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On the Street-Online Acquisition and the Librarian

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Online Acquisition and the Librarian

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by **Eamon T. Fennessy** (The Copyright Group); Assisted by **Kathy Miraglia** (Catholic University)

If your boss came to you and asked how active your department was in "online acquisition" how would you respond? This was the topic for our survey where we asked the following questions:

- 1) How would YOU define Online Acquisition?
- 2) Is your institution, or consortium, using the Web for online acquisition? What was THE determining factor in selecting this method?
- 3) What advantages and/or disadvantages do you see for this method?
- 4) Is it cost-effective for individual institutions or consortia to use online acquisition? Please explain.
- 5) Is security or confidentiality a concern for electronic acquisition? How?
- 6) Does your acquisition operation use a commercial credit card when ordering online? (This question was asked of those librarians who were surveyed via ACQNET.)

Librarians' definitions of online acquisition ranged from **Jill Vassilakos-Long's** (Claremont College) succinct "...Materials ordering via the Internet," to **Fran Stumpf's** (St. Charles County Community College) ... "Any acquisition, be it ordering or acquiring order info done electronically. This is not limited to activity conducted via the Web, but can include FTP, EDI, email, etc." Many librarians reported using this medium, but almost as many institutional policies don't allow it. This was reflected in **Michael Bell's** (University of Tennessee) comment that his institution was "locked into purchase order required by University."

This survey revealed the library community, as a whole, has not adopted electronic acquisition. In our small sample of twelve librarians, seven report utilizing online acquisition while five do not. Percentage-wise that's 58 percent users, and 42 percent non-users.

When we asked what actually determined whether online methods would be used, librarians answered this way: **Steve Johnson** (Clemson) ... "we wanted to see how it worked and hoped it would reduce turnaround time and make the process more efficient." Time savings was also mentioned by the librarian who is the furthest away from us, **Sharon Gower** (Bond University, Australia). Sharon orders electronically to avoid "printing and posting orders," but at the same time reported "the Web has become so slow of late that it is becoming uneconomical to use it and I have resorted back to the old method of printing and posting."

Deana Astle (also of Clemson) said she was using the Web for fulltext database access and one reason she was continuing with it was, "students love it." **Mary Kay** (Humboldt State University) uses the Web "to improve office workflow, and GOBI, with its easy order system, has let us improve many things." **Howard Bybee** (Brigham Young University) also mentioned using the Web "through Yankee Book Peddler's Web-based GOBI database ... accurate, paperless, postage free, faster receipt."

Regarding advantages and disadvantages of online usage, **Mary Kay** also stated enthusiastically: "This particular service is revolutionary for our office, since titles can be ordered with a click, and FTP files of confirmation records to load are provided

the next day for all claims and directs which can be run through our system loader. No more arcane and time-consuming downloads and manual order creation! Immediate access to info that a title has been profiled for us and how!"

Clemson's **Steve Johnson** contended: "It eliminates printing, reviewing and mailing printed orders. With **Eastern Book**, a study I did showed that it saved a week in turnaround time over conventional ordering." **Nina Exner** (East Carolina University) felt: "advantages are being able to see whether what you need is immediately available (in the case of firm orders), or being able to review approval materials before they're sent, reducing the burden of the return process."

When it came to disadvantages, the question of security arose with everyone. For example, **Fran Stumpf** mentioned, "accounting is different from the 'online bookstore' for our institution. We have to keep better track of the checks we send them versus any refund that may be on account for us. Also, they will use the money that we sent for one book to pay for another if one is sent before the earlier book." **Jill Vassilakos-Long's** "fear is that we will have people order, forget to put records into the OPAC and the book will come in. The books will be returned because there is no record of an order in our system." **Ned Kraft** (Smithsonian Institute) says, "Full EDI could truly save us labor, but I worry that with less and less human intervention in the ordering process, bad information could circulate with no one around to spot it."

When it comes to cost-effectiveness of this method, the feeling is the system is more time-saving than cost-effective. Some librarians contend, "There is still some paperwork," while others say this involves double-keying, once to search and once to put in the record, so "it does take up too much staff time." (Ed. Note: Who's correct?) At the same time a public librarian was unequivocal, "Equipment costs can be shared and that cuts the operational costs." There were two librarians who frankly said, "I don't know."

More issues. Security or confidentiality proved a concern for everyone. Nonetheless, those who use online acquisition referred to measures such as their "ship and bill system," where payment is not made until the service, or product is provided. Another expression of security was found when we inquired about the use of credit cards to make electronic purchases. (E-commerce?) Not a single institution reported using credit cards because of the risks involved in fraud, etc., although one or two librarians thought such usage would be a good idea.

To summarize: a bare majority of the institutions in this survey used online acquisition, none used credit cards, and security, or confidentiality was always an issue.

Those who participated and allowed their names to be noted as participants were: **Deana Astle**, Clemson; **Gerlinda Barley**, SUNY New Paltz; **Michael Bell**, University of Tennessee; **Howard Bybee**, Brigham Young University; **Nina Exner**, East Carolina University; **Sharon Gower**, Bond University, Australia; **Steve Johnson**, Clemson; **Mary Kay**, Humboldt State University; **Ned Kraft**, Smithsonian Institute; **Fran Stumpf**, St. Charles County Community College; **Jill Vassilakos-Long**, Claremont College. 🐾