September 1995

Media Minder: Outsourcing Media

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Recommended Citation

Hallman, Philip (1995) "Media Minder: Outsourcing Media," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 7: Iss. 4, Article 25.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.1600>

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Media Minder

Outsourcing Media

Column Editor: **Philip Hallman** (Ambassador Book Service) <phallman@aol.com>

With this issue, we welcome Philip Hallman who will begin editing Media Minder. A long-time media librarian, familiar with the video market having worked for some seven years tracking down titles at both a large university film library and a smaller liberal arts college, Philip looks forward to working with us to discuss the issues we all grapple with in acquiring some of this media. Welcome, Philip! And thanks! — KS

In this column for June 1994 (v.6#3 ATG, page 52-53), Linda Crismond spoke of outsourcing for print and non-print. Why would a library want to use a book jobber to purchase all of their videotapes/non-print materials rather than order direct from the distributor/producer? This is a question on my mind a lot lately. But perhaps it's an odd question, particularly since I am the newly hired Media Director for Ambassador Book Service and the person chiefly responsible for assisting libraries in fulfilling all audio-visual material requests. As the new Editor of this column as well, I thought that I would try to explore this issue, with, I hope, an open mind. This is an issue that I am not involved with alone. Many institutions are facing continual budgetary cutbacks and internal restructuring which is forcing librarians to reconsider traditional approaches to acquiring all types of materials, not just media.

Having been a media librarian for seven years at two vastly different institutions, I must admit that at one time I would have been professionally insulted if someone had suggested outsourcing my orders. So what makes me think that this new media division will satisfy all librarians and distributors? Will librarians and support staff resist the temptation to pay someone else to do some of their tasks, thus liberating themselves to achieve new goals, or is the urge to continue to do everything oneself, because that is the way it has always been, simply too great? While the answer was not obvious to me at first, I am convinced that this is

a vital service.

So — why would librarians, many of whom have been doing their work for years, want to farm out acquisition responsibility? After all, the typical Media Librarian, perhaps even more than the typical Reference Librarian, prides him or herself on the ability to find obscure materials that would stump other mere mortals. One reason may be the lack of centralization in the audiovisual world. While I would never suggest that traditional reference work is easier than working with non-print, one big advantage print librarians have over their non-print colleagues is the vast number of available resources, plus the overall organized quality of the existing materials. There is no single source one turns to when wanting to locate the distributor of a videotape. There is no equivalent of *Books in Print*, for instance, that provides availability, price and distributor for all tapes and is so neatly wrapped in a nice package (including bow) as *BIP*. Instead, one must trudge through multiple sources and hope that the requested tape is older than 18 months so that it will appear in one of the printed texts. CD-ROM sources and OCLC do offer online searching opportunities, but again no single source offers the high percentage of hits that *BIP* does. If one needs to search by subject, it becomes even more difficult to search out materials.

Now, like most librarians, I enjoy the challenge of ferreting out that hard-to-find title. A day's work is akin to a treasure hunt where I have to locate a video for a foreign film that has never had a commercial release in the United States, is not available on 1/2 VHS NTSC, but which the requesting faculty member insists is available — in Argentina. I may need to find a TV program a faculty member saw, but doesn't remember the title, or even the exact subject (It was about women in Marrakech, I think). The faculty member vaguely remembers that it may have been broadcast on PBS, but doesn't know the producer, director, year released, etc. The faculty member would like me to find it, however, and wants to use it in about two weeks. I may also be asked to

obtain public performance rights for a program taped off-air two years ago by a faculty member who now would like to show the program over the campus closed-circuit television system to a class of 500 first-year students. I might have to explain to a user why the videotape of a film still playing in theaters is unavailable. Or finally, a user may query as to the number of appropriate titles that exist on _____ (you fill in the blanks — here are a few of late: biotechnology, investment banking, fencing, the French Revolution.)

