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Librarians Looking at Publishers: Librarians' Reactions to Publisher Marketing Strategies

by **Karen Schmidt**, Ph.D. (Acquisitions Librarian and Coordinator of Collection Development, U. of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign) <karens@uiuc.edu>

At a serials conference a few years ago, I attended a presentation by a librarian friend of mine, who was advising the audience (many of whom were publishers) that publishers should forget sending out any mailing — including catalogs — to librarians. “We don’t have time to look at these mailings. We all throw them out!” the librarian offered. “Omigawd!” My arm was frantically waving in the air. “Can’t I correct that statement? Please?!” (Papa Lyman was there and will attest to my frothing at the mouth.)

I never was called on so that I could refute — or at least qualify — this librarian’s statement. But it did light a fire in me to find out more about just how librarians do respond to mailings, calls, and other publisher/librarian interaction. I always like to navigate from a position of facts (no, Jack “just the facts, m’am” Webb isn’t a cultural hero of mine, but he probably should be) so for the past two years, I have been building towards administering a large survey of librarians and their reactions to publishers and publishing information, to take place soon.

The survey, which I have tentatively entitled “Librarians Looking at Publishers,” will randomly survey about 6,600 librarians from all kinds of libraries: academic, school, public, medical, special, federal. If it moves, I’ll probably sample it. Sometimes in the next few months, if you are a librarian who belongs to just about any library organization, you might receive the survey, which will ask you about a number of things, including:

- some not-very-nosy questions about you and your library
- budget information
- factors that affect book and journal selection decisions
- reactions to publisher communiqués
- uses of and reactions to publisher Web sites
- where you order from: vendors, publishers, bookstores, wholesalers

I hope to find out various kinds of information about the publisher/librarian/vendor interaction, and get a good, statistically valid picture of what tends to work and what doesn’t with librarians, based on types of libraries, budgets, and materials.

If you attended last year’s AAUP preconference to the Charleston Conference, you will know that the magic triangle of librarians/vendors/publishers can be tenuous at best. A lot of this, I

think, can be laid at the feet of the differences in profit and not-for-profit enterprises. In the myths and preconceptions we all hold towards “the other guys,” and in our separate and confusing daily work environments and modus operandi. I have no doubt that the politics and machinations of an average academic library would stump the best publisher marketing team. (Case in point: I’m an acquisitions librarian, right? Right. I acquire stuff, right? Right. I have control over what I acquire, right? Wrong! I won’t bore you with the layers of decision-making between me and the selection process. I certainly understand how publishers think they are targeting the right person when they send things to the eponymous Acquisitions Librarian or Collection Development Librarian at the University of Illinois, however.) I, on the other hand, have always assumed that the acquisitions editors and marketing teams of publishing houses practically live in each others’ pockets. It was a big surprise to me to discover otherwise at the AAUP preconference! And vendors are another matter altogether. They get to figure out BOTH of us.

So the findings of my survey will add to the dialog. Some of these same questions have been asked before by the AAP and other groups. I hope my work will add to the information we already have, by sampling a very large and diverse group of librarians and putting the questions together in a different way. I have had a cracker-jack team of publishers, vendors, and librarians help me develop the right questions without scaring the poor respondents half to death with a 40-pound questionnaire. If you are dying to offer your experience and opinions on this topic, send me an email <karens@uiuc.edu> and I will add you to the mailing list. And if you do get the survey, please send it back!

I should warn you, the **Charleston Conference Program Planning Committee** has already strong-armed some kind of report on my findings for the **1997 Charleston Conference**.

Media Minder from page 81

The Last of the Mohicans (1920, Maurice Tourneur/Clarence Brown) Wallace Beery Milestone Film & Video, \$39.95; laser—Lumiere, \$49.95 CLV

Manhattan (1921) Example of the city tours that was popular at the beginning of the city. Shows the monumental power of New York and its great skyscrapers. Museum of Modern Art, vhs \$90.00; laser—no listing

North by Northwest (1959, Alfred Hitchcock) Cary Grant, Eva Marie Saint, James Mason MGM/UA Video, \$19.98; laser—MGM, \$39.98 CLV, Criterion, \$69.95 CLV, Criterion, \$124.95 CAV

The Philadelphia Story (1940, George Cukor) Cary Grant, James Stewart, Katharine Hepburn MGM/UA Video, \$14.95; laser—MGM, \$34.98 CLV

Rip Van Winkle (1896) Does not appear to be available for purchase at this time on vhs or laser

Seventh Heaven (1927) Janet Gaynor Does not appear to be available for purchase at this time on vhs or laser

Stagecoach (1939, John Ford) John Wayne, Clair Trevor, Walter Brennan Warner Home Video, \$14.95; laser—Warner, \$34.98, CLV

To Fly (1976) An example of the IMAX process; not available for purchase on vhs or laser

To Kill a Mockingbird (1962, Richard Mulligan) Gregory Peck, Mary Badham MCA/Universal Home Video, \$19.98; laser—MCA, \$39.98 CLV

Top Hat (1935, Mark Sandrich) Fred Astaire, Ginger Rogers Turner Home Entertainment, \$14.98

We’d love to reproduce the rest of the Film Registry for 1989-1994, but we’re out of room. Why not write us (or Phil) if you want more! — KS