continue to claim OS/OSI titles from distributors/publishers for up to 340 or even 720 days (1.5 to 2 years!). Some libraries immediately assume that OP/OSI books are essentially unavailable, and decide to cut their losses on those titles more or less right away, and cancel (as there are plenty of other new books to buy). Some other libraries set a decent surrender period of six months or so before trying to acquire any combination of OS, OSI or OP titles via the relatively new array of reliable secondhand sources.

Practices for acquiring used and/or remaindered products vary as well. Some libraries have staff search across multiple online vendors and manage the purchase, shipping and processing from individual sellers using Websites like Bookfinder or AddAll, or directly on Alibris’ consumer Website, ABE, Amazon.com, Half.com, eBay and other sites. Others use some variety of Alibris Services to manage larger lists themselves or use Alibris’ Library Services staff — some even extract files from their library system monthly and transmit in EDIFACT. Others use partnerships that Blackwell’s, YBP Library Services, Ingram Library Services, Baker & Taylor, Ambassador Books and Media, Franklin Books Company, and Eastern Book Company among others have developed with Alibris to fulfill their needs. Typically, these are made on the basis of availability of staff and desire to minimize systems costs of acquisition (costs such as product, shipping, receiving, processing, invoicing, accounting, and vendor management) versus individual copy costs.

I would invite an activity-based cost approach on an independent basis to the assessment of these alternatives — it would be instructive for all involved.

Column Editor’s Note: Comments and feedback (and corrections!) are always welcome. Feel free to reach Brian at (510) 594-4530 or via email at <briane@alibris.com>.

Talk of the Trade

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LITERARY WORLD SHOCKED, SHOCKED, AS PUBLISHING CEO TELLS THE TRUTH

When Bertelsmann’s Peter Olson, head of American book publishing (Random House, Knopf, Ballantine and more) fired senior vice president Ann Godorf, chief of Random House, he didn’t say she left the company to “pursue other interests” or “spend more time with her family.” Instead, he explained that she had a profit goal of $6 million for 2002, but only made $2 million. The figures descended on Olson, criticizing him for being too obsessive about profits and for taking only a few minutes with Godorf to tell her the bad news. Most strange was the New York Times column by Verlyn Klinkenborg. He writes a charming weekly profile of the comings and goings at his upstate New York farm, his daily chores, the weather, the flora and fauna, the delights and hardships of rural life. In a bizarre departure from his usual country life musings, Klinkenborg lamented the driving force of profitability in commercial publishing, the ruthless pursuit of money over art, the big bucks paid big time authors, and the consolidation in the publishing industry. He portrayed Godorf as a victim of a greedy system that is spinning out of control. However, the business pages of the Times provided actual facts and continued on page 96

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figures, explaining how difficult
it is for publishers to prosper and
grow these days without the fis-
cal discipline that all successful businesses must exercise. Meanwhile,
within a few days of Klinkenberg's mournful wishful thinking, Godof
was offered her own imprint at Penguin, where, I'm sure, she will be
required to achieve her profit goals.

NEW YORKER EDITOR, DESPITE BIG NOSE
ACCUSATION, PURSUES OLD WHITE MEN

In an earlier column I discussed the appointment of Deborah
Trisman to the influential position of fiction editor at the New Yorker
magazine. Noting that the number of female authors had declined dur-
ting the tenure of her predecessor, Trisman recently said that she is try-
ing hard to achieve a 50/50 gender record, but eight out of ten submis-
sions, whether from established authors or neophytes, are from men.

The appointment of Trisman has generated much envy among
the local literati, and she says, amusingly, that she stopped reading email gossip about her when someone admitted she was "very jealous"
of Trisman and accused her of having "a big nose." She went
on to describe the publicity surrounding her appointment, which
seemed to indicate that "I was only going to publish, like, young Viet-
namese women." However, she wants to continue to reassure "older
white men....It's alright, you still have a place." And the envious big-
nose-accuser added her comment, stating that "Trisman doesn't re-
ally (have a big nose). I'm clutching at straws here." Ah, the gentle
world of true literary publishing for art's sake.

