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Mourning Serial / The Effect of Firm Pricing Requests

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where only that particular title will do. There is no easy solution to this situation.

The Internal Revenue Service further complicates the decision-making process for the publisher. The Thor Power Tool Co., 439 U.S. 522, 1979, decision places additional negative pressures on publishers to declare a title as out of print prematurely or to restrict unnecessarily the reprinting of a title. This decision leads to the delay of a decision to reprint. A discussion of the full impact of Thor in this writing is inappropriate; but, suffice it to say, the amount of tax paid by a publisher is increased if a book remains

in print.

At Franklin we continue to claim an order as long as our customer requires. If the publisher decides to reprint, we will obtain the book immediately after availability. If the book goes out of print, we will notify our customer as soon as we are informed. However, as a distributor we are limited to the information received from the publisher.

Depending on the urgency and the time one can devote to a search, trying alternate sources, i.e., bookstores that specialize in hard to find and OP titles, may yield positive results.

Perhaps through persistent communi-

cation with the publishers, a compromise could be reached. The following idea arose in a discussion at the recent conference in Charleston. Could publishers print a small number of "extra" copies of a title, but not bind them? This way the publishers could reduce their printing costs associated with set up and start runs, yet have the pages available to bind later if the need arises. Print runs would then not need to be determined so close to the belt. I'd like to hear a publisher response to this.

The only solution I can suggest is that we all try holding our breath until we get what we need. ☹

Mourning Serial

The Effect Of Firm Pricing Requests On Publisher Rate Submission To Subscription Agencies

Column Editor: **Phil Greene** (EBSCO Subscription Services)

For column suggestions or ideas contact your editor or PGreene@EBSCO.com

Earlier this year the call for firm prices was sounded by the library community and directed at publishers and subscription agencies. It has been the agency view that the firm pricing responsibility lies solely in publishers' hands. Agencies do not set prices, affect *when* prices are set or have any power to keep them from being adjusted. The agent's responsibility is to make sure the most current prices are integrated into their title database as soon as they are received and to make sure those prices are carried through to customer invoices. As for publishers, we know that major STM (scientific, technical and medical) publishers were notified of the library community's desire for firm prices, set early in the year, through the **Donald Koepp** letter. Did the letter work? Maybe.

A look at the chart (below) provides a measure of publisher response to this request. In past years, the bulk of major STM rates have been received in August and September. It is interesting to note that as of Sept. 17, 1993, approximately 76 percent of the large publishers in EBSCO's title database (this includes large STM publishers and large commercial publishers) had provided their rates. This is the same percentage of rates that were received from large publishers in 1992.

A random list of STM publishers was analyzed in mid-September. The analysis showed that publishers studied provided new rates an average of 12 days earlier than they did the previous year: some sent rates in one to two months earlier, some sent them in a week later. Of course, one thing that should be kept in mind is that many publishers do not automatically send in rates at all. It takes a major mailing and exhaustive follow up by the subscription agent to procure rates. As mentioned before, we generally receive price change information for more than 90 percent of the STM titles by the end of September in any given year.

Conversely, less than one-third of the other 30,000-plus

small-to-medium size, non-STM publishers have set and sent prices to agencies by September in an average year. These smaller, non-STM publishers did not receive the Koepp letter. However, some of our casual (not-scientific) observations show that rates for smaller publishers did come in a bit earlier in 1993 than 1992. More seem to have arrived in July than ever before. We're not sure to what this can be attributed. Another observation is that more small publishers seemed to hold prices steady for 1994 subscriptions.

A final observation made by our Title Information Department General Manager **Mary Beth Vanderpoorten** is rather somber and possibly foreshadows the future of firm pricing. When going through a file on a particular publisher, Mary Beth came across their rate sheet. It was hard to miss the extra large, bold type at the top of the list that read "1994 Rates." What was somewhat easier to miss was the small print at the bottom of the page that read "Subject to Change." The fact is the proverbial ball remains "firmly" planted in the publishing community's court. It is understandably difficult to set a price in June for a commodity that is: to be sold in November; often paid for in foreign currency; and subject to last-minute decreased demand (subscription cuts). The firm pricing edict might be a tough one to stick to.

1994 Subscription Rate Receipt Dates

Date	% Lg. Publisher Rates Rec'd
Aug. 17	40
Sept. 9	69
Sept. 17	76
Sept. 24	83
Oct. 1	90

Special thanks to Mary Beth Vanderpoorten for contributing data used in this article. —PG ☹