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Letters to the Editor

Katina Strauch
Against the Grain

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Letters to the Editor

■ Dear Katina,

The September 1990 issue of *Against the Grain* contains a letter from Peter E. Simon of R. R. Bowker, which goes against the grain.

Nat Bodian is quite right when he notes that Bowker abandoned its former respected position as "the publisher's publisher." I risk prolonging this debate ad nauseam but nothing stimulates the blood so much as polemics. Perhaps clarification of nomenclature is needed. Bowker stopped publishing books about publishing some years ago. They sold rights to such titles to other publishers and cancelled author contracts for future books (including, for example, one which Ann Strong, Bill Begell and I were working on). Bowker retained the well known reference and database works. Mr. Simon's title, Vice President of Database Publishing, reveals Bowker's present focus. "Book" books about publishing apparently no longer interest them.

We all admire, and libraries probably couldn't do without, the database publishing in which Bowker excels. But "data" does not equate to knowledge and ideas and I'm sorry to say that Mr. Bodian is correct in

advising that Bowker no longer encourages "books" for the publishing industry.

Cordially,

Allan Wittman (Wittman Associates, New York)

■ Dear Katina,

I agree with Christian 100% on the question of naming names [of companies in *Against the Grain*.]

I also agree with Corrie Marsh and Barry Fast that sensitivity to user needs and services will be the hallmark of the 1990s. One of the most significant trends in the past few years here at Caltech has been the dramatically increasing use of our TOC/DOC service (a locally mounted database with a photocopy/delivery system). Although limited to only 2000 (mainly science titles) of the approximately 4500 journals to which we subscribe, use patterns suggest that the 80/20 rule is being applied even within this subset of our collection.

One of the advantages of offering a document (copies of articles) delivery service is that researchers are

beginning to plan their needs in advance and are much less often put off by short ILL delay times. With the advent of fax cooperative consortia, in house collections will become even less important. The upshot of this is a compelling move toward budgeting for access and a decrease in collection building in general (especially for journals).

Sincerely,

Dana L. Roth (Head, Science & Engineering Libraries, Caltech)

From the Editor: Well, I got a lot of comments about the printing the names issue raised by Christian, but the one above is the only one in writing. Though I am not married to Robert Maxwell, I am married to a lawyer ... anyway, one of the things we have always wanted to do with both the Charleston Conference and Against the Grain is to talk about issues not personalities or companies . . . but we appreciate the input . . . Thanks!