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Media Minder

AV Are Challenging to Buy

Column Editor: **Linda F. Crismond** (Vice President for Public Relations, Professional Media Service Corp.)

The acquisitions of audio and video materials present more challenges than the procedures for books and serials. A comprehensive tool to verify price and availability is not widely available, and librarians frequently have to use several specialized sources. Descriptive information about media can be found through sources such as the *Film and Video Finder*, *Video Source Book*, *Schwann*, and *Opus*, and evaluative assessments can be located in tools such as *Gramophone's Good CD Guide* or Roger Ebert's *Movie Home Companion*.

But, these provide only half of the data. What is usually missing is current price information and availability status. Neither of these issues is cut and dried. For books, there is a common list price printed on the product. That is not always the case for AV. Therefore, the basic price for a particular item can vary among vendor, publisher, and distributor catalogs. A video price for a feature film also may change the longer it has been out. Some publishers use a "sell through" technique in which the original release sells for a high price, such as \$94.99. After a few months, they may take it off the market for three to four months, and then re-release it at a much lower \$24.99 price.

The price may also change because the rights have been sold to a different distributor. *On Golden Pond* has carried three different labels and prices since it was first released on video. The James Bond movies were originally released by CBS Fox but now are distributed by MGM, mostly at a lower price.

Like books, AV materials can go out of print, but not necessarily for forever. The equivalent for "out of stock indefinitely" for videos is "on moratorium." Disney is notorious for putting some of its classic favorites on moratorium for the "rest of the century." If you want to buy a copy of *Cinderella*, *Little Mermaid*, or *Sleeping Beauty*, you may have to pay a high price for it at a used video store or risk waiting at least six more years when it may become available again.

Historically, most libraries have pur-

chased their audio and video materials directly from the publisher or distributor. For this reason, when a reviewing source such as *Publishers Weekly* lists AV, they quite often include the address. This is rarely done for book citations.

Many of the small publishers of these materials are ill-equipped to handle the single copy orders coming from libraries. They require payment in advance and don't understand when a library requests public performance rights. They are happy when the product is sold and dismayed when it comes back after the faculty member has rejected the content for his or her class. They are not educated in marketing skills or in sophisticated packaging techniques. For these reasons, AV publishers have partnered with distributors in the production and marketing of their materials and with vendors in the supply of their materials and the provision of value-added services to libraries and book and music stores.

The distribution of a particular label may move from one company to another depending on the length of the publisher's contract and their satisfaction with the marketing services. For example, if you wanted to go direct to the source to buy any product from London Records, Deutsche Grammophon, or Philips, you would now need to contact Polygram. But that has not always been the case.

Wholesalers and jobbers must keep track of the changing distribution channels for thousands of labels in order to fill library orders. The use of a jobber also allows the library to consolidate hundreds of direct orders into one order and fewer invoices and to establish communications with one customer services department. Recently, the value-added services of cataloging and processing and online ordering systems have further streamlined the library's acquisitions and technical services procedures and enhanced the partnership with the jobber.

What happens when the faculty member or patron comes in with a request without a publisher or distributor? There are many variations in AV materials that could cause the acquisitions librarian to

buy the wrong item. For videos, is it the original or a remake, in color, colorized, or black and white? Has it been edited for a television audience? Indeed, does it exist in video format at all, or is it only available in 16mm film, laser disc, or on a film strip?

For audio, there are three format choices: CD, cassette, or vinyl record. Each may include different selections and the quality of the recording may vary. For example, the latest mastering technology for CD's allows for 20-bit recording rather than the earlier 16-bit. The result is music which sounds clearer, with a wider range of high and low notes and less hiss. The quality of the recording, however, does depend on how many generations the recording is away from the original master tape. Fortunately, these new CD's are fully compatible with existing CD players and cost no more than regular CD's.

Other potential sources of confusion include the distinction between abridged and unabridged audio books. Many libraries buy both while others feel strongly that the shortened versions compromise the integrity of the book. "Paperback" audio books were introduced in 1992. They were marketed at around \$4.99. Publishers cut costs by eliminating the protective box and shortening the length to a single cassette called "cassingles." For libraries, the shrink-wrapped treatment make them almost impossible to use in their original packing, and the added repackaging costs negate any purchase price savings.

The conclusion is like the beginning — that AV materials pose special challenges in their acquisitions. Unless considerable staff work is done in the preorder stages, a library may end up buying an expensive item which is not what it requested. Or, it may never find the current distributor. These problems are lessened when a strong partnership

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TEXT. When you get your catalog you will be able to read the excerpt from *Snake* and two (count them) poems from the Ahsakta (it is Mandan for Rocky Mountain Bighorn Sheep) Press: "Kudzu," by Katherine Coles and "The Divide" (about Bozeman) by Sandra Altcosser. There is much more, too. Serendipity to be sure.

