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Group Therapy / Junk Mail

Rosann Bazirjian
Syracuse University

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Group Therapy

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

If Mike Royko can do it, we can too!!! Hey y'all out there! Do you have any gripes or what? So . . . everything perfect? If so, tell us about it. Try LIBRVB@SUV.M.bitnet or FAX (315) 443-9510.

GRYPE:

(Gripe Submitted by **Marsha Clark**, New York Academy of Medicine)

Why do libraries, especially acquisitions departments, get so much junk mail every day? We get multiple copies of advertisements, each with a slightly different address such as Library Acquisitions Department, Acquisitions Department/Library, etc. We get "renewal invoices" for titles which we never held or canceled years ago. Some of the mail is obvious, such as advertisements which we can put aside for selectors to peruse; although it bothers me to see so much waste of paper and postage when we get three to five copies of the same thing. Other mail looks legitimate, like the renewal invoices, and we spend time investigating whether they really require payment or not. Some things have nothing to do with libraries and perhaps are a result of our name being sold as part of a mailing list. Is there anything we can do to reduce the amount of junk mail we get?

VENDOR RESPONSE:

Submitted by **Sandy Gurshman** (Manager, Publisher Services, Readmore)

"Junk Mail" is in the eye (and on the desk) of the beholder. As a vendor who is on many of the same mailing lists as librarians, I can certainly empathize with the frustration of dealing with an ever-increasing volume of mail with no increase in available staff time.

Publishers understand that librarians resist telemarketing and that they have limited time to meet with publisher representatives. Direct mail has thus become the vehicle of choice to present their new and existing products to librarians for consideration. Is there a better way? This might be a good topic for the ALA Acquisitions Librarians/Vendors of Library Materials Discussion Group.

I suspect that very little of this mail is coming from subscription agents or

book jobbers, who tend to focus mailings on known and detailed profiles of the libraries we service. Most of our mailings are account-specific reports of activity or information about titles already ordered. Most vendors also produce annual catalogs, newsletters about their internal operations and industry trends, and monthly or quarterly compilations of information on a range of titles.

Constructing a mailing list with no duplication is extremely difficult, even with the most sophisticated programs, and it may cost less to send multiple copies of marketing pieces and product announcements than to purge the list. Sometimes, reports of the duplication - with samples of the labels - may help the sender clean up the database. Frequently, however, either no action is taken, or the report itself creates yet another entry.

Publishers have established systems to avoid lapses in subscriptions. Readmore, and other agents, have worked with publishers to refine these procedures. We have been successful in persuading a number of major publishers not to send early renewal notices to libraries who order through us; instead, the publishers will send the notice only after they have received the bulk of renewals from us. We encourage them to send the notice to us rather than to the library so we can check the status of the renewal.

Multiple renewal notices may result if libraries switch orders from one agent to another, or if they change from direct order to ordering through an agent. If the ordering information on the "new" order is not exactly the same as on the "old" order, the publisher's system may place the new order without referencing the old. Then renewal notices will continue to be sent on the "old" order (possibly forever), even though the new order has been placed and paid. To avoid this problem, agencies are very careful to reference any change in the order, no matter how slight the difference, so that the publisher can link the old and new orders.

Of course, these procedures are more successful when the same agency is involved in the new and old orders, or when the library furnishes address information in exactly the same format each year. If a publisher has assigned a specific subscription identification number or code, Readmore and other agencies will attach that code to the renewal so that the publisher's system doesn't treat the renewal as a new order.

"Renewal notices" and "invoices" for titles the library doesn't recognize present difficult problems, since they require research just to determine whether they represent title changes, publisher changes, or should not be paid. An occasional such invoice may be a fluke; repeated invoicing of this type warrants a call or letter to the publisher. Also, agents may be able to intervene with publishers to avoid these mailings if we are made aware of them.

For mail that is truly irrelevant, the same remedies are available as for junk mail received at home: a letter requesting removal from the list to: Mail Preference Service, Direct Marketing Assn., P.O. Box 9008, Farmingdale, NY 11735. This is supposed to work, but an active recycling program may be the only answer to the flood of paper.

