February 1993

Off the Wall/ Buy it or Return it

Katina Strauch
Against the Grain

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg>

Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Strauch, Katina (1993) "Off the Wall/ Buy it or Return it," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 5: Iss. 1, Article 15.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.1316>

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

Off the Wall

From Your Editor

Of course we will accept guest "off the walls." I can't wait . . .

Do We Need to Return What Ain't Bought? Buy it or Return it

(A Corollary to Beverly Cleary's
"eat it or wear it")

The other day, our library got a serial from a well-known publishing company.

At the same time, and under separate cover, the library also got an invoice from the publishing company. This is familiar, right? You order something, you have to pay for it. This is SOP (standard operating procedure).

Except, we did not order the item.

The item was an annual volume — new and improved and updated — of the same thing that we had bought last year. So of course we want it. Right? After all, if you bought this last year and if there is a this-year update you will have out of date information and is this good for your patrons? Of course you need the new and improved edition of this wonderful item.

This is a legitimate question. But, hey, I can't buy a 1993 Jaguar just because it is newer and better than my 1992 Jaguar (I thought that would get your attention. No, I do NOT own a Jaguar.)

Let's get back to the invoice. This item is not cheap. It is in the three-figure category (like most of our salaries). We cannot afford to buy the thing this year. Our information will just have to be ... well ... dated.

After long experience, we know that we need permission to return the item. Permission gives us the right to know the right address to which to return the item. And, if you don't have the right address, you may be dogged by this invoice for something that you didn't order for a long time. Collection agents and — the lord forbid — lawyers — may be called in. Threats, accusations, recriminations. This is for afternoon soap operas not the normal library SOP, but we have been there. Stories abound.

So, my assistant calls the publisher. Please, Ms. Publisher, ma'am, we didn't order this book and we want to return it

as quickly and inexpensively and painlessly as possible.

In our tough business market, calling the publisher (or any company for that matter) these days isn't as simple as one might suppose. Instead, there is the 800 number. In theory the 800 number is good because the call doesn't cost you money. But a lot of other people have the same idea and so when you call an 800 number you run into the fact that the publisher/company, etc. has allowed for the fact that there is going to be a lot of traffic on the line.

Enter the computer. The computer is a slam-dunk. The computer will be able to answer your question. Just enter the right number choice on your fantastic touch tone phone. If you don't have such a phone, wait for the operator. (Have a sleeping bag by your phone.)

This is nice. This is cool. This is "dude-ical" (i.e. typical for, characteristic of, or pertaining to a radical/dude) as my ten-year-old daughter tells me. Also, it is the nineties, not the seventies. She says that one a lot.

Except that none of the choices match my particular situation. Heaven forbid that someone comes into my office and says ANYTHING to me to obscure my hearing the choices. Plus, I need a pen and notepad near the phone so that I can keep all of the choices straight. Some of

them want you to press the "pound sign" before the number and others want you to press the "asterisk" before the number (or is it after the number?) and some just want you to press the number by itself and unencumbered. Where are ANSI and SISAC and BISAC when we need them?

Maybe, just maybe, you will be able to punch in an appropriate choice, and maybe, just maybe, you will be connected to a living breathing human organism.

But don't count on it.

Chances are you will be patched back to the computer to try one more time so this time, do it right, stupid! I call it revenge of the computer.

All of this happened to my poor assistant, the prince of patience. At the end of a long day, he came into my office looking frustrated.

"They need our customer number to talk to us," he said. "And I can't find it anywhere. I'll look for it tomorrow. I'm going to pick the kids up from school now. I have a headache."

So, why do we have to put up with this? Why do we get new volumes of something this year just because we ordered it last year? Don't call us; we'll call you. Wait a minute, we'll write you. In black and white. Wait and see.

Headaches make the world go round.☹

For Your Information

ATG contributor **Mark Sexton** proudly reports that his son **Adam** has recently broken into print with a trade book on America's number one cultural phenomenon — Madonna.

While librarians have been wrestling with the ethical and practical problems of adding Madonna's *Sex* to their collections, her effect on American popular culture has been analyzed from every conceivable angle by the nation's press and by numerous scholars in the academic world. What does it all mean? Adam Sexton's new book attempts to make sense out of the conflicting strains of thought. *Desperately Seeking Madonna: In Search of the Meaning of the World's Most Famous Woman* has just been released by Dell Publishing.

The illustrated paperback is a collection of essays, cartoons and other materials from such diverse sources as *The New Republic*, *Rolling Stone*, *America*, *Boston Phoenix* and *The New Yorker*. It has already been reviewed by *Booklist* and *Publishers Weekly* and Adam was interviewed recently on NBC's Good Morning, New York. He and his publishers expect the book to sell to a diverse audience and to be required reading for college courses in women's studies, popular culture, and others.

The young author/editor, formerly a rock music critic, was a Benjamin Franklin Scholar at the University of Pennsylvania and is currently completing a master's in the creative writing program of Columbia.☹