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Carpe Diem/Publishers, Vendors and Librarians

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PROLOGUE

*In the February 1992 issue of **Against the Grain**, Barry Fast and Judy Webster in *Publishers, Booksellers and Librarians: A Partnership?* offer the view "that cooperation among these constituencies is essential to the survival of each but that a cooperative, educational model is a better approach than partnership." While I found the arguments offered by Barry and Judy lucid, I feel strongly that traditional patterns of collaboration and cooperation are inefficient. They are simply not keeping pace with the rate of change in the information industry. A new model of interaction is needed that helps publishers, libraries, and booksellers to achieve their goals. In the fast-paced dynamic, and electronic environment of today's information industry, we must become partners in order to thrive and develop. Partnering, with its implications of long-lasting commitments toward common goals is a more productive vision for the decade ahead.*

In late 1991, the chairmen and presidents of Fortune 500 companies, government officials, scholars, and consultants traveled to the first annual Fortune 500 Forum in Charleston, South Carolina to put forth their wish lists for '92, to offer advice to American businesses, and to listen to new ideas. The December 30, 1991 issue of *Fortune* magazine explored some of these new ideas in a *Special Report*. This report rekindled a long held feeling that our industry needs to embrace change and that the shambling gait that has marked relationship-building among publishers, vendors, and libraries over the past 25 years has to become more coordinated and must gather speed.

But, there are forces at work that are impeding our efforts to work closely together. Following are several issues and challenges we need to discuss individually and collectively:

Issue. The practice of publishers selling directly to libraries, while also selling through vendors, is an ethical question begging to be resolved.

Issue. The need for vendors to establish fiscally sound pricing policies that are consistent with a library's mix and volume, doing away with the current manipulation of discounts that result in subsidizing some libraries by giving others unfair discounts.

Challenge. Engage in more partnering discussions so that everyone will begin to understand that consolidating vendors solely to get more discount is counter-productive, and that negotiations should focus on finding common ground on which vendors and libraries can build a long-term relationship.

Challenge. Although the national economy continues to bring storm clouds to our information community, particularly to libraries, and while there is no break expected in the weather for some time, if librarians can rise above these pressures and grab onto the golden opportunity they have to influence the way we do business in the '90s, we all will move into the 21st century in a much stronger position.

The Information Age has brought rapid change to our community, and never has the need been greater for collaboration and cooperation among publishers, vendors, and librarians. Nothing is to be gained by waiting for tomorrow. Today we should begin working together to plan the future—there is much to do if we are to put our community puzzle together. *Carpe Diem.*

PUBLISHERS/VENDORS/ LIBRARIES

When I started my bookselling career with Prentice Hall over 25 years ago, the division I worked for called on public and academic libraries across New England. Our job, like that of sales representatives of other major houses, was to sell directly to the library. It did not seem to matter that someone else in the publishing house was also selling the very same titles through book ven-

dors. We offered libraries attractive pricing—discounts approximating those accorded to book wholesalers — as a benefit of "going direct."

In the '60s, '70s, and '80s publishers seemed oblivious to the ethics of distributing books through library vendors with one hand, while the other hand pushed the direct order form in front of the librarian. If vendors felt that this practice failed to acknowledge and respect their place in the distribution chain, they failed to stand as one and cry, "Foul." Vendors have relied on only a few individuals to carry our message of cooperation and collaboration: Lyman W. Newlin, Book Trade Counsellor and former executive with several academic library vendors, and more recently,

Helmut Schwarzer, who is YBP's Director of Publisher Relations. Both have asked and cajoled individual publishers to recognize the vendor's important role in book distribution.

Publishers who wanted library business direct — but who were reluctant to acknowledge their predilection toward total control — viewed the vendor's role as simply one of picking and packing books. Publishers felt they could "pick and pack" for the library as well as the vendor, and viewed the library wholesaler as an unnecessary middleman who did not promote books and was, therefore, nothing more than an order-taker. These publishers became very adept at biting the hand attached to their existing distribution arm.

Selling through vendors and then trying to buy the business from their customers demonstrates a self-serving set of ethical values and raises questions of sound business practice. P-H thought that financing its sales force was more cost effective than working through vendors. Cheaper to pay the team's salary and expenses? To maintain thousands of files and customer service contact points? To pick, pack, and ship small boxes and jiffy bags, numbering in the tens of thousands, each with an invoice that had to be processed along with the payment? All of this *cheaper* than collaborating with a small number of vendors?

The idea of a publisher (university press, commercial scholarly, scientific, technical, professional, or trade) selling monographs directly to a library is more foolish now than it was 25 years ago! Publishers who cling to the outmoded paradigm that steep discounting is the librarian's only priority simply do not understand the service requirements of libraries.