While I may have the time and expertise to do this sort of searching, many others may not. Many college and university libraries do not employ full-time media librarians. Euphemisms like downsizing, rightsizing, or re-engineering (choose your favorite) roll of the tongues of many library administrators these days. But librarians and library staffs are realizing that these are more than idle threats and are feeling the effects of downsizing. Fewer people are being asked to do a greater variety of tasks. This means that the librarian, who already has enough frustrations trying to stretch out a smaller budget or deal with an angry faculty member because the reserve book that is needed tomorrow, but only placed the order last week, has not arrived. Now someone must spend a portion of the day getting a public performance license. Where does the librarian start? Who should be called? And why does a video need a license anyway? What kind of car does it drive, huh? Your long-time support staff assistant in serials, who is a whiz claiming missing issues, doesn't know the difference between 1/2 and 3/4, PAL or NTSC, CAV versus CLV, must now add videotapes, CDs, CD-ROMs and computer software to the repertoire of dance steps. Will one learn the dance sequence in

What is media? We have been thinking about it and have looked at several other people's use of the word. It is varied. Frequently, the word is used to describe various forms of mass communication, i.e., Television, Film and Newspaper industries. So our use of it is — Media is materials that originate from something other than a printing press. There you have it! — PH

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time for the prom? Does Arthur Murray offer a class?

But these are all reasons why one would want to have someone else do the hunting. While some people may spend hours searching for a distributor, they often rationalize it by saying — "It's my job; of course I'll do it." It is time that Media Librarians think about outsourcing. Time is too precious a commodity. Granted, budget money is tight and I am not suggesting a frivolous waste of an institution's hard-earned dollars. However, in the long run, the money used towards jobbers' fees empowers an institution to allow employees to initiate new tasks and to learn other skills which will enable the employee to provide a better overall service and hopefully eliminate the aspects of the job they enjoy least.

Take the following recent situation I experienced as an example: I received a request for two videotapes produced by a faculty member at a large mid-Western University. The professor distributes the tapes himself rather than work through one of the numerous vendors that exist. After checking the usual sources one would use, I still did not have a telephone number to call because none of the tapes were indexed in any of the sources. The order was marked rush, so rather than write a letter to the filmmaker with the hope of receiving a reply, I pursued it a bit further. Noting the creator's name in the record supplied, I called information. I did not know the area code for Norman, OK, so I had to look that up. I called information and got the main number for the institution. The university operator gave me the number, but after calling it, I had to call several other numbers only to then leave a message on voice mail. Two days later, the professor did return my call but I was told I would have to fax the order on official letterhead and send prepay by check. Within two weeks, the tapes were sent out.

Yes, the events just described might be monotonous for some. But that is the point: Pursuing a video can take time and involve more than one a single telephone call. Yet, on the other hand, it can be a single phone call procedure. Initial calls, follow-up calls, faxing, pre-payments can all be eliminated through the outsourcing procedure. The time and money spent to locate materials can often exceed the service fee a jobber would charge to order the tape. In this case, four or five long distance telephone calls, letter writing, faxing, check approval and mailing time are tasks eliminated by outsourcing to the jobber. While figures vary, typically it can cost an institution anywhere between \$15.00-\$25.00 to write a check when adding the hidden costs to the amount spent such as salary, benefits, etc.

Libraries have been using jobbers for

processing many of their book requests for years. Ask why and they would probably respond: "Have you ever tried to call a publishing company before?" Inevitably, time is spent waiting . . . and waiting . . . and waiting for someone to pick up the phone. Psychologically, the feeling of having greater control with less paperwork is a great motivation and a strong reason for outsourcing. The same can be done with videos. One invoice for ten different distributors is a real option. So too is the possibility of having a single invoice for ten books, five videotapes, a compact disc, four CD-ROMs and some software. It would be impossible to have that kind of variety from any other purchasing source.

Librarians have dealt with the business side of maintaining a library for years and many see the financial and emotional benefits to outsourcing non-print materials. The same may not be true for others, who may experience a feeling of being devaluated when asked to outsource materials. One aspect of ordering direct that media librarians enjoy is working to establish personal relationships with the salespeople from the various distributors. Each distributor offers a unique collection of programs and offers incentives when placing orders. Customer service has been and will continue to be the distinguishing factor when working with any service-oriented business and will be as im-

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Issues in Vendor-Library Relations

Electronic Publishing: Beyond Pricing

Column Editors: **Judy Webster** (U. of Tennessee) <jdwebster@utk.lib> and
Barry Fast (Academic Book Center)

Electronic Publishing: Beyond Pricing

by Barry Fast

Electronic publishers are experimenting with a variety of pricing models in order to find a reasonable, profitable and fair policy. Over time they will succeed; the market will decide. In a year or two one or more pricing policies will be in effect that satisfy most consumers most of the time.

There is another aspect of this evolving policy that is not being discussed enough, and in some ways it is much more difficult to resolve. While the market as a whole will determine pricing, the potential conflict between government investigations and the right to privacy may only be resolved, if at all, by a few influential people. It is time for more of us to get involved in the debate.

