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Letters to the Editor

Katina Strauch
Against the Grain

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Against the Grain

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Letters to the Editor

Dear Katina:

The comments ("The Cantankerous Nemesis", Vol. 2, Number 4, September 1990) by Chuck Hamaker on the sales by the UK Library Association of their A & I journals publishing programme need to be countered by a realistic assessment of this programme's problems.

Mr. Hamaker has taken at face value an opposition to this sale which is founded as much on the old British disease of assuming that "commercial" means diluted standards than on any realistic view of the crossroads at which these publishing properties stood. The following should be borne in mind:

(a) The LA were unable to provide the sort of forward investment in hardware and software which these journals immediately required and will receive from Bowker-Saur, e.g. immediate investment in new hardware and software and preparation to launch all the products on CD-ROM.

(b) Sensitive to the charges made by Mr. Hamaker and others about the practices of European publishers we at Bowker-Saur were anxious to respond to the problems encountered by US Serials Librarians. Our 1991 \$ subscription prices for three journals (*ASSIA*, *Current Technology Index* and *Journal of Librarianship*) were frozen i.e. a real fall and the others raised by less than the current UK inflation rate.

(c) The professional library staff who have joined Bowker-

Saur have joined similarly qualified staff already in the Company in the creation of high quality reference works for the international library community. Users of the *Catalogue of Printed Music in the British Library* and the *American Biographical Archive* will be acquainted with our high professional standards.

It would be a pity if simplistic assumptions about "commercial" publishers were to have detrimental effects on a publishing programme such as our A & I journals which are designed to help librarians manage their periodical collections more effectively in these difficult times and to provide a broad view of whole segments of scholarship.

Bowker-Saur's US price for 1991 was made — at considerable commercial disadvantage — because we are sympathetic to and conscious of the points made by Mr. Hamaker and others.

We do believe that commercial publishers can be conscientious and professional publishers and that the pressures of commerce do not preclude the maintenance of the highest standards in librarianship. We do not suppose that many librarians in the United States would disagree with that premise, nor do we think that genuine attempts by publishers such as ourselves to respond to the problems they face should meet with such suspicion as that expressed in your article.

Dr. Shane O'Neill
(Managing Director, Bowker-Saur)