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## Off the Wall/ Words

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*Against the Grain*

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# Off the Wall

From Your Editor



General sound offs about things that impact our world of librarianship. From your Editor. This one is about an important part of communication. Words.

## Words

How does a new word or expression get started? I was listening to my nine-year-old daughter the other day talking to a girl friend in the back seat of our car (a frequent way to eavesdrop on the conversations of the young and the restless). They kept saying words like “not” and “psych” (pronounced “sa-i-e-k in three syllables). It seemed to be shorthand for saying: “I don’t agree with what you’re saying.” As in — “Are you going to let me eat dessert when I didn’t eat all my vegetables?” My response would be “not,” or alternatively “psych.”

Be that as it may, words seem to be created by people of all ages. And for all kinds of reasons. So, don’t worry about making a word up — the key to it is to pick a word to make up that will catch on — sort of like publishing a bestseller. You have to understand the yin and yang of the experience.

But what I want to complain about is certain words that seem to have crept into our vocabulary.

For example, the word **empowered**. I decided I loved Clifford Lynch when he spoke at the Charleston Conference last year and admitted in public something I would have never had the nerve to do — that he hated the word “empowered.” At the time I didn’t applaud him or anything, but I did make a mental note that at least there was one person who agreed with me. And who had a lot more nerve than I did to admit his dislike in public. Don’t get me wrong. There’s nothing wrong with power or empower and whatever it embodies. It’s just not a word that sounds like something that it’s good to have. Empowered sounds like underhanded power. Okay. Sorry if you don’t agree with me.

Next, I hate the new word “**downsizing**.” What the heck does it mean? Who dragged it into our vocabu-

lary? When a company is “downsizing” it is getting rid of people. Using that word is sort of like putting chocolate icing over a mud pie. Who wants to go around saying “I was downsized today”?

And how about “**liaised**” or “**interneted**” or “**bitneted**.” These are words that have identity crises. They once were nouns. And now they are trying to become verbs. Give me a break.

Though I was empowered by bitnetting you today, I found myself downsized before I knew what hit me.

## Letters to the Editor

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written on the script before them. A couple of years ago I was invited by accident to a party given for the direct sales reps for one of the large publishers. There were 30 or 40 people present and I did quite a bit of questioning. My conclusion was that the combined book knowledge of this group was less than the wastebasket emptier at any of the jobbing companies I am familiar with.

So there is no threat for your life. But I hope that I have again helped you in trying to figure out the complexities of library-vendor relations.

I have just finished reviewing the April edition of *ATG* and have come across your complaint about publishers asking for a customer number. I agree with you wholeheartedly: I never give them a customer number even if I happen to know it, and I maintain that I am placing an order and it is their business to find out my number if it is so important to their system. Sometimes I get real sarcastic and mention that I deal with over 30,000 publishers and who in the “blankety-blank do they think they are” that I should have their number at the tip of my tongue. I do, however, volunteer my zip code or the zip code of the client for whom I am calling. This will invariably satisfy the

What language are we talking anyway? No wonder we have trouble communicating! And no wonder publishers, vendors, and librarians don’t know whether they are partners or cooperators. It’s all a matter of language.

Our world is about communication. I guess we have to keep up. Still, I’m old fashioned enough that I don’t like these weird words creeping into our vocabulary. They just muddy the waters of communication.

There. I got that all off my chest. And this is *Against the Grain*, isn’t it?

question of the boob on the other end of the line.

Of course, I can’t write this much without a short lecture: why don’t you order from your jobber? I’m sure none of the jobbers ask you for a customer number and if you ask for a “Rush,” you will probably get the book as quickly, and with much less hassle, than if you order from the publisher.

With best regards,  
Lyman W. Newlin  
(Book Trade Counsellor)

## Deadlines

Look, we have to establish deadlines, right? Still, send us what you have, regardless of the deadline. It seems like *Against the Grain* is always in production.

The next issue (November 1992) is the Charleston Conference issue and the deadline is October 5. Some of the other deadlines are listed below.

February 1993  
January 15

April 1993  
March 15