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Acquiring Minds Want to Know / Smart Systems, Smart Books

Joyce L. Ogburn
Yale University

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Acquiring Minds Want to Know

Smart Systems, Smart Books

Column Editor: **Joyce L. Ogburn** (Yale University)

This article concludes a series of three explorations on technology and acquisitions. The first article was a wish list of applications of new technology, involving increasing reliance on workstations. The second article described an existing application of workstations and windows to enhance a mainframe-based integrated library system.

This article will outline a specific suggestion both to aid some basic acquisitions functions and their management. It will focus primarily on use of vendors, vendor performance and business terms. I have several suggestions for improvement, which were touched on briefly in the first article, based on having an extensive online vendor profile.

The online vendor file is often very limited and serves mainly as a means to supply and control addresses for sending orders, claims, and paying invoices. It could instead be a control and information file that documents the terms of business, keeps performance data, and has some measure of control over the order, receipt,

and payment processes.

The vendor file should be designed to profile the details of the business terms negotiated by the library, including any discount arrangements, shipping and handling charges, or service charges. Other items to profile include the basic terms under which the vendor should be used, based on country and/or date of publication, format, in print/out of print status, etc. It should even include a basic description of the profiles of approval plan arrangements.

With this level of detail in the vendor profile, we would then be able to ask the system to do a number of things automatically. First, we would be able to have the system do an initial selection (or rejection) of the vendor for order placement, based on the relevant parameters listed in the profile.

Second, the file would control the re-

ceipt and payment of material by matching the terms on the invoice (discounts or charges) against the terms in the profile. If there is a discrepancy, the system would alert the staff.

Third, the system would keep running, automatically tabulated statistics on vendor activity and performance (number of

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Column Editor: **Matt Nauman** (Blackwell North America)

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receipts, average price, average discount, number of outstanding orders, sorts by type of order or format, etc.). All one would have to do to get this data would be to look at the vendor file.

Fourth, the system would facilitate the tasks of housekeeping and documentation by having its extensive online profile replace paper files that list all the terms of business. Since the vendor file is accessible by anyone authorized to do so, it serves as the central and shared documen-

tation of the business terms. When the file is updated, immediate access to the updated information is provided.

Additionally, the system and the material received would also "talk" to each other. The material would, in effect, be smart enough to receive and pay for itself because it would have bar codes or diskettes, or some form of electronic information provided with it. As libraries access and pay for an increasing number of materials online, these electronic journals, databases, and files would tell the system when they are available and/or "received." Although automatic check-in is not predicted on having an extensive online ven-

dor profile, the existence of one would aid the matching of appropriate billing terms and invoice specifications.

Perhaps in this scenario libraries would also expand the definition of vendor to include access points and servers on networks and would profile them as well as to the kinds of files, subjects, and types of information that can be accessed/acquired and under what terms. The system would serve as the auditor of the proper use of or access to these electronic files, much like the systems that count number of searches, users, etc., and would ensure that payment is appropriate to the usage (or level

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of usage appropriate to the terms of payment and access).

Or perhaps the vendors that we traditionally use for supply of materials will profile the electronic world and provide

access to libraries based on a profile much like an approval plan (this idea was presented at the **1994 Feather River conference** by **Steve Pugh** and **Rick Lugg** of **Yankee Book Peddler, Inc.**).

These ideas are all predicated on reconceiving the purpose and form of an online vendor file. I argued in the first

column that ILS systems were too slow to change to advance technology applied to acquisitions; however an enhanced and extensive vendor file should become a basic component of any acquisitions system. Having a detailed profile is a crucial step toward the age of smart systems and smart books. ☛

Publisher's Profile II

Column Editor: **Matt Nauman** (Blackwell North America)

The Oryx Press

4041 North Central Ave., Suite 700
Phoenix, AZ 85012-3397
Tel: (800) 279-6799
(602) 265-2651
Fax: (800) 279-4663
(602) 265-6250
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Phyllis B. Steckler, President
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