Dear Editor:

I want to correct an impression that John Secor conveyed in his ATG February '98 article entitled “Pandora’s Box — Partnering: A Powerful ‘What to Do’ Management Tool or Just Another Fad.” John and I have had a friendly debate on the term “partnering” for years, both in an informal way and, in the January 1997 ALA Conference, in front of an audience of librarians. In fact, I am the “senior executive of a library bookselling company” he disparagingly refers to on page 72. I did give my views on the use of the word partnering, but not quite in the way John tells it.

I do understand what partnering means, in the context that John has popularized it. I share his thoughts on the business strategy embodied in the way he uses the word. I agree that relationships between vendors and librarians require a close collaboration because the environment is changing rapidly and the solutions are more complex than in the past. Without a close, collaborative and collegial customer/vendor relationship, we are impeding communication and accomplishing far less than is possible. Anyone who reads my writings in the ATG column, Issues in Library/Vendor Relations, knows how strongly I support this viewpoint.

But words have both a rational and emotional content. Words mean things, often precise things, and we should use them carefully. My only quarrel with John on the use of the word partnering is that I think it is imprecise. It is, in my view, a buzzword, and an inaccurate buzzword. When I hear the noun, partner, I think of my wife (the more emotional aspect of this word, as in partner in life) or my colleague, Dan Halloran (the more rational aspect of the word, as in business partner). In both cases, the word implies equality and commitment. When cowboys used it, affectionately, in the old West, that’s what it meant, and it still does on cop dramas in the movies and TV. It especially bothers me when a perfectly good noun is turned into a cumbersome verb. I happily stand accused of being a curmudgeon on language abuse. I dislike the word partnering because it is a bad verb derived from a good noun to describe a business relationship that does not, and should not, exist.

When a library pays a vendor to supply certain products or services the relationship can be, and should be, collaborative, congenial, collegial, and as cordial as both parties want. But the relationship is not equal, and it should not be. The vendor works for the library, at the librarian’s direction, to standards established by librarians. Consulting together on problem solving, or bringing new and creative ideas to the process, is all to the good. But no matter how intimate or collaborative this relationship gets, it is not a partnership. The librarians retain the right to dismiss the vendor, with or without a good explanation, with or without civility. By definition, the relationship between a customer and a supplier is commercial and unequal.

We can create a new word, if we wish, to define the collaborative customer/supplier relationship, but let’s not take an old one, full of rational and emotional content, and change both its meaning and its gender.

That is the point I made at the ALA meeting, and it is still my position.

Sincerely,
Barry Fast
(Vice President, Academic Book Center; 800-326-3080) <barryf@acbc.com>
See page 94 for more letters.

From your (saddened) Editor:

This morning when I was finishing up this issue of Against the Grain, I learned of the death of Mario Casalini — a truly gentle, marvelous, kind, generous, urbane and cultured man. I feel that I must break with the tradition of the ATG editor’s column to reminisce.

Born in Florence 77 years ago, Mario Casalini was a genius who started an Italian book and journal business and won our hearts as well as our accounts. I first encountered Mr. Casalini over email. He was inquiring about the Charleston Conference. Larry Simms, an Italian Professor here at the College of Charleston, had learned that Mr. Casalini was coming to Charleston. He was elated. He knew Mr. Casalini well and described him as a scholar of deep learning and culture.

I met Mr. Casalini that same year. He was courteous and self-deprecating. He bowed and even (I believe) kissed my hand. I had never heard one in such manners, such grace, such gentlemanliness. I recently visited Casalini Libri in Italy and met Barbara and Michele Casalini, his daughter and son who have taken over the company. I feel honored that I got to visit Mr. Casalini in his native Fiesole, a gorgeous venue where he did business in a beautiful villa. He showed me the chapel where his parents had worshipped. It was full of boxes and supplies, but he said that he hoped to turn it back into a chapel someday. The last time I saw Mario Casalini was in Charleston at Blossom’s Cafe, where he brought me 12 gorgeous red roses. He was always doing something nice. Always thinking of those around him and never of himself.

