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Tower of Babel: New Realities in Foreign Language Acquisitions

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Abstract

Outlined within this proceeding are the challenges facing libraries and other institutions when they wish to acquire foreign language publications. The niche role of specialized vendors and its evolution over time is highlighted. From providing approval plans to assisting with cataloging and the maintaining of online journal collections, the role of vendors in meeting the challenging needs of libraries is discussed. Looking to the future, new endeavors are considered as Casalini Libri strives to respond to and anticipate developing market needs.

Foreign Language Acquisitions and Specialist Vendors

The realities of academic publishing vary greatly from country to country and across continents. Each subject area and country presents a new challenge, with hurdles such as language and communication, availability and quality of information, shipping times, and methods. For libraries in different regions or even continents, it can be difficult to navigate the various pitfalls without help, and it is here that specialist vendors can provide support, knowledge, and experience in dealing with each particular niche market.

Casalini Libri is one such vendor, specialized in the supply of publications from Mediterranean Europe. Established in 1958, the company's mission is to advance the profile of European culture and scholarship precisely by bridging the gap between publishers and institutions and facilitating the passage of academic content across national borders. From the supply of information and Italian published works at the very beginning of its activity, the company has gradually expanded its services through the years in response to growing requests from libraries. Casalini Libri assists its customers in meeting the challenges of foreign language acquisitions and provides the tools necessary for libraries to process acquisitions in a fast-changing environment. This paper discusses the motivation behind each of the company's services, all based on very real needs expressed by the library community and designed to meet them effectively.

It is necessary to first briefly describe the scholarly publishing market in Mediterranean Europe to fully understand the particulars of the niche in which Casalini Libri operates.

Mediterranean Europe is a prime example of an area with diverse publishing markets and fragmented distribution chains. Market figures show that while STM, popular science, and fiction publishing is often in the hands of large publishing groups, in the Romance-language countries of Europe, the humanities and social sciences (HSS) sector is not only predominant but characterized by a large number and variety of small independent publishers. These can range from private entities to university presses, academies, foundations, societies, institutes, museums, and archives, many of which produce an average of only five titles per year.

The Evolution of Humanities Publishing

1950s: Sourcing Material

When Casalini Libri was founded, it was to respond to the requests of various American scholars who had expressed a need for timely bibliographic information and supply of Italian publications. The bookseller's very presence in the territory, knowledge of the market, network of contacts, and language skills were indispensable assets to the academic community in the United States.

Since that time, much of Casalini Libri's energy has been focused on the problem of ensuring that quality information on relevant research publications is made available in a timely manner to universities and libraries worldwide. A dedicated team within the company, including several native speakers of non-Italian languages, focuses its efforts on actively searching for new titles and evaluating their pertinence for academic collections. Use is made of many resources, not least specialist journals, publisher contacts, trade fairs, and visits to the territory.

Table 1. Publishers in Italy, France, Spain, and Portugal.

	Italy	France	Spain	Portugal
No. of active publishers	4,604	3,000 approx.	3,109	530
New titles published	61,882	68,187	68,378	63,428

Sources: ISTAT; Service du livre et de la lecture; Ministerio de Educacion, Cultura y Deporte; Agência Nacional de ISBN.

The difficulties created by a complicated and fragmented publishing market are common to much of Mediterranean Europe. Sourcing works is the first, and sometimes greatest, hurdle for librarians. It is a time-consuming and complex task aggravated by the fact that small publishers often lack the means or the organization to publicize their works effectively. This has an enormous effect on the accessibility, frequency, and quality of the bibliographic information available. Publishers may or may not have their own websites. Incomplete information means it is at times unclear whether a work is a new edition or reprint of a previously published title. In some cases, unsuccessful publications are simply re-released under a new title. This confusion is not confined to publishers alone. With the exception of France, the area is also characterized by a notable lack of reliable and exhaustive national bibliographies. The Italian national bibliography catalogs a fraction of the country's publishing output, and a similar scenario can be found both in Spain and Portugal. The nature, aims, and procedures of national libraries often mean that bibliographic information is not available as quickly as required by librarians wishing to use that information to order titles.

1960s: Selecting Material

It was in the 1960s and following requests from customers that Casalini Libri extended its role to the selection of material for the library's collections, drawing not only on its position in the market but also its familiarity with customers' interests to select and supply titles that fit the profiles of libraries and their collections.

The company's aim is to act not only as a point of information for librarians but to offer a real service as intellectual curators, filtering the entire production of the market, and proposing bibliographic updates for the publications that can be of real value to collections, adhering strictly to the individual collection development criteria of each institution.

