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Approval Plans "Down Under"

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In 1994 the **Australian National University Library** purchased the **INNOPAC** automated library system and transferred all operations to it. After surviving the first hectic six months and making major changes to acquisitions workflow and procedures, we began to look for ways to take advantage of **INNOPAC's** capability to interface with other systems.

One optional feature that showed potential for significant savings was the approval plan interface. The Library had tried a couple of approval plans with a U.S. vendor several years ago, but as finances became tighter, we had to discontinue the approval plans after about eighteen months. While the trial use of approval plans generated some resource savings for collection management staff, acquisitions staff identified no benefits at all. Bear in mind, however, that we were then not able to download any bibliographic, order, or financial data into our system; this information still had to be entered manually into the online system.

In March 1995, when we decided to re-visit the idea of approval plans for some social sciences and humanities material, we contacted **Innovative Interfaces** about their approval interface and confirmed that we would be able to transfer, via ftp, LC MARC records from the approval vendor's system to our **INNOPAC** system. The MARC records would contain essential order and invoice information embedded in the 980 fields and would create full bibliographic, order, and invoice records as they were added to the local **INNOPAC** system.

We then talked to some major approval vendors for U.S. material, including one (**Academic Book Center**) that was able to supply records via the **III** approval interface. Our approval plan profiling was based on the LC classification system, a publisher list, and non-subject parameters. We chose our approval vendor because, after initial title selection by machine, all selected titles are reviewed against the client's profile by a bibliographer with book in hand thus meeting a client's special requirements. Seeing potential benefits to working with **Academic Book Center** and **Innovative Interfaces**, we decided to go ahead and order the approval interface and begin planning with **ABC**.

After setting up our profiles, **ABC** was able to incorporate **INNOPAC** fund codes into the MARC records. On **INNOPAC** we set up a special order code to identify approval orders, and, for the incoming records, a default template to capture all mandatory codes.

Our initial subprofiles were run against the bookseller's database for all 1994 publications, giving us an estimate of what each subprofile would have cost had the plan been operating in 1994. This enabled us to adjust the subprofiles to match the 1995 budget allocations.

To identify titles that would have been shipped before our plan began, the bookseller ran our subprofiles against 1995 titles in their database and produced printed forms for all material that would have been supplied had the plan been in operation from the beginning of the year. These slips were airmailed to us and after checking our database for existing orders/holdings, we returned the forms for those books we wished to receive.

By June we were ready to proceed. The first test batch of sixteen records was successfully transferred with just a couple of keystrokes and resulting in sixteen bibliographic records, each with an approval order attached, and an invoice awaiting processing in the system. However, our initial euphoria was dampened when we discovered that

the prices in U.S. dollars had been converted to Australian dollars and the full MARC records had been reduced to brief MARC records. We were the first non-U.S. library to purchase the approval interface from **III** and we acquired it before it had been set up to handle foreign currency.

In addition to correcting the

currency problem, **III** set up the downloading table so that the approval interface matched the one used for downloading full MARC records from our bibliographic utility, the **Australian Bibliographic Network (ABN)**. After testing and eliminating some minor glitches, we resumed transferring and processing records without problems.

We are pleased with the control we have, with the quality and relevance of the material being supplied, and with the significant cost savings in staff resources for acquisitions. To date, we are receiving about fifty to sixty approval books per week (2500-3000 per year), but for this material there is almost no keying of bibliographic, order, or invoice data and very little internal handling is required. We have expanded the publisher lists for some of the subprofiles for 1996.

The actual process works as follows:

- * Once a week, the bookseller runs our subprofiles against their database for publisher and LC class matches.

- * The selections are reviewed against the non-subject parameters on our subprofiles, orders are placed with publishers for material apparently matching our profiles

- * The bookseller produces two sets of forms at the time of selection — one set for material matching our profile for "FORMS ONLY," another set for the titles that would normally be shipped. These forms are sent to us by air freight, inside our parcels of firm orders.

- * On receipt at **ANU Library**, the "FORMS ONLY" material is handled in the same way as any other new title information. If the title is required, a firm order is placed.

- * The "ON ORDER" announcement forms are passed to collection management staff for urgent review — anything not required is returned to acquisitions, who email our bookseller that the item should not be sent.

- * When the bookseller receives books from the publishers, they review them against our profiles. For titles deemed not appropriate, they send a de-selection form indicating why the book was not supplied.

- * The bookseller creates a file of records in their system for the weekly consignment of approval titles (LC MARC records with the embedded order and invoice data) and air freights the books to us with a paper copy of the invoice.

- * Once a week, **ANU** staff transfer the weekly file into **INNOPAC** via ftp, process the records to create the bib, order, and invoice records and await arrival of the parcel (the records are available about ten days before the books arrive.)

- * When the parcel arrives (boxes are clearly marked "Approvals"), the contents are matched against the paper invoice, and the invoice is called up from the "Invoices Awaiting Processing" file. If there are no changes to be made, i.e., all items invoiced are present, a couple of keystrokes is all that is needed to process the invoice and receive the orders.

For us, the attractive and important features of the plan include its publisher/LC class base (which makes it relatively easy to exclude this material from our firm orders), the human review with book in hand, the ability of the bookseller to comply with special requirements, our advance knowledge of what has been ordered, and our ability to stop supply of unwanted titles before they are despatched (which virtually eliminates the need to return any books).

The **III** interface brings significant added benefits — virtually no keying of data for this material (which means significant savings in staff resources and elimination of keying errors), and the supply of full LC MARC records free of charge. 🐾

*Author's note: I might add, we were very grateful for the excellent support from both **Academic Book Center** and **Innovative Interfaces** in getting the teething problems resolved as quickly as possible and assuring that this process worked. I am especially grateful to **Lorene Dortch** of **Academic** who assisted with the **Approval Plan** profiling. — JE*