September 1993

Mourning Serial / Service Charges

Phil Greene
EBSCO

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

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

Recommended Citation

Greene, Phil (1993) "Mourning Serial / Service Charges," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 5: Iss. 4, Article 8.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.1401>

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.

have no money for them. We are working with the Lenin Library to help them acquire some books as well.

Q: Are you a lawyer?

A: No. I am an engineer by qualification. I have managed several companies in Europe and in England. I was also a management consultant with KPMG Peat Marwick and specialize in work with companies with problems. I was called in to help Collets about 12

months ago and fell in love with the company and the people. After all, business is business regardless of the company.

Q: Do you travel to these countries each year?

A: Yes. I travel an average of ten to twelve days per month throughout Eastern Europe and in the next few months I am going to Russia, Rumania, and Slovakia.

Q: Do you plan to come to the U.S.?

A: Yes. I am planning to come to find new outlets for books, recruit a U.S. representative, and to attend the Charleston Conference in November.

Q: Have you been to the States before?

A: No and I am really looking forward to it. I am very excited about meeting the people and seeing the country. ☺

Mourning Serial

Column Editor, **Phil Greene** (EBSCO)

For columns or ideas contact your editor or PGreene@EBSCO.com.

A Service Charge is a Service Charge is a Service Charge

It is renewal time again, when serials librarians are faced with myriad important decisions - what to cut, what to keep and what to order from whom. It is the latter decision I would like to address.

When making the decision about which agency to use, the service charge is certainly a primary concern of most librarians. However, the complexities of a service charge are sometimes not fully understood. This has recently become evident in a situation where some libraries, when approached to do so, are splitting selected European titles from their main subscription list (usually ordered through one vendor) and giving them to another vendor — a “specialty” vendor — who has offered to handle them free of a service charge. In some cases, libraries are shifting “selected” titles from their subscription agent to direct ordering from the publishers. While this seems initially like a frugal and attractive option, it may cost the library more money and a loss of efficiency in the long run.

To make my point, a discussion of service charge assessment is in order. Most major U.S. subscription agencies assess library service charges according to the mix of titles on the library's list. The “mix” can be loosely defined as the

ratio of low-maintenance titles to high-maintenance titles from the agency's standpoint. For practical reasons, the agency assesses a higher service charge to titles which are more difficult to handle. Commonly, these are titles from publishers who cannot accept electronic orders, titles which are infrequently published or frequently delayed (i.e. often claimed) or from publishers who are generally unorganized or difficult for the agency to work with.

Conversely, a smaller service charge, or sometimes a discount, is often required for low-maintenance titles. Traditionally, these titles are produced by a handful of major European publishers that are more organized, can accept electronic orders and claims, publish journals on schedule (requiring fewer claims) and provide a discount to the subscription agent. So, the total service charge for the low-maintenance titles — even if they include only a small portion of the total number of subscriptions — may offset the service charge for the high-maintenance titles.

It is for this reason one must carefully consider giving European journals to a vendor that may offer to handle them at “no service charge.” Doing this may force the primary vendor to raise the charge on the remaining list, since it would then consist of primarily high-maintenance titles — many in number yet more diffi-

cult to handle. The service charge rises because the less problematic European journals are not on the list to offset the cost of handling the others.

Additionally, splitting titles like this makes it more difficult for the library to analyze the collection as the library is forced to look at the collection in parts instead of as a whole. Collection development decisions become more cumbersome. Additionally, electronic management services such as invoice downloading and on-line ordering and claiming will involve several steps instead of one — so you may lose efficiency.

Another question to ask is “does the specialty vendor offer any value-added services or even full service for that small group of titles? Would that vendor take your other more troublesome titles if you asked and give the same service and price as your primary vendor?”

You will do yourself and your library a long-term favor if you discuss the possible shifting of these titles with your primary vendor before you make a final decision. Ask what will happen to your service charge if you delete these titles from your list and what your current, effective service charge for those titles is. This will help you make a better informed decision. ☺