The second half of the 20th century saw the birth and growth of the approval plan, first in the United States and later also in Europe, Australasia, and other parts of the world. Approval plans offered a solution to a reduction in staffing by allowing libraries to maintain a complete and balanced collection through close collaboration with suppliers. For foreign language acquisitions, libraries realized the value of using suppliers' networks, knowledge, and ease of movement in their own areas of expertise and territories. As academic publishing in Italy and across Mediterranean Europe is often characterized by short print runs, a regular supply of titles on approval plan from a vendor positioned in the territory guarantees a punctuality in the acquisition of new titles that reduces the risk of important material going out of print before the library obtains a copy.

1970s: Acquiring Material

The subscription service set in place by Casalini Libri during the 1970s again meant that libraries could take advantage of the company's knowledge of and presence in the territory, which allowed it to provide accurate information to libraries and handle correspondence with the various publishing entities. By consolidating shipments, Casalini Libri can closely monitor the issues supplied against publication information and claim any missing items to ensure that all material published is received and forwarded to libraries as soon as possible following its release.

While monographic titles bring some challenges, the level of difficulty can rise notably when it comes to the acquisition of serials. Serials publications range widely in format and frequency, from periodicals to annuals, conference proceedings, and reports of learned societies. As with monographs, in Mediterranean Europe many publishers of academic serials are small, independent entities with little or no real distribution network and often erratic publication schedules. Customers finding difficulty in dealing with the complex reality of Italian serials publishing were the catalyst in Casalini Libri's development of this service.

Bibliographic identification of serials, particularly irregular publications and annuals, ordering, and claiming are not always straightforward. It can be difficult to trace publications, publishers, and maintain communication in order to remain informed of effective publication dates and schedules. In European markets, there is less automation and more need for human intervention, compared with the larger, more organized realities of Anglo-American journals publishing. Shipping can be the cause of numerous problems, from unpredictable schedules and long delays to the traceability of shipments and the quality of packaging; missing or damaged shipments bring expense and further delays. A specialist vendor capable of dealing with all aspects of the information and supply chain and ensuring safe and prompt delivery of the material is, without doubt, an invaluable support for libraries.

1980s: Bibliographic Database and Automated Data Exchange

The next two decades brought about a rapid series of technological advances, increasing both efficiency and expectations. The improvements in technology made it possible for Casalini Libri to create an extensive database containing the entirety of its bibliographic resources and production. This allowed the company to be more efficient in supplying title information to libraries. With the arrival of the Internet, the *ilibr*i database was made available directly to customers through the company website, making up-to-date bibliographic information even more easily and quickly accessible, matching library requests to the highest possible degree.

It was during the 1980s and with the constant objective to facilitate access to timely and quality bibliographic information for libraries, satisfying the request of its own customers, that Casalini Libri began to develop a supply service for machine-readable cataloging (MARC) records. By producing catalog records for Italian publications in accordance with the Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules, Casalini Libri could provide bibliographic information in the exact format required by the libraries it served. A valuable resource, vendor MARC records for foreign-language publications mean that libraries can receive reliable bibliographic information to a recognized and widely used standard format, taking advantage of the specific language proficiency of the vendor to

ensure greater accuracy of data. Not only does the library gain from the time saved by the acquisition of records, but the presence of a record in the library system upon the arrival of the book allows for a faster turnaround time in processing the item and making the title available to patrons.

1990s: Keeping Up With Technology—The World Wide Web and Wider Interoperability

The possibilities opened by the World Wide Web meant that orders and other communications could be sent through the website, speeding up the internal workflows of libraries and the timescales between placing an order and receiving the title. Online databases and password-protected ordering tools, while widespread in the Anglo-American market, are far from being the norm in niche areas of scholarly publishing such as that of Mediterranean Europe. The online library services offered by some specialist vendors allowed librarians to operate as they would with orders for domestic titles, requesting and downloading MARC records with local order and invoice data for ordered titles and keeping track both of order status and invoice details. These developments, all based directly on customer requests, have now become an integral part of library workflows.

As the automation of data exchange became even more important, so did the expectation of interaction between the information systems of library and bookseller, leading to the emergence of the electronic data Interchange (EDI) standard as the preferred means of transferring order and invoice details. Casalini Libri responded to the challenge, becoming an active member of the EU-funded Electronic Data Interchange for Libraries and Booksellers in Europe (EDILIBE) project, aimed at defining the EDIFACT subsets required in the commercial communication chain for libraries and booksellers. EDIFACT order and invoice transmission services are a valuable tool in facilitating workflows and speeding up supply times as they allow for the immediate processing and monitoring of orders.

