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Group Therapy / Status Reports

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Group Therapy

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

*Hey y'all out there! Do you have any gripes?
Come to your therapist! Try
rvbazirj@hawk.syr.edu or FAX (315) 443-9510.*

TWO GRIPES:

Submitted by **Ann Waligorski**, University of Arkansas

Before ordering, my staff checks BIP+ to confirm price and availability. The books are available. Off they go to the vendor who, some time later, reports that the books are out of print or out of stock indefinitely. So we call the publisher and the book is in print and available (or maybe it is OP or OS). The vendors and the publishers are big-time businesses with national/international markets. So what's going on?

Submitted by **Barbara Dean**, Fairfax County Public Library

When we receive a status report of out-of-print on a title ordered from a vendor, our practice is to check the status with the publisher. If the publisher reports the title in print, we send them an order, and subsequently receive the title. We prefer ordering from vendors because of the economy of scale, level of service and discount rate. We don't like re-ordering a title from another source because of the added work, added cost and delay in receipt. Why do vendors think titles are out-of-print when they are not? Do publishers send inaccurate reports to vendors?

PUBLISHER RESPONSE:

Submitted by **Linda Larrabee**, Sales and Promotion Manager, Lynne Rienner Publishers

This question will undoubtedly start a lot of finger pointing, and it is puzzling indeed.

We can imagine a number of reasons why you're getting contradictory information (though we would agree that none of them is a good reason!):

1. Vendor error. Given the number

of titles a vendor handles, the occasional mistake is to be expected. But if problems occur with frequency, it may be time to formally evaluate the service being provided.

2. Publisher error. Please let the publisher in question know that you and your vendor are receiving contradictory information. A responsible publisher will make every effort to find the source of the problem and make any changes necessary to correct it.
3. Misunderstanding. For example, the publisher says "out of stock", the vendor hears "out of print"; or you give your vendor an incomplete or inaccurate book title and/or the vendor does the same to the publisher, causing the publisher to report back to the vendor regarding the wrong book.
4. Hardcover vs. paperback availability. Perhaps you ordered a hardcover, which we reported as "out of print with paperback available". How does your vendor report this to you? (Note: At LRP, if we publish a book in both hardcover and paperback editions, the paperback will typically stay in print much longer than the hardcover).

OR...everyone is right! Perhaps you ordered a book toward the end of its life cycle (BIP takes about six months to report), and the vendor was notified that it was "out of stock indefinitely". Then, between the time the vendor reported back to you and you ordered directly, someone returned a copy of the book to the publisher, who was thus able to fill your order. It happens frequently.

The bottom line: both selfishly and because we want to provide the books you want, we are glad to know that you follow up on "out of print" reports; we

share your frustration with this seemingly unnecessary problem; and it is clearly in the interests of vendors and publishers to do whatever is possible to eliminate the problem!

VENDOR RESPONSE:

Submitted by **Forrest Link**, Northeastern Regional Manager, Midwest Library Service

The problem of questionable publisher generated reporting is really neither new nor much worse that it has ever been. Changes in acquisitions departments, however, have recently begun to highlight this chronic gripe. The library budget-cutters have squeezed materials funding as far as they could, and now political pressures have forced them to shift their sights to staff costs. Libraries which formerly viewed the handling of inaccurate or misleading reporting, particularly OP and OSI reporting, as a minor annoyance, (or as a significant part of the clerical staff's job description), now simply haven't the bodies to do the job. The growing level of frustration we see here reflects an increasing dependency on the added-value services of vendors as acquisitions staff shrink.

So what's going on?

Most publishers are genuinely interested in selling their books and providing accurate information on their availability. Unfortunately, there are human factors involved and publishers do send inaccurate reports to vendors. This is because some publishers' computerized inventory systems may not be updated as regularly as needed or sometimes errors are made in interpreting the information in these systems. Sometimes a title change caused misunderstanding. Errors also occur when workers in publisher warehouses cannot physically locate a title on a pick list and issue an OP or OSI report. Smaller, mom-and-pop publishers often lack the resources to provide timely or accurate reporting.

