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Media Minder — Outsourcing Your Non-Print Media Requirement

by Philip Hallman (Ambassador Books and Media) <philip@absbook.com>



Thirteen years ago, **Ambassador Book Service** became the first jobber to actively assist college and university libraries in acquiring non-print materials. Since then, many other traditional book jobbers have also begun providing non-print materials. Unlike the book supplier market, which is a relatively straight forward path (emphasis on relatively), media acquisition is filled with lots of hair-pin turns and potholes. So much so, that many larger institutions have found it necessary to employ a full-time media librarian to navigate the terrain. But not all places have the luxury of hiring a permanent media-savvy employee. Even those library directors who do have a media librarian on staff may often ask that person to manage other areas, thus relegating the acquisition duties to an assistant who may not have much training. So what's an acquisition department head to do?! Many turned to their friendly book jobbers and screamed "help." Most jobbers threw their hands up or supplied a small fraction of the materials requested.

We, on the other hand, saw it as a challenge and a great way to increase business by working with libraries that had not needed help in the past. We hired a full-time media librarian to orchestrate the activities, hired staff to assist, promoted the service, developed videographies, created a database of available titles, and, in the end, produced consistent results. We also changed our name — **Ambassador Book Service** became **Ambassador Books and Media** and we have been pleased with the results.

As our first Media Director, I must admit that I have a bias. I must also admit that I was

not immediately convinced that this would work. I'm not a psychologist, psychiatrist, or a doctor, nor do I play one on TV, but I am a media librarian and I understand the mindset of my breed. To stereotype in the broadest terms, media librarians have to function in a dualistic world straight out of a sci-fi novel and must adapt a kind of **Dr. Jekyll** and **Mr. Hyde** personality in order to succeed.

On the one hand, we media librarians are the **Rodney Dangerfields** of the information world; we rarely get the respect the other divisions of the library receive. Even as we enter the 21st century, where the general population is completely enthralled with anything electronic, and is practically hooked-up to the Internet 24/7, media librarians must often work with a woefully low budget and are challenged to collect accordingly. Many colleagues still do not feel that developing a moving image collection is necessary nor do they see the intellectual merit of such a collection. In many minds, a media collection is still a frivolous, entertainment-driven waste of time. And what about training? If you check the class schedule of any school of information/library science, I think you would be hard-pressed to find a single course devoted to training people to work in the field.

Yet, in spite of the continuous downgrading of our services, media librarians still do a pretty good job. And that is due in large part to the other side of the media librarian's personality which kicks into gear and saves the day. You see, we also see ourselves as the **John Waynes** of the information world. Particularly **John Wayne** as **Ethan Edwards**, the role he played in **John Ford's** classic film "**The Searchers**." Like **Ethan**, we are the lone wolves of the library who must go it alone in our quest to find that hard-to-find video that is no longer in print. We find great satisfaction as we ride atop our white horse and hand a DVD copy to the professor who requested an impossibly difficult-to-find film from Chile. As we shut the professor's jaw that's dropped open because no one could possibly find it, we ride away into the sunset deeply satisfied with what we have achieved. (This is all done with appropriate humming and guitar strumming music in the background.)

So how do jobbers compete with a lone wolf? They don't. And it took me a long time to realize that. Media librarians don't want help nor do they ask for it either (except from other media librarians). Why not? Because if administrators and colleagues are questioning your very existence, the last thing you want to do is show any kind of vulnerability. And asking someone else to secure your materials is akin to asking your girlfriend to wash your underwear. You don't do it. At least until you get married.

But there are lots of library departments who do need and want the assistance of a jobber. Take **Sharon Propas** of **Stanford University**, for instance. She wrote the following:

"Perhaps the greatest advantage to using a media approval plan is having a place for one-stop shopping. Ambassador sends us a list of new releases once a month, and the coverage of this list is amazing. ... For acquisitions, research time has greatly lessened. We receive the order with all of the information we need, and we know the source from which we can order the title. ... Truly impressive for these often difficult orders."