2000s: Electronic Publishing and Expanding Horizons

A natural evolution of the digital age, electronic publications came to the fore at the beginning of the new century. Casalini Libri rose to the challenge,

creating a specialized digital division to explore the possibilities and potential of electronic publishing for the Italian market. The Editoria Italiana Online (EIO) collection of e-books and e-journals, first introduced at the 2003 Frankfurt Book Fair, offered a wide variety of quality Italian research publications in electronic format to libraries anxious to move with the times, as e-content entered the mainstream of acquisition for major university libraries thanks to increased user demand. The evolution of this project, the Torrossa digital library, was launched a decade later, in 2011. Torrossa combines access to scholarly e-books and e-journals with practical library services designed specifically to simplify acquisitions, licensing, and integration with the library catalog.

Aggregation of electronic content provides access to content through a single portal and facilitates workflows, reducing the number of separate and differing platforms requiring trial periods, set up of access, purchase negotiations, and administration (orders, invoices, statistics), not to mention the language barrier in communication with foreign publishers. Casalini Libri has invested great effort in the creation of a single-license document to cover all resources from over 210 publishers, again facilitating the work of libraries and adding value to the intermediary service. Furthermore, libraries select e-content from material that has already been filtered and selected for its relevance to university requirements based on the company's experience in approval selections.

If distribution through an intermediary is now a confirmed and consolidated practice for print titles, it is even more important in the electronic market, and more specifically in niche areas. Most small Italian academic publishers lack the economic standing and personnel to manage online publishing of their own titles on a company-owned platform, and if they are to meet the expectations of their consumers, offering online access to publications, support is essential. Casalini Libri's dedicated digital division facilitates the offering and acquisition of foreign language e-content by providing visibility and support to academic publishers, from hosting and online publication to access, licensing, and negotiation.

A major characteristic of this decade for libraries was the search for more efficient, streamlined ways of purchasing. Acting upon the request of many

customers, Casalini Libri widened the scope of its bibliographic and supply services, covering the rest of Mediterranean Europe. The company invested heavily in building and maintaining a working network of publishing and distribution contacts in France, Spain, and Portugal to offer libraries exactly what was required: A single supplier for a range of languages and content from areas that are just as complex and unique as Italy.

By increasing the area and the number of academic publishing markets that are each different in their idiosyncrasies, Casalini Libri enables libraries to take advantage of the complete range of its library services. This allows for easier and standardized acquisition of publications that would otherwise result in a number of time-consuming and isolated workflows, from bibliographical databases to online order management and MARC records. The extension of this service in conjunction with book processing options means that the vendor can considerably reduce the time required for libraries to register new arrivals, ensuring that "shelf-ready" books are made available to patrons more quickly.

2010s: New Trends in Acquisitions

The entry of e-books into the mainstream of book acquisition for major university libraries has led to libraries acquiring collections instead of single title selections, moving from special subject collections to discipline-driven information provisioning. In contrast with traditional "just-in-case" systems, a "just-in-time" approach, where libraries acquire resources based on actual requirements has emerged in recent years. This approach responds not only to rising prices and shrinking budgets but to an immediate user need, and it brings with it yet another change in the selection process, making faculty, researchers, and other patrons the principal selectors of material for purchase. The patron-driven acquisition (PDA) model is by now well established for the Anglo-American market, while it is also required for titles from other areas.

What Next?

Casalini Libri remains faithful to its original mission of providing the top-level bibliographic output required by its customers. The company successfully implemented resource description and access (RDA) in 2013 and has been active in the translation of the standard into Italian. Driven by the determination to

anticipate the changing needs of the market, the company is currently working on the development of solutions to the newest aspects of cataloging: Linked data and the BIBFRAME data model.

Conclusion

The acquisition of foreign language titles by independent vendors, such as Casalini Libri, offers libraries a reliable, bespoke service, giving them access to a challenging and fragmented market of publishers in Southern Europe. With changing demands and advancing technology the services offered by vendors have grown immensely since the late 1950s. Over the decades, facilities such as approval plans, the provision of bibliographic records for cataloging purposes, digitization of the ordering process, and the launch of online platforms have evolved from the anticipation of the client's future needs and a willingness to adapt to new demands as they emerge.

The needs of libraries have always been central to all Casalini Libri's activities, and each service

offered has been developed in response to a request from the community it serves. Still a family-run business based in Fiesole (Italy), the company's 90-strong team under the direction of its founder's children remains both faithful to the traditions of the business and committed to innovation. The company's original mission of advancing the profile of Italian culture and scholarship worldwide has grown with the market. Today, two aspects remaining at the heart of its activity: Its role as intellectual curator, providing the information and expertise to ensure continuity in collection development for European languages in areas where subject specialists are often less present, and its dedication to providing visibility and access to academic content in the humanities and social sciences, a niche area that requires a very different approach from that applied to the field of science, technology, and medicine (STM). Going forward, Casalini Libri will continue to anticipate future challenges for libraries, as well as continuing its work in raising the profile of research in the Babel of European languages.