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On the Street

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On The Street

Results from An EMail Questionnaire on Paperback Prebinding

by Neil Jaffe (Marketing Manager, San Val, Inc.) <NeilJaffe@aol.com>

I have spent the last two years trying to learn as much as I can about libraries and how they bind their books. Recently, I sent out an email Questionnaire to over 200 Acquisition Librarians who attended the 1995 Charleston Conference to

learn even more. The questionnaire focused on paperback prebinding. (I learned from the survey that virtually all Academic Librarians know that paperback prebinding is the conversion of paperback books to hardcover, before the book is ever circulated.)

San Val, Inc. is the exclusive prebinder for the following academic library vendors: Academic Book Center, Ambassador Books, Baker & Taylor, Blackwell North America, Book Wholesalers Inc., Bookhouse, Emery-Pratt Co., Franklin Book Co., Ingram, Midwest Library Service, Quality Books, and Yankee Book Peddler. These companies offer the outsource service of paperback prebinding to their customers. The amount of books we prebind for the above vendors has grown dramatically over the past few years. I attribute this growth to the increase in paperback book purchases, shrinking budgets and the continued increase of outsourcing among libraries.

In recent years, there has been more and more discussion among librarians concerning the purchase of paperback books. The June 1995 edition of *Against the Grain* (see v.7# 3 June 1995 p.1) featured this topic with the cover story — "To Buy or Not to Buy: The Cost Implications of Purchasing Paperbacks" by Ed Goedecken, Ivan Hanthorn & Pam Rebarcak. This article states that the long-standing habit of acquiring hard bound library materials whenever a choice was available between paperback and hard cover is changing. I wanted to learn more about who's prebinding and why; who's not prebinding and why; and what are the trends.

My response to the survey was unbelievable! First, it was amazing to see how many librarians actually had their own email address. Librarians should be proud of the fact that the library world is way ahead of corporate America when it comes to email. Second, I received a 30% response rate. (Though it took a reminder email for some to respond!) Any marketing professor in the world would consider a 30% response rate to a survey a magnificent success.

# of questionnaires sent:	210
# of undeliverable addresses:	36
# of responses:	63
# of usable responses:	59

Following is a complete list of the questions and a summary of the responses. In the summaries, I draw only from the 59 usable responses. Four of the 63 total respondents did not answer any of the questions.

Question #1 — Are you involved in book acquisition decisions?

55 of the respondents answered Yes to this question. Four re-

sponded No. I sent the questionnaire to 210 people from the Charleston Conference attendance list with titles relating to acquisitions.

Question #2 — What book vendors do you purchase from?

A variety of book vendors were listed by the 59 respondents. Following are the top six book vendors listed and the number of times they were listed by respondents: Yankee Book Peddler, 24; Blackwell North America, 23; Midwest Library, 21; Baker & Taylor, 17; Bookhouse, 13; Ambassador, 11.

Question #3 — Are you aware of paperback prebinding, the process of converting paperback books into hardcover?

56 of the 59 respondents answered Yes to this question.

Questions #4 through #9 were answered by those who prebind books in their library. Otherwise, they were asked to skip to question #10.

A total of 21 respondents prebind books in their libraries.

Question #4 — Do you outsource prebinding through your book vendor?

15 respondents currently prebind books with their book vendor. Nine of these 15 respondents also prebind with their Library Binder.

Question #5 — Do you prebind with your Library Binder?

15 respondents currently prebind books with their Library Binder. Six of these respondents use only their Library Binder to prebind their books.

Question #6 — What % of new paperbacks do you prebind?

Of the 21 respondents who prebind books: eleven answered 90+% or "nearly all", six answered 50% or more, two answered under 50%, and two did not have an answer.

Question #7 — What criteria decides whether to prebind or not?

This was an open-ended question in which a variety of answers were given. Each response tends to reflect the respondent's answer to Question #6. The following are a few quotes taken from the responses to this question. "If it is paper, we want to get it between hardcovers for better durability." "Estimated use and quality of paperback binding." "We prebind all paperbacks that are firm ordered, except for rush items and those deemed unsuitable by vendor or binder." "Need for circulating copy and longevity of title, i.e. we don't bind computer related topics."

Question #8 — What do you like about prebinding?

There were a variety of answers, but three major themes stood out. Eleven respondents said that durability and prolonging the life of paperback books were factors they liked about prebinding. One respondent stated that they liked prebinding because, "It's done before the books are put on the shelf. Preventing damage is always preferable to repairing damage."

