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## Group Therapy-Brian McLaughlin's "gripe"

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# Group Therapy

## Canceling Prepaid Orders



### GRIBE:

(Submitted by **Brian McLaughlin**,  
Syracuse University)

My "gripe" relates to orders that need to be prepaid by the vendor. The library is not advised when these prepayments are made, but after our normal period for leaving orders open, we are advised that the order cannot be canceled because it has been prepaid.

This is particularly a problem related to orders submitted to US-based vendors that require prepayment for domestic imprints and/or for titles which are not available in the US. We have received notices in responses to claims on open orders "CANNOT CANCEL — ITEM PREPAID OR ORDERED FROM OVERSEAS." Some of these items have been open or

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.

ders well beyond our normal one year limit. Other than more careful pre-order searching, what can be done? I would like to be advised of the necessity for prepayment PRIOR to this commitment being made on our part.

### RESPONSE:

(Submitted by **John Perry Smith**,  
President, Total Information, Inc.)

### TITLE:

Remembrance of Prepayments Lost  
(Purdue)

**Sarcastic Response:** Is a puzzlement, as the King of Siam is reported to have stated when confronted with practices outside of his experience. Who earns the blame for dropping the ball on this one? The Jobber who leaves a prepaid order outstanding for over a year? The Library that is willing to accept this level of service? Both?

I can't help but compare this gripe to the complaint that every book our library receives has pages 100 to 145 torn out. What can I do? Tell your Jobber to stop tearing out the pages. Fire your Jobber!

**Cynical Response:** It often is the case that a library order is received at a Jobber for a publisher who is unknown, unfriendly

or just unaccommodating. These orders can take a long time to forward to the publisher. When, and if, the library claims them the Jobber quickly places the order. Some time later, the order comes back requesting prepayment. More delay while this request is processed. The seasons turn. A year, or more, goes by. The library customer is fed up and wishes to free-up the funds dedicated to this ancient order. The jobber caught on the horns of his/her procrastination is as unwilling to cancel the order as he/she was to expedite the order in the first place. Like the abusive parent crying out for the return of his/her battered child when faced with the loss of custody, the Jobber now refuses to give up what was originally scorned. Is it even possible that the order was not placed/prepaid until the library sought to cancel? Fie on any who would believe such a calumny!

Is it really credible that a Jobber can stay in business by mailing out checks for materials not guarding its money? Just how rich are they? A full year and still no book? In that case let me make Total Information the designated non-fulfilling source for all orders requiring prepayment. We guarantee not to ship. We won't refund your money. But you will have a warm place in our hearts as we recline at our quaint villa on the Cote d'Azure.

### What Happens at Total Information?

Here at Total the money used to prepay orders is mine! If I wasn't using it to serve this part of my customers requirements I could take a vacation, go to dinner, buy a new suit or just keep it in the bank. I care a lot about what happens to my money.

We have a purchasing program that lists more than 15,000 publishers. It is one of the most valuable assets of this firm. Compiled over twenty years, it tells us all kinds of things about each publisher. One of the things it tells us is whether this publisher should be prepaid. In most cases, they require prepayment because they are not a commercial publisher with a fully articulated accounts receivable and credit department. In some cases, we have determined that prepaying a purchase order greatly improves the speed of fulfillment, or increases our discount enough to justify the allocation of funds required. When

*continued on page 65*

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**Group Therapy**  
from page 64

the orders are printed every day, all orders marked "Prepayment Required" are separated and sent to our prepayment expert. This person is the second most experienced bookseller at Total Information (over twenty years in the business). Every order is processed before it is sent. The publisher is contacted by phone or fax. Only those items currently available are ordered. Pricing is confirmed on the day the order is sent. No back orders are allowed. Almost all our prepayments are charged to one of our credit cards. (This allows us to object to any charge for material not received). The publisher gets his/her money at once. The material ships quickly. Items not available are tickled for reordering, and the customer notified.

Currently we are prepaying almost 20% of our total purchases. Only gross mismanagement could explain the type of service that Brian is talking about.