Company Profile

Dawson

William Dawson and John Bumpus set up businesses in London some 200 years ago, John as publisher and bookseller in Clerkenwell and William as news agent and bookseller in Cannon Street. Both grew rapidly and opened additional business premises, first in London, then in the provinces and later overseas. Dawson developed subscription, back issue, antiquarian and publishing services and exported books and journals to all parts of the world. Dawson France was established in the 1920's and survived the turbulence of 1939-1945 to become one of the major subscription players in the French-speaking market.

Dawson UK's London premises suffered bomb damage during the Blitz and the company moved to Folkestone in the 1960's in order to bring together the subscriptions and back issues activities under one roof. Acquisitions during the 1970's and 1980's (Stevens & Brown, Seabrook and Alan Armstrong) extended book business, while activity in the USA received a boost with the acquisition of the McGregor Subscription Service and Quality Books, the leading USA small press distributor. Overseas business was further strengthened with the introduction of the Consolidated Air Freight Service in the early 80's and the appointment of agents at strategic points around the world.

Meanwhile, the Bumpus story showed similar development, one of steady growth and change. Bought in 1986 by **Robert Maxwell**, the business was sub-

sequently combined with Haldane's library supply business. Maxwell's involvement in publishing and distribution enabled him to create Bumpus, Haldane & Maxwell, set up in 1970. BH & M remained a private company within the Maxwell organization until 1986 but subsequently became part of Pergamon PLC. The business was acquired by Dawson in March 1991.

Since then, Dawson have consolidated the business, with the subscription and back issue activities located in Folkestone and book supply in Wellingborough, in new premises replacing the old factory building in Olney. The company's Library Services Group is divided into three Divisions: Subscriptions, Books and Technology, the latter emerging in the mid-80's as a supplier of PC-based library management systems, later to be consolidated under the OASIS banner. The combined customer base now runs into many thousands of libraries and information centres in the UK and overseas. The main volume of business is in the subscription sector but book supply has grown steadily in importance. A significant part of turnover comes from export sales, much of it in the wider Europe and the United States.

Dawson have continued to invest heavily in in-house automation. New systems based on the IBM AS/400 are replacing those on the existing 38 and Unisys platforms. These new company-

wide systems have greater flexibility, capacity and sophistication and will offer staff and customers alike improved performance allied with wider customer choice.

The diversity of Dawson is illustrated by reference to other companies within the Group, namely:

Dawson Advertising Ltd., an international advertising agency; Reward Regional Surveys Ltd., producing economic and remuneration surveys frequently reported in all branches of the media, and Training Information Network Ltd., publishers of expert and highly acclaimed products such as *IT Training Journal*, *Management Training Journal*, *Directory of Training*, etc.

Dawson, with its motto "International Network for the Information World" aims to provide the best solutions for those involved in information management. Dawson view the future with a confidence based on a long history of service to customers, accumulated expertise and high investment in new technology. The Group continues to address the many changes taking place in the world of information, not least the impact of electronic storage and delivery, and looks forward in proactive style to a third century of dedicated service. ☛

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Vendors have adopted various strategies to deal with these problems. Some generate reports from their own computerized database of titles they have in inventory or have handled. At Midwest, we have determined that the best way to maximize fulfillment is to routinely question publisher reports of unavailability. We visually review publisher OP and

OSI reports and frequently obtain misreported titles by reordering them. This is an expensive and labor intensive process which must be viewed as a value-added service.

Libraries can help, too. It is essential to provide your supplier with complete and correct order information. It is also a good idea to give your vendor some de-

gree of latitude in substituting later editions when applicable. Understand that this problem is not altogether avoidable, but it can be relieved through careful order preparation and vendor selection.

For a look at publishers' reporting of OP, see the Duke University Press OP Survey, this issue, page 56 — KS ☛