Eight respondents mentioned that prebinding is an outsource that saves them staff time in preparing and handling books. One respondent said, "We're interested in having paperbacks bound prior to arrival to save the personnel costs involved in 'writing up' paperbacks for shipment to the bindery. Another said prebinding, "Cuts down on our own

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processing time. Since we bind most paperbacks, obviously, prebinding cuts down on our staff time which we don't have a lot of."

Six respondents said that prebinding saves them money because a prebound paperback is much cheaper than a publisher's hardcover edition. One respondent said that prebinding, "Saves us tons of money from our book budget." Another said, "It provides us with an inexpensive but sturdy copy, which will last as long as a hardcover item, if not longer."

One respondent summarized all of these ideas, "Saves staff time in making decisions and preparing binding slips; cheaper than our contract binder; paperbacks will last longer; even with prebinding cost, it is cheaper per item than hardcover, making the book budget stretch much farther."

Question #9 — What do you dislike about prebinding?

One general negative emerged from the survey. Eleven respondents mentioned the time delay added to receive prebound books after ordering. For those who mentioned a specific time delay, the additional time varied between two weeks and six weeks. Five respondents mentioned a specific dislike they had for either the look, quality, or type of binding used in prebinding.

38 of the 59 respondents did not prebind paperbacks and therefore skipped questions #4 through #9 and answered questions #10 and #11.

Question #10 — Why do you not prebind paperbacks?

A wide variety of answers were given:

Eight respondents stated that they bind their paperbacks after they see heavy use. Some quotes: "If paperbacks are heavily used and start to degrade, it is usually possible to replace or to bind into hardcover at

our commercial bindery." "We tend to bind trade paperbacks only when they circulate, i.e. we have a 'flag' in our circulation system that tells us when a paperback circulates, and we then send it for treatment." "If paperback use so merits, we commercially rebind in buckram, for a very small percentage, or purchase second copies."

Seven respondents said they don't feel paperbacks warrant prebinding. One stated, "Don't feel our paperback purchases are used that heavily." Another said, "Most of the paperback books we buy have adequate binding already (based on the amount of use at our library)."

Seven respondents specifically mentioned cost as the prohibiting factor to using prebinding. One respondent said, "Our budget has deteriorated to the point that we are not binding any paperbacks." Another said, "We do not prebind for budget reasons at this point. Although paperbacks have a shorter life, the number of paperback books we have to repair or replace does not seem to warrant special pre-treatment at this point. Admittedly, we have not done any studies to verify this."

Six respondents say their library has a policy of purchasing hardcover whenever possible. One respondent stated that the reason they do not prebind paperbacks is, "Because most of the books which come in paperback are less scholarly and less important to our mission. And if we prebind paperbacks, we might as well buy the hardback." Another answered, "Our policy is to purchase the hardback version of a title whenever possible."

Six respondents use either their own bindery or another technique, such as plastic covers and spine tape to reinforce paperbacks. One stated, "We do reinforce the spine and covers of paperbacks on-site. We do not feel the need to do any more than that."

Four respondents said they are currently researching the idea of prebinding. One person answered, "We are waiting for our new preservation librarian to investigate and do a cost analysis, etc. Beginning a new program is slow but eventual." Another said, "The issue has come up in the last two years, because we are buying more paperbacks than ever before." One more said, "We will move in this direction in the future, I'm sure."

Finally, one respondent stated that they were not pleased with the quality of their prebound books and another stated that "It takes too long for delivery of the book when that process is added in."

Question #11 — Would you like a sample and more information on paperback prebinding?

Six of the respondents who currently do not prebind asked for samples to be sent to their library.

Conclusions of the survey:

- * Currently, academic libraries which prebind their books are in the minority.

- * For those libraries which prebind books, a strong majority use their book vendor as an outsource.

- * The advantages of prebinding: 1) it extends the life of paperbacks and prevents damage; 2) it saves staff time when outsourced; 3) it saves money when buying a prebound paperback over the publisher's hardcover edition.

- * The reasons for not prebinding: 1) the library binds paperbacks after they see heavy use; 2) the paperback usage in the library doesn't require binding; 3) a prebound paperback is an additional cost; 4) the library has a policy of purchasing hardcover over paper; 5) the library uses their own resources for binding or reinforcing paperbacks.

- * A portion of those libraries who currently do not prebind paperbacks are considering doing so in the near future.

I want to thank each of the librarians who participated in the survey. The information generated is tremendously valuable to me and I hope it will help librarians make more informed decisions regarding prebinding. If you would like a complete list of all the responses, or if you would like more information on prebinding, please call me at 800-458-8438 or e-mail me at <neiljaffe@aol.com>.

Some final comments received from the email questionnaire: "This is certainly easier to respond to than junk mail!" "This is a convenient way to answer a questionnaire. Thank you!"

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