So, for those who want and need the help, thanks for the business. What else do you need? For the **John Waynes**, I'm not sure I can ever convince you, but, have you considered using a jobber for a portion of these media services? Consider that since the 1980's, library administrators have borrowed from the business world the notion of "just in case vs. just-in-time" collection strategies. The "just-in-case" selector purchases materials of merit hoping that someone in the future can make use of them, while, the "just-in-time" selector takes the opposite approach, buying materials only after they have been requested by a faculty member or patron and praying that it will be received "just-in-time" for the patron's use.

Most media collections, particularly small academic collections, are developed using a "just-in-time" approach. Since budgets are tight, selectors want to be sure that the vast majority of the collection is used. A great many academic media users tend to wait until the last possible minute to check and see if an item is in their library's collection, which forces the selector to go into speed mode in order to secure its arrival on time. No vendor can help there and shouldn't promise to do so. That's what makes **Amazon** so amazing. But there are plenty of other titles that you know that you do want to receive so why not let someone else help out? Especially since you probably already have many other responsibilities including, committee assignments, letters of recommendation for colleagues, budget reports, new hires that need to be trained, job candidate and promotion dossiers to read, booking systems that are down, students that are late for work.

For those who have the luxury of using the "just-in-case" method, the jobber can assist mightily in this regard. Why not take advantage of lists and subject guides that have already been established? If you need to develop a collection of films from India because a new faculty hire is asking for them, a jobber can help. Remember, in addition to the "just-

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Library has decided not to continue overburdening him with automated serial check-in.

CUSTOMER SERVICE: For customer outreach, **Mr. Doormat** has no peer. Whether the customers are in study carrels, browsing the stacks, or working at the copier, **Mr. Doormat** will find them and make sure they are up to date on such topics as play-offs, retirement qualifications, local elections, and mass transit problems.

SUMMARY: For his verbal skills, **Mr. Doormat** is known throughout the library as "The Great Communicator." He has an immense effect on the library's reputation, staff morale, and productivity. Hardly a day passes that his supervisor does not receive some comments on **Mr. Doormat's** abilities. A highly valued employee. 🐼

Bet You Missed It

Press Clippings — In the News — Carefully Selected by Your Crack Staff of News Sleuths

Column Editor: **Bruce Strauch** (The Citadel)

Editor's Note: Hey, are y'all reading this? If you know of an article that should be called to *Against the Grain's* attention ... send an email to <kstrauch@comcast.net>. We're listening! — **KS**

BUFFOONERY AMONG THE PROFESSORIATE by Bruce Strauch (The Citadel)

"The nature of institutions usually dictates how to treat them in fiction; thus universities, like governments, are most accurately portrayed by ridicule." And thus **Roseblatt**, author of *Beet*, an academic satire published last month by **Ecco/Harper Collins**, list his top five favorites. 1) *Lucky Jim* by **Kingsley Amis**; 2) *Eating People Is Wrong* by **Malcolm Bradbury**; 3) *Small World* by **David Lodge**; 4) *Straight Man* by **Richard Russo**; 5) *Pnin* by **Vladimir Nabokov**.

See — **Roger Rosenblatt**, "Five Best," in *The Wall Street Journal*, Feb. 16-17, 2008, p.W10.

SIT UP AND SAY "ARF" by Bruce Strauch (The Citadel)

Christine Merrill is a high level dog portrait artist hired to paint **West Minster Kennel Club** winners and other pampered pooches of the rich. She learned to get a likeness from her mother, a high level portrait painter of such celebrities as **Tricia Nixon** and **Spiro Agnew's** wife. **Christine** is flown first class to the pet owner's home where she studies her subjects in their home environments. She has done **Oprah Winfrey's** cocker spaniels, **Malcolm Forbes's** Norfolk Terrier, and **George and Barbara Bush's** spaniel Millie.

See — **Joanne Kaufman**, "Her Portrait Subjects Sit, Fetch and Roll Over," in *The Wall Street Journal*, Feb. 12, 2008, p.D8.

