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Group Therapy / Book Costs

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Group Therapy

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

Hey y'all out there! Do you have any gripes or what?

So . . . everything perfect? If so, tell us about it. Try LIBRVB@SUVM.bitnet or FAX (315) 443-9510.

You will remember in the last issue of *ATG* (September, v.5#4), there was a gripe submitted by **Marlene Barnola** (College of Charleston) about prices which are not listed in *Books in Print*. We have received the following response from Baker & Taylor —

VENDOR RESPONSE to Gripe Submitted by Marlene Barnola

Submitted by **Wendell Lotz**, Vice President, Product Development, Baker & Taylor Books

The B&T Link family of products offers a number of solutions to the dilemma of not knowing a price before placing an order. *The Title Source*, a CD-ROM database of over 1.5 million titles, contains pricing data up-to-the-day prior to the date each monthly disc is mastered. Because the database is de-

rived from Baker & Taylor's business file, it reflects the price we last paid to the publisher. Since publishers will always invoice with their latest price, prices on *The Title Source* reflect the latest prices available from the publisher and it is not necessary to count on the cooperation required in EDI transfer procedures.

Baker & Taylor purchases in advance of publication over 60,000 titles annually, including titles for its Approval Program. For these titles, prices are obtained before the purchase order is placed and are immediately added to the database. If for any reason we cannot locate a price, we will provide an estimated price based upon our previous experience with the publisher, binding, and subject area.

For textbook and net price publishers Baker & Taylor works with the publisher to determine a suggested list price. Similar to many retail items in other in-

dustries, although the reseller is free to sell at a price of its choosing, the manufacturer has a list price in mind when determining the net price.

Finally if prices updated monthly are not satisfactory, B&T Link, Module 1 (ordering software) includes an Inquiry Only function allowing a library to query the Baker & Taylor database via an 800 phone line and receive back the latest price on our database within five minutes.

And here is our new gripe for this issue —

GRIPE:

Submitted by **Dottie Marcinko**, Head, Acquisitions, Auburn University

My gripe is about the cost of books.

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While we can't complain as vigorously about monographs as we have about serials, it's still a problem. The increase in the cost of books in the last ten or twelve years has far outstripped inflation. I don't want a scholarly answer or a three-page response, but does the fact that the publishing industry has not moved offshore, as have our basic manufacturing industries, account for the difference in the rate of increased cost of books compared to the other items I purchase on a regular basis? Toasters are cheaper than ever but the basic paperback book is now six or seven dollars.

VENDOR RESPONSE:

Submitted by **John Smith**, President, Total Information

Here at Total Information we've recently tried to understand the same phenomena. Over the years we've always measured our productivity by the standard of gross sales per employee. This number has gone up over the years quite impressively. However when we try to measure the actual units sold per employee there is a much smaller advance in improvement. Our costs of delivering the average book to a customer have risen along with the price of the average book.

I believe the reasons are the same for the price increase of books and lack of achievement in unit productivity in the jobbing industry. Books, which quickly go out of date or out of print, are intellectual products produced in very small quantities by thousands of publishers, ordered one at a time by customers.

Except in the case of gigantic bestsellers (selling over 1,000,000 copies) there is little economy of scale available to the publisher. Almost all the cost of producing a book is intellectual (authoring, editing, design, marketing, advertising, sales) or distribution (shipping, wholesale markup, retail markup). I am sure that the average library spends far more money processing the average book (from selection to shelving) today than it did in the past. (Try dividing the budget of the Technical Services department by the number of books processed for your own cost.)

Of course if any consumer believes a toaster is too expensive he has the right to buy a competing toaster that is priced more to his liking. If, however, a consumer believes a book is overpriced, he

has the choice not to buy it, and go without.

These twin engines of high intangible input and monopoly pricing guarantee that books will continue to out-pace the consumer price index.

PUBLISHER RESPONSE:

Submitted by **Donald O'Connor**, Library Sales and Promotions Manager, Routledge, Chapman, Hall

Read any good toasters lately?

There may be a small savings in having books typeset offshore, but that accounts for a very small portion of the costs involved in producing books. Rents, salaries, promotion and advertising, royalties and either profit or surplus, are all taken into account when a book is priced. Publishing is labor intensive, involving many people editing and checking copy, a process that is not easily automated, as you know if you have used a spell-checker on your word processor. A slight decrease in the cost of manufacturing would not have a drastic effect on the list price, if rents and salaries and advertis-

ing costs are increasing.

Probably the greatest single factor that influences the higher cost of books to libraries are declining print runs of monographs. Routledge currently prints about one-third fewer monographs on an initial print run than we did, say, three or four years ago. But again, all the fixed costs are apportioned equally to a smaller number of books, thereby increasing the cost of each book. When we do see potential in other markets for sales, we print more books and are able to price downwards.

Libraries have always been our biggest market, and we are keenly aware of the pricing issues. Our pricing on domestic books are average and prices on books that we import from our London office have actually decreased by almost 15% in the past year in response to librarians' concerns about prices.

We know all publishers want to keep prices within the reach of their customers and new technologies may help bring prices down. We are looking at ways to make short runs of monographs more economical and pass the savings on to libraries. ☺

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