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Biz of Acq — Identifying New Titles from Publishers and Vendors

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Column Editor: **Rob Richards** (Technical Services Librarian, University of Colorado Law Library) <rrichard@stripe.colorado.edu>

Column Editor's Note: Tools that announce and describe new information resources are the foundation of acquisitions and collection development work. In today's multi-format and multi-seller environment, acquisitions librarians have at their disposal a remarkable variety of resources for learning about new titles, ranging from simple publishers' flyers to sophisticated online approval slip services. These resources vary in format, completeness, accuracy, and usefulness. **Rob Withers**, formerly Systems/Technical Services Librarian at Western Maryland College Library, and now Electronic Information Services Librarian at Miami University of Ohio, draws on survey results, conversations with librarians, library science literature, and observations about Web resources, to make sense of this plethora of aids, and to help us identify those tools which are best suited for our local situations.

Introduction: Finding needles when you don't know which haystack to look in

Acquisitions personnel face the daunting task of keeping current with new titles and resources for which they may be asked to place a firm order. Information about new publications can change literally from day to day and even hour to hour, and there is no single source which can provide every piece of new information as it becomes available. A decade ago, keeping abreast of new publications and special promotions entailed filing of materials received by mail and placing phone calls to publishers and vendors. Technological changes have given rise to new resources such as Web pages, elec-

tronic discussion groups, and inquiries by email which often provide more timely information. In addition, the spread of approval plans and approval plan databases makes information about many new titles readily available with a minimum of effort. However, electronic resources and approval services have not entirely eliminated the need for phone calls and print information. As a result, acquisitions personnel are confronted with a variety of options for keeping up-to-date, some or all of which may be needed to determine the price and availability of titles.¹

This article will explore the kaleidoscopic array of options available to acquisitions personnel and assess how acquisitions staff can and do use these options to improve performance. Information gathered for this column includes the author's personal experience, anecdotal evidence gathered from surveys distributed over AcqNet-L², an examination of unsolicited information received via mail and email by the author, a survey of publishers' and vendors' Web sites, and a review of library literature.

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Information from outside agencies

Review services were most frequently mentioned by survey respondents as being useful for identifying, evaluating, and ordering new titles. In addition to bibliographic data, these resources contain information about the scope and intended audience of a work and a critical overview of how well the book fulfills its purpose. **Choice**—the print magazine or the card service which makes each review available on a separate 3 x 5 slip—was the most frequently mentioned resource. One respondent indicated that selectors at her institution preferred the new, online version of **Choice**³ and “hated” the print issues or cards. Other services mentioned were *Library Journal*, *Chronicle of Higher Education*⁴, *Academe Online* (the online edition of the *Chronicle*⁵), and *Doody's* (A health sciences resource). For small press publications, such resources as *Small Press Review*, *Small Press Book Review*, and *Small Press* may be useful in identifying and reviewing titles.⁶ One drawback to such services, noted by several respondents, is that they lag slightly behind vendor slips and publishers' catalogs because of the time needed to review each title.⁷ Also, publishers may withhold controversial titles from reviewers until after they have been released; as a result, review services must scramble to review the materials as soon as they have been released.⁸

Book reviews in scholarly journals and electronic discussion groups are much less useful for gathering information on new products. Reviews appearing in journals have been a mainstay for selectors, but not for acquisitions personnel. Several survey respondents noted that reviews appearing in journals were an important source for collection development staff. Electronic discussion groups are more difficult to monitor, even for selectors. Because electronic discussion groups are so new, there is no established consensus as to which groups and which discussion participants are most authoritative. Selectors therefore have to figure out for themselves which groups to monitor. More importantly, discussion group participants must sort through many messages not concerned with new titles. As **John Rutledge** noted at this summer's ALA meeting, scholarly discussion groups are not wholly devoted to discussion of new books. There are many specialized scholarly discussion groups. Attempting to monitor many discussion groups can result in a maximum of email with a minimum of useful information. (See bibliography.⁹)