NEW AD VALUE IN THE FACEBOOK WALLED GARDEN by Bruce Strauch (The Citadel)

Online social networkers are certainly not looking for privacy. Rather they are seeking recognition as individuals, and vendors are welcome. **NebuAd**, **Project Rialto**, **Phorm**, **Frontporch** and **Adzilla** are pitching behavioral targeting to Internet service providers which will use tracking cookies to provide relevant ads. This will seriously undercut traditional online publishers who draw viewers to their content along with the adjacent ads. As the article says, "**Google** and **Microsoft** are so yesterday."

See — **Esther Dyson**, "The Coming Ad Revolution" in *The Wall Street Journal*, Feb. 11, 2008, p.A18.



3-D IS BACK

by Bruce Strauch (The Citadel)

Some of us are old enough to remember "House of Wax" and "Creature From the Black Lagoon" in the quickly abandoned gimmicky 3-D format. Now rock concerts by the likes of **U-2** and **Hannah Montana/Miley Cyrus** are employing 3-D in a desperate bid for theaters to combat the growing sophistication of home-theater systems. With new editing techniques and polarized lenses on the glasses, the old eye-strain and headaches are history.

Of course this will add \$20 million to the already bloated costs of film production and it's hard to add subtitles which is vital to those foreign sales that drive movie-making so much more than the American audience.

See — **Sarah McBride**, "Clash of the 3-D Rock Stars," in *The Wall Street Journal*, Feb. 15, 2008, p.W1.

"THE BEST WAY TO MAKE A BAD WORK OF ART IS TO TRY TO MAKE A GREAT ONE." by Bruce Strauch (The Citadel)

Leonard Bernstein stormed Broadway with "West Side Story" and spent the rest of his life trying to make a Great Big Musical Statement without a bit of success. He had developed a bad case of importantitis. Likewise **Orson Welles** after "Citizen Kane." And **Ralph Ellison** who was acclaimed a major novelist for "Invisible Man," then got writers' block and piled up thousands of pages trying to complete a second novel which never got published.

"**Voltaire** said it: 'The best is the enemy of the good.'"

And if that doesn't sum up the pathetic paralysis of academe, I don't know what does. Everyone wants to be important, so they can't manage to pull off good.

See — **Terry Teachout**, "Importantitis, Enemy of Art," in *The Wall Street Journal*, Feb. 16, 2008, p.W18.

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in-time" model, jobbers have also introduced other workflow aids that include the delivery of shelf ready materials. For example, as an **OCLC WorldCat** partner, we and other jobbers, can deliver cataloging for 100% of your media acquisitions.

But I feel that we media librarians don't give ourselves enough respect. This is an unfortunate result of the **Rodney Dangerfield** syndrome that media librarians suffer from. Since others don't always value our services, we don't either.

The recent release of the film adaptation

of the popular Broadway musical "**Sweeney Todd**" starring **Johnny Depp** reminded me of an earlier show that composer/lyricist **Stephen Sondheim** created in 1971. Entitled "**Follies**," the show features one of the great songs for an actress "of a certain age." The song "**I'm Still Here**" begins as a lament to the past and details the various changes in times and fashions that the singer has had to endure to remain in show business. By the end of the song, it becomes a song dedicated to the resilience of the human spirit and a triumphant call to all survivors.

We media librarians need to adapt the song as our professional soundtrack and change the lyrics to reflect what we've lived through. After all, we've made it through 16mm, VHS, NTSC, PAL, and Secam too. We're still here.

Laserdiscs, CX encoding, CAV vs. CLV, expensive Criterion boxed sets. We're still here. Pan and scan and letterboxed videos. We're still here. We made it through public performance rights, off-air copying limitations, retaining reserve copies for 45-day vs. 15. Not to mention DVDs, region 1-5 or region-free encoding, multi-standard players, Blue-Ray discs, flat screen and HD TVs. And even with digitization on the horizon, we're still here. How many format changes have those book buyers had to deal with?

And jobbers or no jobbers, we'll still be here. But media specialist jobbers like **Ambassador** can help along the way. 🐾