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Group Therapy/ Defective Books

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Group Therapy

Column Editor, **Rosann Bazirjian** (Syracuse University)

You know how we complain about each other from time to time? Well here's a chance to get things off your chest. In this column, we try to talk about some of the things that bug us about the publisher/vendor/library relationship in a non-confrontational way.

Defective Books — Scylla Meets Charybdis

I am tired of receiving so many defective books. All too often our library receives books with pages that are either smudged, blank, folded or miscolated. My staff is asked to carefully scan each title that arrives. This takes time, which in this day and age is truly becoming a luxury. It also takes money to return an unwanted title in exchange for a perfect copy. Shouldn't the publisher be responsible for quality assurance? And where does the vendor fit into this scheme; isn't she/he often the victim as well?

Gripe submitted by **Rosann Bazirjian**, Syracuse University

VENDOR RESPONSE: Submitted by: **John Smith**, Total Information

On Procedure: defective books should always be returned to the jobber. He/she is most able to quickly replace your copy, and has a constant stream of returns going to most publishers that allow the vendor to efficiently return your defective book with little hassle. Besides, replacing defective books is part of the service a jobber sells with the book.

But don't forget that not perfect is not necessarily defective. This has to be the governing rule in determining whether a book should be returned. Once a book is delivered to a library, a significant portion of the total acquisition cost of the book has already been incurred by that library. Returning the book to the jobber or the publisher will at the very least double the administrative cost to the library of acquiring the book. Are pages blank? Signatures missing? Miscolated? Falling out? Is the binding cracked? Unglued? These are defects that strike at the nature of a book, making it useless or so limiting its expected life that they must be replaced. But is the corner bent? The top or bottom edge worn? A signature

partially unopened? The case glued upside down? These are imperfections that do not impair the use of the life of the book.

Jobbers screen books for obvious defects before shipping, however, concealed defects will always evade the most scrupulous examination. Librarians are not antiquarians (who regard librarians with their labels, pockets, and stamps as their great enemy), and should not approach books the way a collector evaluates a prospective purchase of a modern first edition. Let your expectations be realistic.

From my own experience I have learned that it is not cost effective to verify the information we receive from our customers, not that the information (no matter how scrupulously prepared) is always correct, but that it is practical to trust the information in front of our eyes and deal with the failures when they arise. It is impractical to distrust everything. Process your books and deal with the hidden defects brought to your attention by the subject bibliographers, and even the library patrons. Even though the cost of shelving a defective book will be individually greater than if the defect were discovered before processing, the overall cost of defective books in clerical and administrative cost will be significantly reduced.

PUBLISHER RESPONSE: Submitted by: **Claire Stanton**, Kluwer Academic Publishers

The issue of defective books is of concern to publishers as well as librarians. It is, of course, next to impossible to check every copy of a print run, which could range from 500 to 10,000 copies. The publisher works with printers/binders based on a variety of requirements: quality, service, price and reputation. The printer/binder

maintains the quality control in their plant of the actual book manufacturing process. It is during the course of that process that any printing defects will occur. The actual causes of these defects can be varied and should be addressed by a qualified book manufacturer.

The publisher randomly checks a certain quantity of advanced copies upon delivery. While this alone does not ensure that every copy is flawless, it does provide a further quality check to that of the printer/binder. In addition, most copies are individually shrink-wrapped to provide extra protection. Ultimately, the publisher's strongest means of quality control is to discontinue future business with a particular printer/binder who does not satisfy the publisher's standards.

Returns are an inconvenience for both publisher and librarian. Just as it takes money for a librarian to return a damaged title, it takes money for a publisher to process the return.

Publishers appreciate hearing from librarians, vendors, or individual customers who have consistent problems with damaged titles. From this notification the publisher can then follow up on the problem, determine the particular printer involved, and take the necessary steps to remedy the situation. The publisher will always take final responsibility for the quality of the product (either through refund, replacement, or credit); but, identification of any particular problem must remain a cooperative effort to be beneficial to all parties involved.

Does anyone have any issues, gripes, etc., that they would like to have aired? We would love to hear them, from Librarian, Publisher and Vendor alike. Please send to Rosann Bazirjian at Syracuse University. LIBRVB@SUVB.bitnet or fax (315) 443-9510. ☛