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Group Therapy / Defective Books

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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.*

QUESTION:

(Submitted by **Sandy Wallace**, College of Charleston Libraries)

Here is something I am curious about. It isn't really a gripe, but it is a problem. I am curious about how often this happens. Every now and then we find a book that is defective which we didn't notice at the time it was added to the collection. However, we discover the defect five or ten or twenty years later. Whenever I write the publisher and tell them this (I have done it maybe 3 times in my career), they are very nice and give the library another copy of the book gratis . . . no questions asked. Sometimes we return the defective book and sometimes not. Just a minute ago, we discovered a book (1960, Scribners) which has two pages bound in twice and is actually missing two pages, and the book is out of print. I wonder if it's worth writing and trying to get a replacement copy of the book, or if we should just do an ILL request for the two pages. I guess my questions are -- how often does this happen, and what is the best procedure to follow?

LIBRARIAN RESPONSE:

(Submitted by **Dorcas MacDonald**, Interlibrary Loan Librarian, Syracuse University)

As an Interlibrary Loan Librarian, I can say that it is quite easy to order replacement pages through ILL, and urge librarians to do so when the situation calls for it. In talking with our Receiving and Accounting Supervisor, I discovered that this is not a major issue for our library. At times, patrons may discover defective titles in the stacks, however, this rarely happens. In fact, our supervisor claims that she returns approximately three to four defective books to publishers in the course of a year. As a guideline, our supervisor will ask for replacements for books up to four years old, and when that is the case, she has received replacements with little difficulty. If books are older than four years old, I

think it is easier to request replacement pages through Interlibrary Loan. That type of request is routine for us.

The best advice is to aggressively check your new books upon receipt very thoroughly, and return them promptly to the vendor who supplied the copy if found to be defective. It is much easier to correct problems at that time with invoice in hand, than to let the defective title go through only to be caught years later. If the title is no longer in print and hence not replaceable from the publisher, you can waste a lot of time trying to track down the needed title.

Also, the Preservation Department at Syracuse University tips the pages in, thereby keeping the cost of replacement pages relatively low. In terms of cost, time and energy, using Interlibrary Loan to replace pages from defective books over four years old is the best way to go.

So, my best advice to **Sandy Wallace** is to replace the missing pages for the 1960 Scribners title through Interlibrary Loan. It is quick, efficient and virtually headache free.

PUBLISHER RESPONSE:

(Submitted by **Stephen Dane**, General Manager, Kluwer Academic Publishers)

The issue of defective books is always of concern to publishers, vendors, librarians, and no doubt, their patrons. Because it is a costly and very competitive activity, publishers generally produce book titles using the services of outside printers/binders whom they select on the basis of quality, service, price and reputation. While the printer/binder maintains quality control standards in the manufacturing process, and the publisher often checks advance or random copies of a printrun, occasionally defective books are produced (causes vary and may involve just a few copies within a printrun) that are not detected by either the printer or the publisher. Apparently these defective books may go unnoticed by consumers for five or ten or twenty years too!

While customer requests to return a defective book or receive a replacement copy are common, publishers generally receive fewer claims involving titles which are out of print (especially if the title is 34 years old). Given the tendency among some publishers within the last decade to reduce printruns and put titles out of print more quickly, however, perhaps the scenario you described is more common than publishers would like to think. As technology for printing on demand becomes more readily available, perhaps it will become less likely for many titles to go "out of print" at all! The issue of replacing missing pages, however, is still another matter.

There is probably no best or even guaranteed procedure to follow to replace missing pages from a title that is out of print. Customer service departments of publishers and vendors are usually willing to replace defective books if the cause is obvious and the customer request is made within a reasonable period of time following the purchase. In fact, publishers are sometimes alerted to problems if this happens, and may even obtain a credit from the printer/binder for each defective copy or, if the problem is severe enough, the publisher may request a corrected printrun. It is easier because it is far less labor intensive for the publisher or vendor to replace the defective book, however, than it is to replace missing pages. If you add to the claim the condition that the source is out of print, chances are remote a publisher will be willing and probably much less able to satisfy your request. Believe it or not, it is often difficult to find an archival copy of a book that is out of print within a publishing company!

I think the answer to your questions are: fortunately (we publishers like to believe), it isn't too often that a book is produced with missing pages; it's even less common that a book with missing pages isn't detected for many years (or at least for us to hear about it), and you're probably better off trying to solve your problem first through interlibrary loan than by contacting your friendly vendor or publisher. ☺