LOVE STORY

Among the five finalists for Britain's prestigious Whitbread Prize
were a 69 year old husband and wife. Claire Tomalin was honored for
her excellent biography (which I've read and thoroughly enjoyed) Samuel
Pepys: The Unequalled Life. Her husband, Michael Frayn, (the play-
wright famed for Noises Off and Copenhagen) — I fell asleep during this
drama about Nazi nuclear bomb intrigue — was honored for his World War
II espionage novel, Spies. This is the first time in the 33 year history of
the Whitbread that a married couple has competed for the prize. As
the award was announced at a black tie dinner in London, Mr. Frayn
gallantly rose and kissed his wife as her name was added to the pantheon of
past winners. Ms. Tomalin thanked the committee and said, "I spent
most of the evening praying I would not win so I would not have to get up
here and say anything." Later, her husband told the press that his wife's
trip over him gave him an opportunity to "feel rather noble. It gives
me a tremendous moral advantage...." Every time they argued he would
have the opportunity to say, "But darling, I behaved so well over the
Whitbread."

ANOTHER GUN NUT EXPOSED

Readers of this column will remember I have written twice about the
since-resigned Emory University professor who apparently faked his
research "proving" that America's early settlers rarely owned guns. Now
a pro-gun "scholar," working for the American Enterprise Institute
(sometimes referred to as a right wing think tank) has been caught in a
triple whammy of forlorn and suspicion. John B Lott, Jr. has been posi-
ng as Mary Rosh, writing favon reviews of his book More Guns, Less Crime on various Internet book review sites. Dear sweet "Mary"
has defended the research in the book, including the assertion that merely
brandishing a weapon has prevented crimes in 97% of reported incidents
where the potential victim owned a gun. Amazon posted a glowing re-
view signed by maryrosh, who turned out to be Lott's 13 year old son.
So not only has Lott faked reviews on his own, and with the help of his
family, it turns out no one can discover where Lott got his 97% foiled
robbery figure. Lott can't help locate the sources for this assertion either,
claiming a bookshelf fell on his computer, destroying the research trail on his hard drive. Another guy named Lott getting himself in trouble.

IF YOU WORK IN THE BOOK BUSINESS
AND ARE HAPPY, YOU'RE WRONG

Writing his weekly business column in New York Magazine, Michael
Wolff recently asked: "Why, for God's sake, would anyone want to work
in the book business?" He went on to contend that publishing and other
bookish pursuits are a "liberalish, feminist redoubt, but in some kind of
retrograde inversion, the economic model requires that women mostly
do the job because they have husbands who support them."
Continuing, "Virtually any other business, save for the more bureaucratic
and regimented, has more day to day comforts, more joie de vivre and
personality than book publishing." Wolff acknowledges that he
has many friends in the business, who "against all evidence don't agree
with me," but "this isn't where a kid with heart and imagination
is going to end up. Rather, the book business is logically getting a
dimmer bulb." One has to wonder how many friends in publishing he
has left after this column.

Issues in Vendor/Library Relations —
Decisions, Decisions

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The classic vendor gripe about libraries is that they take too long to make decisions. Why, vendors ask, must it take weeks, months, years
to move on anything? Is there a library in the world, they wonder, without a host of commit-
tees and sub-committees, councils, circles, groups, task forces, teams, and who knows what
else to study and usually stymie any proposal put to them, small or large? Not in my territory
there isn't, every vendor rep has sometimes muttered. Why can't libraries make decisions
like we do?

Of course, this griping is highly selective, always focused on un-made vendor decisions
where the rep's company has something to gain. And on made decisions going the wrong way.
Clear opportunity, these instances, to cite flawed
process. When they gain or hold business, on
the other hand, reps are always forgiving on pro-
cess, no matter how long a library took to de-
cide. Likewise, quick library decisions that went
badly are immediately forgotten. It's the hang-
ers, instead, that haunt the minds of reps.

Librarians might forgive reps their impa-
tience here, because a long-hanging decision
is a truly painful experience. For those old enough
to remember a past era in social behavior, it's
not unlike asking for a date... and then wait-
ing, and waiting some more, and then longer
again, for the word yes or no and maybe a little reciprocal interest from someone who held ev-
ey card. "I'm not sure I'll be here that day."
"My cousin might be visiting." You know how
it was. "The task force just scheduled its first
meeting," feels about the same.

Naturally, it's none of a rep's business how
long a library takes to make a decision. The
task force has every right to hold whatever me-
tings it wants, whenever it wants, for as long as
it wants. Anyone who needs to get an A on ev-
ty test should find another line of work than
selling to libraries. In this case they give out
only two grades — A and F. Strictly pass-fail.
Ever a very good library sales rep, used to
straight As on the other report cards of life, will
see some Fs on this one, and even harder to bear,
some incompletes.

Reps always believe that a library's decision
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