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Group Therapy

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Group Therapy

Invoices: The Environment and, Copies of, and Electronic Possibilities

Column Editor: **Rosann Bazirjian** (Florida State University)

Hey y'all out there! Do you have any gripes? Come to your therapist!
Try <rbazirji@mailers.fsu.edu> or FAX 904-644-5170.

GRIBE:

(Submitted by **Pamela Rose**,
Head of Acquisitions,
Health Sciences Library,
University at Buffalo):

"How many invoice copies can one library use?" We need only one invoice copy. We discard all others. Our internal processing mandates five separate marks on the original, requiring a photocopy to create a sturdy record for our files. Yet nearly every vendor we deal with sends us at least two invoice copies, and many send three or four copies (one original, two-four duplicates, and often an additional packing slip). Most are generated from computer systems on preprinted forms designed according to company assessment of customer need. Therefore, if my request for only one copy is honored, all it means is that the vendor takes care of disposal. The number of trees being felled for this purpose is astounding.

How can we reduce the waste? How many customers don't need those extra copies? Are vendors designing forms with conservation in mind?

PUBLISHER RESPONSE:

(Submitted by **David Mitchell**,
Business Manager,
Guilford Publications, Inc.):

Ah, the number of invoice copies questions, proof of the old adage "You can't even satisfy some of the people some of the time." Personally I happen to agree with this gripe; most businesses send out too many copies of invoices, not to mention purchase orders and other documents. Unfortunately, other people don't agree. Believe it or not, we have had customers return invoices to us because there weren't enough copies. Some purchase orders specify the number of copies the purchaser requires. Publishers have to design systems for efficiency, made more difficult because we serve libraries, bookstores, wholesalers, vendors, government agencies, and individuals, all with different needs. Some classes of customers want several copies. Others suffice with one or none. To answer this, many publishers, and other businesses, print a large number of invoices to hedge their bets.

It is not feasible to custom print a number of invoices, nor is it feasible to rip off superfluous copies for each customer. Even if it were possible, the customer would ultimately pay for this "service" and I would rather put the effort into other, more deserving areas. The publisher ripping off the extra copies of the invoice doesn't avoid the waste of paper, and isn't practical when processing hundreds of invoices a day.

The best solution is for the industry to have a gentlemen's and gentlewomen's agreement to send only one copy of the invoice and those who require additional copies make their own. This way only the number of copies that is needed is made and ensures the least paper used.

Printing one copy will save everyone time and money. A few years ago, we moved from a two-part renewal form to a one part form with a perforated reply stub, resulting in substantial savings of time and money. We put some of the cost savings toward using recycled paper. We are looking into a one-part invoice. (We currently have a two-part one.) Hopefully our customers who need more than

one copy won't mind making their own, but we will have to see. Now, what can we do about those stacks of library orders on those tiny individual forms?

VENDOR RESPONSE:

(Submitted by **Barry Fast**,
Vice President,
Academic Book Center):

Pamela Rose raises a serious issue that incorporates not only environmental concerns, but waste in general. While the Rush Limbaughs of the world ridicule "tree huggers," even the youngest among us remember vividly rivers that caught fire, air pollution that killed old people with breathing problems, and ground water sources that caused cancer. The environment is much better now, but continued attention to waste reduction and high quality standards for air and water are still very important. This is especially true in the current political atmosphere where many equate environmentalists with communists. For those of us on the business side, we should not only be doing our part for the environment, but we should also be keeping our operating costs as low as possible. With slim profit margins, watching the pennies is essential. So, as Pamela Rose asks, why all this waste in invoicing?

The short answer is, customers overwhelmingly require multiple copy invoices. Manufacturers of invoice stock overwhelmingly offer carbonless stock in two to six copies. Unless vendors set up banks of printers, each loaded with different permutations of invoice copies, vendors must choose the most popular, for instance, three copies, and then either print them twice for customers requiring six copies or discard copies for customers requiring fewer copies.

There are several solutions. Pamela's gripe should encourage all librarians to see if they really need as many copies as they are getting, and they should work with their business offices to reduce the number. Vendors should examine the way they do their invoicing, and either reduce the copies of the stock they purchase, or switch to laser printers that can be programmed to print one or more copies per invoice. We should encourage systems vendors and business offices to move to the acceptance of electronic invoicing, which is now standard practice between many governmental agencies and major corporations.

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