Librarians I talk with say they want to buy books through library vendors. They are cognizant of the myriad costs that result from buying direct, and the ripple effect buying from publishers has on other departments within and outside the library. They also say their libraries require value-added services that only vendors can supply. Libraries incorporate these vendor services into their staff training, acquisitions procedures, and organizational structure. Comprehensive approval plans, current and retrospective selection aids, on-line ordering, real-time access to inventories, and machine-readable bibliographic and invoice data are required, not merely desired options. If publishers took the time they spend competing for library sales and allocated that non-renewable resource to working more closely with their authors and improving production quality, the book community would gain far more than it does from publishers competing with their distributors.

This is not to say that the present distribution channel can't be improved — it can. The system can, with leadership and effective trilateral communication, better serve everyone's needs. The leadership cannot be bilateral (vendor and library). We all have to do a better job of communicating goals with each other. If publishers were open to partnering with

vendors — offer more equitable terms and improve the quality of service in return for vendors increasing speculative inventory purchasing and providing market intelligence — we would all benefit:

- Increased publisher discounts to vendors would make for a more financially sound distribution channel.

- Interactive quality programs would reduce everyone's costs; it is much less expensive to order and ship the right book the first time than to incur the expense of reorders resulting from poor quality.

- More books on the vendors' shelves would reduce publisher and vendor transaction costs.

- Market intelligence supplied by the vendor to the publisher (and the library to the publisher) would enable the publisher to keep a finger on the pulse of the library marketplace, providing a road map for effective change.

- And, the library would get its books faster and, hopefully, cheaper.

While many publishers still choose to compete with vendors, rather than collaborate, a few are beginning to talk about issues of mutual concern:

- Universal use of the ISBN, printed on the outside of the book.

- Application of an industry standard barcode, preferably an EAN, on the outside of the book.

- Standard formatting of publisher catalogs: ISBN always listed; LC Classification noted; type of binding designated.

- Discount models based upon the annual sales volume rather than individual order quantity.

- Speculative inventory on consignment. (A major way to reduce transaction

costs for both publisher and vendor while improving delivery speed to the library.)

- Quality controls to produce error-free shipments.

Librarians who are interested in learning about the business of publishing are also inviting publishers to sit down and talk about mutual goals:

- University research interests and future publishing opportunities.

- Under-published subject areas.

- Literacy.

- Library budget trends.

- Use of acid-free paper.

Librarians and vendors have traveled further down the relationship-building road than publishers. If publishers were more willing to communicate with vendors and librarians, we could unearth more common ground than we dream exists. *Carpe Diem.*

VENDORS/LIBRARIES/ PUBLISHERS

The relationship between the vendor and the library has improved over the past decade. The increased opportunity for dialogue offered by several ALA committees and discussion groups, as well as the Charleston Conference, the University of Oklahoma Libraries Conference, and the Feather River Institute has enabled us to see that our goals are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, as I have traveled the U.S., talking with librarians about various issues and trends, I have found a growing interest in the concept of partnering, in establishing an environment conducive to cooperation and collaboration. Writing in *The Partnership News*, Jon Hein & John Martin say: "The term partnering is frequently used where a relationship is viewed to be based on a negotiated set of conditions that benefit both parties."¹

Across the business spectrum, buyers are entering into longer-term relationships with a smaller number of suppliers. Libraries are no different. Vendors and librarians are being drawn to the negotiating table by a vendor consolidation movement that is gaining momentum. As librarians see their buying power deteriorate, the ubiquitous pressure to stretch those budgets often leads to demands for higher discounts from vendors. Unfortunately, there are all too many vendors ready to "buy the

business" as they try to cope with declining library budgets. But while price should remain negotiable, we should not lose sight of the goal of entering into a fuller relationship that is based on cooperation and collaboration:

To the library, this means locating a supplier/partner with whom you will work very closely to acquire library materials. It means accepting half the burden for communications. It means a willingness to change, to adapt your policies and procedures, to conform to standards. It means challenging tradition, debunking widely held "truths." It means constructive confrontation, clearly stated expectations, constant oversight. It means building confidence in your vendor through shared experience, knowledge, and planning. It means trust.

To the book vendor, the strategic alliance means seeking library partners whose objectives match your own. It means openness, candor. It means accepting the burden for half or more of communications. It means involving libraries early in your planning cycles. It means extraordinary efforts to achieve and maintain a secure, in-depth relationship. It means sharing information, problems, solutions, and giving up - in part - control of your company to your customer.²

Across the U.S., American business is finally taking partnering seriously. The potential advantages to libraries and vendors of a partnering process that explores interactive quality management programs, links goals, and results in knowing one another's business as well as you do your own are great. Yet, building long-term relationships will not come easy. It requires that we change the way we have done business for decades. *Carpe Diem.*

LIBRARIES/VENDORS/ PUBLISHERS

Technology is changing the library by changing the way information is delivered. Today, librarians face the formidable task of positioning libraries as the nation's premier information service organization. The present deep recession makes this challenge all the more difficult. Yet most librarians I talk with are optimistic; many understand the need to bring an entrepreneurial spirit into their workplace, and recog-

nize that innovation and creativity are the building blocks to success.