My favorite cover, for sentimental reasons, is from the University of California Press catalog for Fall 1993: "Valley Fruit Box Labels, California State Library," from The Great Central Valley. Some of those fruit pickers are returning to Oklahoma. Inside, there are tidbits of trivia or knowledge, depending on the context and company, that grace all such catalogs. I learned, for example, that Nicholas Ray directed *Rebel Without a Cause* and *Johnny Guitar* (I prefer the latter — it did not star James Dean), that Ray's wife, Susan was also his collaborator, and that Ray, who died in 1979, wrote a book called *I Was Interrupted*,

now available from the UC press for \$25.00 cloth.

Short Notes on other Fall 1993 Catalogs

- Fodor's has a book called *Walt Disney World For Adults*. It has been promoted in *Parade*, *Bride's*, *Mature Outlook*, and *Travel Holiday* and makes me glad that I am not an adult but older than 21 and thus ineligible to visit any of the Disney communities.
- Be warned, Villard has yet another Robert Fulghum book coming out but it they are also making the antidote available: Lewis Grizzard's new book called *Pushin' Fifty Is Exercise Enough*.
- Elster Verlag has a series called *Reisefuehrer fuer Frauen* or *Guidebooks For Women*. I don't know when they began but in one brochure Elster

mentions that the Thailand Tourist Bureau proclaimed 1992 the Year of the Woman Traveler (literally "female tourist" from the German Touristinnen. The German word is just fine but it needs softening when translated into English.)

There are guidebooks for Athens (brutally modern but still the cradle of Western culture), Bangkok (skyscrapers as in New York, bargains as in Milan or Hong Kong, restaurants as in Paris, and anarchic traffic as in Rome), Barcelona (art & culture, luxury & fashion, food & drink, bars & discos), Frankfurt, Florence, Hamburg (auction houses, harbor restaurants, and English gardens), London (shopping & sightseeing), Madrid, Munich, Paris, Prague, Rome, Vienna, and Zurich. Elster also has a series of *Kriminalromane* (Krimis) that they cast as either dark (schwarz) or sunny (sonnig). Might we do the same? For you Krimi Leser (mystery readers, auf Englisch) can you suggest those that are dark and those that are sunny? Bill Crider, Sara Paretsky, Amanda Cross, Simon Brett and Sue Grafton are sunny? And the dark ones are Elmore Leonard, Jonathan Gash, Robert B. Parker? Send me your lists and I will combine and summarize.

Plus Ça Change

The Library Book Club

Column Editor: **Karen Schmidt** (U. of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign)

Long before approval plans, blanket orders or cooperative collection development were part of the mainstream of modern libraries, the concept of the library book club was widely discussed. In 1938, the *Wilson Library Bulletin* suggested that libraries unite their purchasing power to form a consumers' buying unit, a library book club, that would canalize the buying wealth of our libraries and convert it into power. Publishers would be asked to submit books, before their publication, to a committee of librarians for review and approval. Once published, the books would come immediately to the libraries, in library bindings, and fully catalogued. The plan envisaged a discount of 25% on trade and 10% on texts, with a possible further distribution of any profits. Libraries could subscribe to different levels of service, so that larger libraries would receive more books. One of the first results the *Bulletin* suggested, would be to insure the publication of valuable works of a serious or scholarly nature that are now regarded as publishers' risks and too unprofitable to print.

Not surprisingly, negative commentary on this idea was received through an editorial in *Publishers Weekly* and from the American Booksellers Association. Among the many faults found with this plan — from the publishers' standpoint, at least — was the notion that there could be extra discounts or profits to be had for the libraries, that publishers could easily handle single large purchases without adding any extra staff (and thus, overhead), and that most of a library's budget could be spent on trade publications.

Still, maybe this will spark one of our more entrepreneurial readers to consider a library consumer union, perhaps with serials included. Does anyone know where Ralph Nader is working these days? ☞

Publishers' catalogs can be sources of amusement, learning, style, and pure information. Before you toss that next catalog, take a look inside and you might be glad you did. ☞

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is formed with a supplier who specializes in AV.

A library should expect that the jobber would perform the bibliographic verification and supply not only for the readily available and widely reviewed titles, but also for the more specialized materials such as educational and curriculum-related videos, laser discs, and import labels. Automated systems that allow electronic transmission of orders should be a requirement. The availability of full MARC or enhanced cataloging records for all items purchased and the processing of all materials ordered are highly desired options. The reward will be timely delivery and a high fill rate that keeps the faculty and general public happy. ☞