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## On the Street-Book Vendors and Services to Libraries

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# On The Street

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## Book Vendors and Services to Libraries

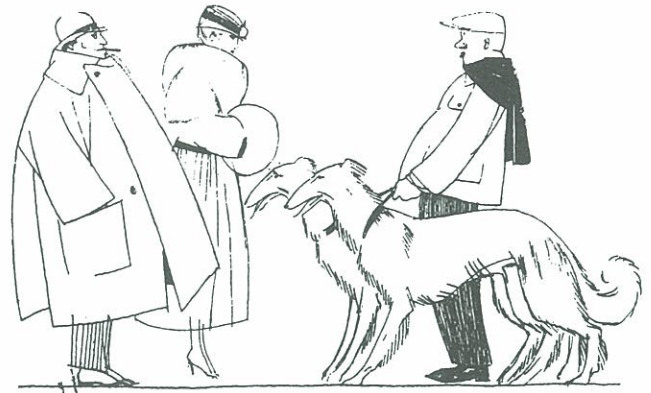
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This issue of "On The Street" addresses book vendors and librarians, two communities which occasionally joust while still recognizing their vital relationship in the information field. Our survey reviews this link and reflects comments on how vendor services can be helpful today, and in the future.

Participants responded frankly and in some detail to the following questions which were posted on ACQNET through the good graces of **Eleanor Cook** at Appalachian State: 1. Has the role of the book vendor changed from what it was ten years ago? In what way? 2. What do you look for in the "ideal book vendor?" 3. Are there innovations book vendors are offering which are particularly helpful to you in providing services to your clients? 4. What book vendor services would you like to see in the next five years?

**Nancy Stanley** of Penn State University answered question one this way... "being a book vendor today certainly goes way beyond selling books. We must rely on vendors to find methodology to keep both our operational and materials budgets under control. A couple of examples on the operational side are: receipt of records and shelf-ready books and assuring that library staffs are dealing with issues such as unwanted duplicates. On the materials side, we expect a high degree of accuracy in projecting our costs based on our approval plan profiles."

Other librarians agreed vendors' roles have changed, **Tony Ferguson** of Columbia University and **Melissa Stearns** of Franklin Pierce College both emphasized more and better services are available today. They concurred that availability of bibliographic information was a "big plus" for librarians.

The second question about "ideal book vendors" was answered in some detail by **Beatrice Colastin** at the University of Miami Richter Library. Beatrice responded her "ideal" has these characteristics: "Provides expedient delivery of materials; Personalized customer services (one contact person in the vendor organization); Vendor's comprehensive online database and ability to order electronically; Online order status and payment reports; Accuracy in shipping and invoicing, and High Discounts." (It was no accident "high discounts" appeared in the responses of many librarians in answer to this question...everyone wants to reduce costs.)

**Mary Kay** of Humboldt University expanded her ideal vendor with: "Decent discount; email access; FTP or other speedy retrieval for brief order records loadable into our online system; searchable database is a plus; West Coast location for speedier shipping (check your geography ... where is Humboldt?); and Good customer service operation."

Among the responses to the third item concerning "innovations" librarians like **Dan Evans** of Lafayette College put it succinctly. He wants "Web sites, especially for foreign vendors, which have titles with prices listed." Several others mentioned: Ordering Electronically; Collection Development Reports; and Authentic Rush Order delivery. Penn State's **Nancy Stanley's** comment was direct, "Any innovations that reduce turnaround time in order fulfillment." **Tony Ferguson** again was even more specific. His one word answer was ... ABSTRACTS.

Survey question number four opened the door for the "futurists" among us. Here are some of your colleagues' thoughts on the subject of what services we would like to see in five years. **Jim Segesta** of California State University, Bakersfield, opined: "Daydreaming about innovations. I wish we (a small academic library) could sign up for a plan that might bring us every month ten or fifteen new academic books likely to make a stir in their disciplines. Identifying books like that before publication would require a lot of research, but if there were enough customers to amortize the cost, it might be doable." He also added, "Perhaps systems like YBP's GOBI can develop to the point of e-mailing solid selection information (more than the title, price, and subject headings) to the proper book selectors on campus so that books could be ordered for the library simply by replying to the e-mail. In the daydream the holdings check and the bookkeeping are done at the same time in some clever but unspecified way."

The University of Miami's **Beatrice Colastin** looks for: "A large note field in the electronic ordering." Another small liberal arts library replied: "I would like to see them concentrate their efforts on the basic price/service." For more specifics, **Mary Kay** of Humboldt called for: "BISAC/EDI Interface with our IOLS; IP address authentication for search only database access rather than by password (for faculty); and File on their host of slips for faculty to browse and mark from offices rather than trek to library." Other responses: from a Big-Ten school: "Book Vendors will be expected to be advocates for libraries with publishers and producers of information in pricing their products." (Cost containment raised its head.) A typical response: (this one from Columbia's **Ferguson**): "Larger discounts and interface to Digital Books." **Melissa Stearns** of Franklin Pierce College summed up her wish list with, "Many of the services I'd like are available now, we just can't afford them, such as **Baker & Taylor's** inventory information. Otherwise I would like to know an estimated ship date if a book is not in stock." (Column Editor's note: pretty basic stuff but crucial when you can't provide your clients with what they want.)

What have we learned from this? Librarians appreciate book vendors' services...can't get along without them. However, they wish costs were lower and that electronic communications were the rule and not the exception for a great many services.

If your institution wasn't mentioned in this survey, if you feel differently about these questions concerning book vendors, or would like to suggest topics for next year's surveys, let me know. You can reach me at <efennessy@worldnet.att.net> Our survey usually involves phone conversations with randomly selected librarians. So, if you would like to participate in the future send me your full address, including phone, fax and e-mail address, but you can also participate through **Eleanor Cook's** ACQNET where our survey is also posted. You can subscribe to ACQNET by accessing: <listserv@listserv.appstate.edu> and inserting this message: Subscribe ACQNET-L Your first name, yourlast name. (You must have your real name in the command for it to work.) 🐾