**RESPONSE:**  
(Submitted by **Ann Revelt**,  
Sales Director, Franklin Books)

It is the vendor's responsibility to succinctly articulate the basis of the business relationship governing the transactions


between the Library and the supplier. Franklin's training program for both outside sales personnel and customer service staff members includes adequate reference to the non-returns policy regarding prepaid items and foreign acquisitions. Our advertising literature outlines the limited exclusions for foreign and prepaid acquisitions from our liberal returns policy. Problems do arise when the acquirer does not recall the limitations of the returns policy. All businesses develop, or should develop, policies to regulate relationships between itself and others: customers, staff, suppliers, etc. Company business policies normally reflect a sensitivity to the needs of both the business and the customer, though in some cases conflicts do exist. Librarians would like to be able to cancel and return everything. The inability to obtain refunds, return costs, and publisher restocking charges act to deter the distributor's ability to accommodate the librarian.

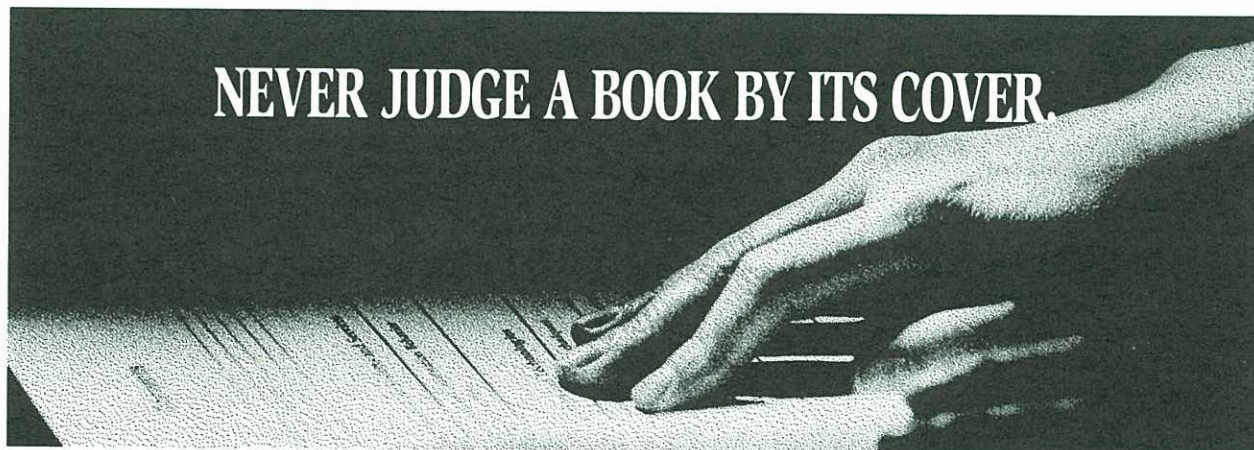
Fewer than 3% of Franklin's publishers require prepayment for orders. Many of our prepaid suppliers have a no return policy. In some cases the supplier has an artificially higher shipping/handling charge. If the vendor does accept a cancellation, Franklin may receive credit for the value of the book but loses the vendor shipping/handling charges and the costs

Franklin incurred to return the book. Refunds are abnormal, with the publishers issuing a credit to be used against future acquisitions. In addition, the publisher may impose a restocking charge as high as 25%.

Franklin faces the same problem with the foreign vendor as it faces with the prepaid vendor, with two additional hurdles to overcome. The first hurdle is the excessive costs undertaken to ship a book to a foreign country. The second hurdle is the damages which occur in shipping. Excessive rough handling during shipping to a foreign country requires full insurance coverage, thus we incur even greater return shipping costs.

The rhetorical question which arises is who should be responsible for costs incurred by the distributor for the library's cancellation. For most cases, except where the restocking charge is particularly burdensome, Franklin has absorbed these costs.

In order to keep the library fully informed of Franklin's policies, we upon the receipt of a foreign order or prepaid order, generate an informational message to the library indicating that the item is non-cancelable. When more than \$75.00 is to be expended for a prepaid item, we call the library to confirm the order. Franklin's invoices highlight the non-returnable item. 



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