PUBLISHER RESPONSE:

Submitted by **John Tagler** (Director, Corporate Communications, Elsevier Science Publishing Group)

The notion of "junk mail" is as disagreeable to publishers as to librarians. Promotion and marketing people try to ensure that our mailing lists are as clean, cost-effective and efficient as possible — at least we assure our managements that is the case. Librarians' complaints about junk mail are well founded; they just apply to other pub-

lishers' mailings and not our own.

Under the theory that one person's meat is another's poison, it is often difficult to determine what will be deemed junk mail in any particular library setting. In the absence of a consensus, direct mail managers probably err on the side of amplitude when selecting a mailing list.

Ms. Clark's concerns focus on two particular areas: (1) receipt of multiple copies of the same piece and (2) receipt of invalid renewal notices. Both deserve consideration, although the former is more commonly noted by librarians.

It is in everyone's interest to reduce or eliminate multiple copies to the same address but it is not so easily resolved. In recent years, strides have been made because of several factors: (1) rapidly rising printing and mailing costs have been a real incentive to reduce mailings to a minimum, (2) automation has continued to improve the ability to merge lists and purge duplicate addresses and (3) the introduction of a standard (the SAN) has provided guidelines, although adherence to such

standards is voluntary and far from widespread. And still librarians complain about receiving duplicate brochures.

Part of this is attributable to the seemingly endless ways in which libraries are organized and the variety of functions assigned to librarians' titles. From one institution to the next, relationships vary between central libraries and departmental, satellite or special library collections. The situation becomes no clearer as one consults directories, subscription files or mailing lists which carry slight address variations. Also, one list may identify an institution's libraries by their proper names while another list may simply designate "library". This is compounded by the use of street addresses in some cases and box numbers in others, with both usually having different zip codes. Uncertain that any two addresses are identical, the tendency is to be as comprehensive as possible.

Beyond the veracity of an address, it is desirable to target someone in a specific function to receive a mailing — what is called a slug line in direct

mail. Who really makes the decision? From one institution to the next, librarians within any of the following departments can carry selection or ordering responsibility: acquisitions, collection development, technical services, bibliographers, serials, reference and, of course, the director. Rather than miss your key decision-maker, once again the inclination is to be inclusive.

Most direct mail campaigns use several lists and this exacerbates the problem. Many publishers maintain their own mailing lists and it is to their advantage to maintain clean lists. Thus, a librarian's letter to a named individual in the marketing department should succeed in correcting errors on the in-house list. Copies of the various address labels involved should be included with indication of which addresses are correct and which to eliminate.

This technique will only succeed for in-house lists. In all likelihood the publisher's list is supplemented with an exchanged list of society members

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called list brokers or list suppliers. List brokers buy and sell unannotated lists to the direct mail industry. List compilers, such as Dun and Bradstreet, sell telemarketers lists with profiles. In our end of the spectrum, trade magazines and organizational membership lists (AALL, ALA, SLA) are excellent sources of telemarketing lists.

In terms of sales approaches, there are two types employed by almost all telemarketers. The "total control" approach is based on the objective of maximum calls at the lowest cost. This approach is used with cold prospects and has developed into those annoying calls you receive in the evening. Companies have resorted to computer generated calls and a new method called predictive dialing. Predictive dialing uses a computer to select and dial the number for the prospective customer. At that point, a telemarketer picks up the call and the sales approach begins. If the telemarketer does not pick up the call, the caller is left with a period of silence before the computer abandons the call.

In marketing to libraries, the dialogue approach is employed to focus on two-

way communication between the prospect and telemarketer. This is the approach employed when selling any complex product, such as a set of law books. While the total control approach uses a highly scripted format, the dialogue approach employs a skeletal script and relies on the expertise of the telemarketer to establish a relationship with the customer.

A good telemarketer scripts every phase of the call from introduction to the closing and reassurance phase. At the point where objections occur, the telemarketer develops a common objection file based on all perceived objections. This is why telemarketers always seem to have a response to your objections.

