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"Just In Time" Acquisitions:

The Case of the New York Times Book Review

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On any Monday morning, a user is likely to come to the library information desk and say, "I read a review of this book in *The New York Times Book Review* and I'd like to check it out." At the University of Virginia Library, we try to anticipate such a request through our Yankee book approval shelf ready plan. Aspirations are laudable, but do we deliver, I wondered as I read *The New York Times Book Review* (NYTBR) Sunday morning, October 23, 1997? (None of our twelve Yankee profiles specifies that "Books reviewed in NYTBR" be sent automatically on our book approval plans.)

To determine how many reviewed titles were already on UVA Library shelves, I searched our online catalog the following Monday. I then searched Yankee's GOBI database to see which of the thirty-seven reviewed titles were expected to arrive on our book approval plan. (Of the thirty-seven titles listed on the contents page, twenty-eight were non-fiction (NF) and nine were fiction (F). The UVA Library shelf ready plan includes a FTP'ed upgraded CIP bibliographic record with item record created in the bibload (we supply Yankee with barcodes), spine label, security strip, property stamp, and bound covers, if paperback.

Of the thirty-seven books reviewed on October 26, sixteen titles (listed below) were already on library shelves the next Monday morning: eleven non-fiction and five fiction.

Non-Fiction

Big Trouble (J. Anthony Lukas)
Endless Frontier (G. Pascal Zachary)
The Platypus and the Mermaid (Harriet Ritvo)
Wild Cowboys (Robert Jackall)
Civil Rights Chronicle (Clarice T. Campbell)
Ghetto Schooling (Jean Anyon)
Racechanges (Susan Gubar)
The Stolen Legacy of Anne Frank (Ralph Melnick)
Mutual Contempt (Jeff Shesol)
Heretic's Heart (Margot Adler)
Planet Quest (Ken Crosswell)

Fiction

The Zigzag Kid (David Grossman)
The Crystal Frontier (Carlos Fuentes)
Panther in the Basement (Amos Oz)

Skin Deep (Diana Wagman)
She Loved Me Once (Lester Goran)

Three additional non-fiction titles were due the week of the review:

John Quincy Adams (Paul C. Nagel)
Companero (Jorge G. Castaneda)
Daughter of the Queen of Sheba (Jacki Lyden)

The six titles below were due to arrive in the library between 11/4 and 11/11. Yankee handled these titles from 10/22 to 10/29. In several cases the NYTBR review was published before Yankee handled the title on approval.

Non-Fiction

Wait Till Next Year (Doris Kearns Goodwin)
The Two Koreas (Don Oberdorfer)
The Grand Chessboard (Zbigniew Brzezinski)
Nightmare on Main Street (Mark Edmundson)
A Feeling for Books (Janice A. Radway)

Fiction

Open to the Public (Muriel Sparks)

Within three weeks, 67% of the reviewed titles were on library shelves ready for review readers to check-out. Of the remaining titles, five titles have been ordered (as of 11/18), one has not yet been published, and three titles covered on approval slip plans await selector decision. Three titles were not covered on the approval plan and will be firm ordered if requested by a user or desired by the selector after reviewing the NYTBR.

Titles On Order (Approval Slip or Firm):

Non-Fiction:

Speaking Truth to Power (Anita Hill)
The Pleasures of the Imagination (John Brewer)
American Bandstand (John A. Jackson)

Fiction

Wobegon Boy (Garrison Keillor)
On the Road with the Archangel (Frederick Buechner)

Not Yet Published:

Guevara, Also Known as Che (Paco Ignacio Taibo 2d)

Approval Slips: Not Yet Selected:

Appetite for Life: The Biography of Julia Child (Noel Riley Fitch)
The Monkey's Bridge (David Rains Wallace)
Flower Net (Lisa See)

Not Covered on U. of Va. Approval Plans

Philippe, duc d'Orleans (Christine Pevitt)

Publisher not covered

The Mad, the Bad, and the Innocent: the Criminal Mind on Trial
(Barbara R. Kirwan) Subject not covered
The Life of Poetry (Muriel Rukeyser) Reprint

My analysis affirms the known tendency for fiction to be reviewed very close to publication, if not before, putting much pressure on approval vendors to handle fiction titles very quickly for library customers. Non-fiction titles tend to be reviewed up to six months after publication.

If the U. of Virginia Library aspires to have all of the major titles reviewed in the *New York Times Book Review* on library shelves close to the date of the review, perhaps we should set up an approval plan parameter to have all reviewed titles sent automatically. Our representative has indicated that Yankee can set a non-subject parameter of "All titles reviewed in NYTBR (and TLS)" Would this expedite delivery? Probably. Would we receive many unwanted titles? Probably not.

Looking at title by title performance opened a window on how our approval plans actually work at the nuts and bolts level. Since no plan material is returned, plan monitoring is less hands-on than it has been in the past. I am very pleased with the results of this survey: nearly 70% of the reviewed titles on the shelves within three weeks of review.

Collections staff now need to determine whether our users would benefit from having all titles reviewed in the NYTBR (major reviews only) arrive automatically on the shelf ready book plan. What kinds of analyses have other libraries done to measure approval plan performance? With what results? 🐾