The literature does not lack well written, futuristic views of the library; nor does the field have a shortage of spokespeople ready to share their ideas of the future. Buzz-words are heard everywhere, as they should be: the language of change helps us to dig below the surface, urges us to think, question, and explore that which is useful to our organizations. Yet effective change cannot and will not take place unless it is planned for, carefully managed, and communicated to the people who can make it happen. Change is being written and talked about. Yet if libraries are to transition successfully into the 21st century, someone must set into motion a vision that is clearly understood by all.

Richard De Gennaro in his fine paper, *Technology & Access in an Enterprise Society* (*Library Journal*, October 1, 1989), states: "Technology is making the resources within the library available beyond its walls, and the resources beyond its walls available within the library." Our libraries are this country's last best hope for a literate society and competitive nation; they are the only information environment available to many children and adults aside from TV, radio, newspapers, magazines, and school texts; they house and provide access to knowledge we need to compete around the world. We are, as Patrick O'Brien, a character in Nelson DeMille's spy thriller, *The Talbot Odyssey*, notes: "...a civilization which rests almost entirely on information - its manufacture, storage, retrieval, and dissemination." (New York: Warner Books, Inc., 1991, p. 17).

Jack Welch, CEO, General Electric, says in *Fortune's Special Report*: "We are after getting information to people who can act on it." Regrettably, the U.S. has done a poor job in educating its youth over the last decade, and Mr. Welch, as well as other American business leaders, should be concerned where they will find information literate workers. Barbara Prete in *Publishing for Literacy* (*Publishers Weekly*, November 30, 1990), notes that The Business Council for Effective Literacy found that "75% of

the adults who will be employed in this country in the year 2000 are now at work. At present, 23 million of these people read at or below an eighth-grade level." This sad state of affairs gives credence to the warning issued by Joseph Gorman, CEO, TRW, in the *Special Report*: "I think America is losing its competitiveness battle extraordinarily fast."

There should be little doubt about the need to get everyone together: librarians, publishers, and vendors. We all have a stake in any restructuring that occurs:

The whole information structure that has been in place since the invention of the printing press is about to change. Authors, publishers, librarians, and readers [and I would add, vendors] will have to fashion new methods of handling information, which will eventually work together in a new structure responsive to the demands for information anytime, anyplace, and in just the right quantity.³

If we work together to set short and long-term goals, we can be more proactive, more assertive in positioning libraries as America's premier information and service organization.

CARPE DIEM

We need someone to quarterback our team and I'd like nothing better than to see ALA take the ball and convene a Leadership Forum that would discuss information issues and trends in our industry. I would not expect these individuals to debate who should sell to whom, nor discounts. Rather, the Forum would try to set vision, two and five years out.

The Forum might be comprised of leaders from ALA, AAP, and AAUP; from the information distribution community — academic, public library/school, and journal vendors, as well as bibliographic utilities and local systems; from the library community — university, school, and public librarians, and *Library Journal*.

The initial session could set the agenda and member transition policy; meetings could be held once every two months. The agenda would focus on

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setting new goals to bring us all more closely together:

- Libraries as America's premier information and service organization.
- Communication and Partnering.
- Ethics.
- Total Quality Management (Publisher, Vendor, Library).
- Expansion of partnering to involve big business leaders, such as Jack Welch, and small business leaders in every community in literacy and education.

In a recent message to colleagues, Patricia Glass Schuman, President,

ALA, said: "We can marshal our forces to insist that libraries and librarians are essential for a literate and informed citizenry." Vision will be necessary to achieve this objective and goal setting should involve a community effort that begins today.

Horace (65 B.C. - 8 B.C.) was one of the greatest Roman poets. The translation of "carpe diem"—ode I, 11—that I have before me reads "take the present" rather than the more popular "seize the day." Either translation is good advice and while the ode may seem to exhort us to ignore the future, it is important to remember that if we take today, day in and day out, we take the future!

*Leucon, no one's allowed to know his fate,
Not you, not me: don't ask,
don't hunt for answers
In tea leaves or palms. Be
patient with whatever comes.
This could be our last winter,
it could be many
More, pounding the Tuscan
Sea on these rocks:
Do what you must, be wise,
cut your vines*

*And forget about hope. Time goes running, even
As we talk. Take the present, the future's no one's affair.⁴*

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1. Hein, Jon & John Martin, "Supplier Partnering and the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award: A Guideline for Bilateral Relationships," *The Partnership News* (American Society for Quality Control), Vol. 2, No. 2, August 1991, p. 6.

2. Shirk, Gary M., "The Wondrous Web: Reflections on Library Acquisitions and Vendor Relationships," in *Vendors and Library Acquisitions*, ed. by Bill Katz. Haworth Press (*The Acquisitions Librarian*, #5), 1991, p. 1.

3. Gherman, Paul M., "Setting Budgets for Libraries in Electronic Era," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, August 14, 1991, p. A36.

4. Horace, Ode I, 11, in *The Essential Horace: Odes, Epodes, Satires, and Epistles*, transl. by Burton Raffel. North Point Press, 1983, p. 12.

graph 3