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Deadlines

Editor

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Off the Wall

From Your Editor



General sound offs about our world of librarians, vendors, and publishers.

One Account Number Or Bust

Years ago, I remember coming home terrified from grade school in New Orleans, Louisiana because I had a nuclear war form to give my parents to fill out. They were supposed to specify what would happen to me in the event of a Russian attack — stay at school or be sent home. My parents decided I was to stay at school. I had nightmares long after that. I was certain we would have a nuclear war and that I would NEVER see my mother and father or my two brothers again.

Enough of this seriousness. So what does this have to do with anything?

This column is supposed to be OFF THE WALL. And the experience I was talking about above was my first confrontation with IMPERSONALIZATION. It was the first, but it very definitely was not the last.

The ultimate impersonalization is numbers. We are a society of numbers. Social security numbers. Tax Identification Numbers. International standard book and serial numbers. Phone num-

bers. Bitnet and Internet numbers. Fax numbers. Call numbers. Invoice numbers. Purchase order numbers. Voucher numbers. Check numbers. Order numbers. ALA Membership Numbers.

If it's not one number, it's another.

Anyway, to some extent I realize that we have to put up with these numbers because they make our life easier. Okay, okay.

Still, there are some numbers that I HATE. And one big hate is the account number at the publisher and the serials jobber. Why is it that I have to have a different account number whenever I call to order a book or a journal? Why, why, why? Why do I need a separate account number for EVERY publisher? Why can't I order ANYTHING without my account number? Are those enough questions?

Am I the only person that has professors walking into my office asking for books yesterday and if they don't get the book their whole class will be cancelled or inconvenienced or whatever and the librarian will get a bad name because it will be all his/her fault? And am I the only person who calls the publisher in this instance direct and asks for special consideration

because professor X needs Y book and can you please get it to us now? And am I the only person who gets a very cooperative customer services rep at the publishing company who is ready to do all that I ask — until —he/she asks for the library's ACCOUNT NUMBER and I don't have one! Then the proverbial publisher hits the fan, as the old saying goes. Because, no, I don't have an account number. And, no, I can't charge the book to my personal credit card because I will never have a chance of being reimbursed. And, no, please don't hang up.

Only a very cooperative, patient publisher will allow you to order a book without having your account number. You are talking about some serious and fancy talking to get out of that requirement. You are talking about trust. And what's trust without a number?

This is a plea. In the last issue of *ATG*, Sandy Paul told us about this numbers business and the SAN (Standard Address Number) and ISAN. I say bravo.

Let's work to use the SAN instead of the individual account number for every publisher. If you've seen one number you've seen 'em all. All for one and one for all. ☺

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