I will miss Mario Casalini very much. He was born so early in the twentieth century that his manners were those of the nineteenth. He conducted himself with a graciousness that is disappearing with his generation. May he rest in peace.

Yr. Ed.
Letter From Stewart Lillard

(Technical Services J. Murrey Atkins Library, UNC Charlotte; 9201 University City Boulevard; Charlotte, NC 28223; phone (704)-547-3589 <stllard@newmail.unc.edu>)

How we are doing on Physics Bestsellers!

In the Feb. 1998 issue of Against the Grain, pp. 46-7, Katina Strauch of the College of Charleston, SC, began to publish a series of scholarly bestseller lists. Drawing on the collective expertise of selectors across the country, Bob Nardini, Yankee Book Peddler, compiled a list of the top fifty (50) books in the LC subclass QC Physics purchased most often. These fifty titles represented approximately the top 10 percent (10%) of the remaining physics titles sold by YBP during 1996/97.

Of the 50 titles (ranging from $19.19 to $139), Atkins Library purchased 27 titles on approval plan purchased 3 titles on departmental direct orders purchased 30 [total]

Of the 50 titles, Atkins Library developed 3 titles on approval plan and returned them does not own 17 titles does not own 20 [total]

Wandering the Web
from page 93

International weekly journal of ideas, opinions, news & analysis.

Fortune: http://www.pathfinder.com/fortune, Searchable archives back to 1993 as well as Fortune 500, etc.


Advertising Age: http://www.adage.com, Great site for articles about advertising issues.


LAW:


Oral Arguments of the Supreme Court: http://overz.at.nwu.edu/cases/70-18.


Cornell University’s Law site: http://law.cornell.edu/.

International Court of Justice: http://www.law.cornell.edu/sci.


So, Atkins Library is a 30/50 library. Now the big question is “So What?” How do we evaluate this 60% plus rating? Do we win the gold cup, or are we adequate for a mid-size research institution? At least, we know that our faculty members and advanced students have adequate resources on campus. Without the approval plan, I am afraid that our statistics would have been much lower. As Daniel P. Halloran, Academic Book Center, wrote on page 1 of the same issue of Against the Grain, Feb. 1998: “among these trends and developments [for 1997] are ... the central role of approval plans in libraries, including smaller libraries that traditionally had used other collection management tools,” Atkins Library began the BNAm approval plan in 1977/78.

Letter From Bob Nardini

(Regional Vice President, Collection Management & Development Group, YBP) <nardin@YPB.com>

My first thought on reading Stewart Lillard’s letter is, that I’m glad people are actually using the list to check their own holdings. We’d hoped a list like this would be useful, so maybe it actually will be.

Other random thoughts: • If teaching faculty at this library were presented with a list of the 20 not obtained, would they recommend buying them? • If presented a list of the 30 already held, would they agree with the purchase decision? • Is approval plan sales actually a good way to measure the value of books? It might be interesting to compare this list with some other methods, e.g., how did the 30 held books circulate compared with other physics books purchased during the year? How did YBP’s 50 titles fare in reviews? (how many were even reviewed at all?)

I guess the 60% would be meaningful only when compared with other libraries, especially with peers. I wonder if an analysis using AMIGOS or the WLN software would identify these same titles as those most widely held, from the time period, in Physics?

It would be interesting, as well, to check the 50 against the holdings of some libraries who don’t rely on an approval plan in Physics, especially in comparison to some who do.

I wonder if publisher sales records would agree that these were the leading Physics titles for the year?

Etc. etc. Somebody could really make a project out of this, I’ll bet, if they put their mind to it. 🍃

Ed note: What do the rest of you think on this issue? Are “bestseller lists” important selection tools? What role does the approval plan play with faculty and/or bibliographer selection? For example, when I showed the list to our Physics liaison (at the College of Charleston) who is a professor, he said: “Order whatever we don’t have!” What do Y’ALL think? Anyone who wants to explore this further? — KS

Box facts excerpted from Nat Bodian’s The Joy of Publishing, available from Open Horizons Publishing Company, Post Office Box 205, Fairfield, Iowa 52565 for $29.95

<http://www.against-the-grain.com>