Here is the problem as I see it. Most libraries, most universities and other research institutions have a policy in place regarding investigations by the government. When the police ask what journals a researcher used in a library, the common policy is not to divulge this information. Libraries have long held that people do their research in private, and the particular journals or books used by a researcher are incorporated in that privacy right. But two elements in this widely shared ethic are changing: The nature of the information itself, which is transforming to an electronic format, and the seemingly new specter of widespread hate groups, united in an apparent contempt for our democracy.

If, as seems likely, the pricing of electronic journals is tied in some way to usage, then the ability to track who is using a particular journal, how often, and even which parts becomes simply a matter of programming. If libraries are paying publishers based on frequency of use, it is just a small step to recording who is using each journal. In fact, that may well be the most efficient and

effective way of tracking usage for purposes of pricing. And it has some real advantages, both to publishers and libraries. Publishers can see which types of researchers are using their journals, how frequently, and which parts of each journal are being consulted. This can help them in editing existing journals to better serve the needs of users, and develop new journals based on emerging trends in usage. Similarly, libraries will be able to determine which journals are really being used, and which are not. They can do better resource sharing and better managing of their electronic journal budget. The danger here is that government investigators will have an easy electronic trail to follow.

By refusing to divulge who is looking at what, even in an electronic environment, librarians will continue to keep the wall of privacy around people's reading habits. It is unlikely that this tradition of privacy will be breached just because the information is in a new format. It is disturbing, however, to watch our supposedly liberal government (in the human rights sense) falling all over themselves to get to the right on the issue of hate groups. From Janet Reno's instant promise of the death penalty for the Oklahoma City bombers, before she even knew anything about them or their motives, to Bill Clinton's sweeping condemnation of "hate radio," our leaders are demonstrating that the voice of reason is merely a whisper. It is the times, perhaps, or maybe it is just that they have no courage to go against the mob psychology of vengeance and fear. In this atmosphere, with this lack of leadership, a new kind of McCarthyism is not far fetched. After all, the Alien and Sedition Acts were passed in the earliest days of this republic, under the halcyon days of Jeffersonian Democracy. It does not take much to change the public mood from tolerance and fair play to fear, anger and ven-

geance. When the government calls for more government investigative powers it is time to start worrying. This appears to be the national mood now, and we should do our small part to work against it.

Librarians have traditionally defended the whole concept of freedom to read, even in the worst of situations, in small towns where it takes great courage to stand up against one's neighbors. There is no reason to believe that librarians will suddenly change now. The policies of keeping research private, to hold sacred an individual's right to read without prejudice, is not in danger. But will this hold true for the publishers?

Publishers are businesses, and as such are vulnerable to government pressure. Some publishers do not agree with the right to privacy, or at least not to the extent incorporated into the policies of most universities. It is more likely that the information electronic publishers have — about who is reading what — will be turned over to the police. While librarians may defend a principle, even at some risk, electronic publishers would seem to be much less motivated to do so.

In order to help electronic publishers join librarians in the principle of privacy, librarians should consider writing into their electronic journal usage contracts that they will hold publishers to the same high standards that their institution maintains. Publishers should promise that they will not divulge any information on who is using which journals or articles to investigative agencies. If publishers are contractually bound to adhere to this standard, they will find it much easier to resist any heavy-handed tactics from a government more interested in playing to the mob than protecting our rights.

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portant an issue when libraries decide whether to continue to go direct or work with a jobber.

A library's decision to use jobbers when ordering non-print materials is a gradual process, but the change seems to be a natural evolution. The booming video, CD-ROM, computer software and music markets makes it increasingly difficult to main-

tain a handle on ordering. The decision to use jobbers is not a necessary one for certain institutions, namely those that have a full-time professional media librarian who can maintain the collection and its growth. Although I still would argue that even institutions in this situation can benefit from outsourcing certain segments of orders, particularly feature films or those that require extensive paperwork.

As the new editor of **Media Minder**, I will focus future articles on problems and

concerns for librarians working with audiovisual materials: copyright, public performance rights, cataloging videotapes, etc. I encourage people to message me via e-mail (abs@class.org), telephone (1-800-431-8913), or write to me if they have issues they wish to see discussed, clarified, supported, denounced. I wish this to be a forum for lively discussion and hope to shorten the links in the chain of an area of librarianship that has typically been complicated and cumbersome.