There are three basic responses that are effective in controlling the volume of telemarketing calls. First, simply do not purchase anything by telemarketing. If you are interested in a title, request a brochure and generate a firm order. Secondly, do not accept anything on approval. The approval shipment approach harkens back to a basic sales principle that says: "If you can get it into their hands, it's three-quarters sold." This marketing strategy knows that you are busy, often harried in your daily work. The whole process of repackaging and

returning approval items within the time period specified can and does cause an item to be accepted. The vendor also hopes the customer will find the title useful and decide to accept it. Either way, it is a matter of numbers, which means that enough approval titles are kept as opposed to those returned to make the approval strategy a profitable venture.

One final step in dealing with frequent telemarketing calls is to request that your name be removed from a publisher's telemarketing list. This request can, however, result in your name simply being moved to the cold prospect or optional call list, meaning that you could occasionally still receive calls.

Additionally, you should remember that a telemarketer may fail to mention discounts to which you are entitled whereas, a sales representative will offer them as a matter of course.

This brief overview only scratches the surface of this complex industry. Many librarians find that telemarketing provides them a quick and easy method of acquiring new titles. Whether you view telemarketing as a convenience or a nuisance, it will remain an effective method of product promotion for many years to come. ☞

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or conference attendees or any variety of rented lists that are available. Often rented lists may not be seen by the renter and the brochures are mailed via a third-party mailing house designated by the list's owner.

Many of the small, specialized lists used for scholarly or scientific promotions are available in print rather than electronic form, and it becomes more time-consuming and expensive to manually compare and weed several lists than to mail to everyone, even allowing for some duplication. In contrast, there is a highly automated merge/purge function for lists in areas where list rental is big business (e.g., credit card companies or consumer magazine subscribers), but given the variations in institutional addresses even these lists fail to identify many valid matches due to variations in address structures.

Direct mail is a specialty all its own. There are even gurus who may be consulted to develop a strategy for a single campaign. Publishers and their marketers are serious about making the system run as efficiently as possible and if librarians can understand the factors involved, perhaps they can offer constructive advice on how to target their libraries.

Ms. Clark's second point about unwanted invoices is perplexing. First of all, a document may not be called an "invoice" unless it is in response to some type of direct solicitation from the customer. There are strict federal trade laws regulating this. The items may be labeled "notice" or the like but this vague identification should alert librarians to the level of urgency.

Reputable publishers, in my experience, are conscientious about having a formal renewal schedule. At Elsevier, we suppress several renewal notices for libraries subscribing through a subscription agent. A notice is sent to the ship-to address only after the subscription has expired for about ten weeks (mid-March in most cases) and if we have received no official advice to cancel the title. We send two follow-up notifications but at that point the subscription remains dormant and is purged from the fulfillment files after two years.

Libraries with direct subscriptions will receive several notices during the fall renewal season, but notices for unrenewed, uncanceled titles should not stretch much past spring.

Some publishers attach invoice-like notices to sample copies to facilitate ordering, but even within companies that use this technique there is controversy about the practice. It is a successful marketing technique that is probably more

effective with individual subscribers than with institutions.

Misleading the customer is never to anyone's benefit and reputable publishers should not — and in most cases do not — send bogus invoices to dupe libraries into subscribing to journals. There's little to be gained in the long term. If a librarian feels that deceptive practices are being used, then they have every reason to cry "foul play" and a strong letter to senior management with accompanying documentation is a decisive step toward thwarting bad practices ☞

Request for Information

This is a request for help from any readers of *ATG* who can supply information about the history of purchasing books (but not excluding periodicals), by academic libraries.

I have been asked to write an article for a forthcoming encyclopedia on publishing. My subject is "the history of book marketing to academic/scholarly libraries".

I would welcome bibliographies of books and periodicals [or articles] that in any way shed light on the history of the way academic libraries purchased materials, especially from an historical standpoint. Having been in this business for over half of the current century, I am particularly interested in the history of library book buying in the nineteenth and preceding centuries. I will welcome all information and will certainly acknowledge source of same in my article.

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Lyman Newlin
P.O. Box 278
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