Information from vendors

After review services, survey respondents ranked vendor notification slips as the most useful resources for keeping abreast of new publications.¹⁰ Libraries can request notifica-

tion slips be sent only for books pertinent in scope and in reading level to the institution which requests them. In addition, several respondents regarded these slips as more up-to-date than review services. However, attempts to provide information as quickly as possible can result in notification slips with faulty information. Vendor slips may provide information which may change before a book appears in final form, or may contain information about books which ultimately are not published or are published significantly later than projected. One librarian noted that one of her vendors was more likely than the others to identify books which were currently unavailable; she noted, “I'm trying to spend my money and I don't want money committed to things that are not yet or may never be published.” This librarian went on to note that she disliked using another vendor's slips because the estimated prices for books listed on the slips were often substantially different from the price she eventually paid for the book. Slips are most frequently distributed to selectors; however, at several colleges or special libraries where all librarians have collection development responsibilities, acquisitions librarians also utilized the slips.¹¹

Several vendors are also establishing online services which notify libraries of new titles. **Blackwell's NTO** service, and **Yankee Book Peddler's** still-under-development **Gobi-Gen** were both mentioned by survey respondents. Likewise, **Academic Book Center** is establishing a similar service. Internet-based approval notification services improve on printed slips in two ways: they put information about a new title in a central location where all selectors can simultaneously access and annotate it, and, in addition, they present new title information in electronic form, which greatly eases distribution of the information to selectors and faculty. Thus, acquisitions personnel aren't faced with the dilemma of deciding to whom they should route a notification slip that may be of interest to multiple selectors. Also, at libraries in which acquisitions departments have traditionally received vendor notification slips, sorted them by subject area, and distributed them to selectors, staff time can be re-directed to other tasks.

Information from publishers

Publishers' catalogs—in print and on the Internet—and flyers were the third most frequently-mentioned source of information on new products.¹² Information from publishers includes general catalogs, subject-specific catalogs, media-specific catalogs, and flyers about individual titles. An examination of catalogs received by the **Western Maryland**

College library during the week of October 26 revealed that 31.4% of catalogs were non-subject-specific, 59.6% were discipline-specific, and 11.5% were for non-print media or foreign language resources.

However, each type of catalog is not equally welcome to librarians. The sheer number of catalogs and promotional flyers can overwhelm all but the largest of libraries. One-third of survey respondents indicated that their department retained a few comprehensive, generalized catalogs. In most departments, only annual updates, rather than quarterly or monthly catalogs, were retained. While responses did not preclude routing generalized catalogs to selectors, they hinted that such items were more often discarded or recycled.

The majority of respondents indicated that their library routed subject-specific catalogs to an appropriate selector when possible, although many respondents made clear that they did not always have time to deal with sorting and routing all such catalogs. Two respondents indicated that their department filed the catalogs where the selectors could find them. Media-specific catalogs were the most likely sources of information to be retained by acquisitions departments. Half of the respondents indicated that their department retained only catalogs for materials not covered by standard review services, vendor slips, or services such as **Books In Print**. Videos were the most frequently mentioned product—

“[P]anel participants unanimously recommended that publishers focus on providing catalogs arranged by subject or subject-specific catalogs.”

the author's previous employer refers often to their cumulative copy of *Facet's*—with foreign imprints, scores, and music being mentioned almost as often. The recommendation of a panel for the one-day seminar “Libraries: The Invisible Market” is consistent with librarians' reactions to publisher catalogs: panel participants unanimously recommended that publishers focus on providing catalogs arranged by subject or subject-specific catalogs.

Flyers are often unhelpful, as the information they contain—bibliographic information, price, and excerpts of reviews—are available from other sources. Exceptions to this rule are flyers for large, expensive sets, especially if a significant discount is offered. Flyers which contain insignificant discounts, or discounts comparable to what library vendors can offer, however, are less useful. Likewise, flyers which require that an order be placed within a week or two are unhelpful. Some flyers may require an inordinate investment of time or contain misleading information. One reviewer cites a flyer which instructed the reader to place a phone call to receive information about a new product.

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When the respondent called, she was told that a discount was available, and found out only later that the discount did not apply to libraries.

The usefulness of online catalogs—and librarians' reaction to them—are varied. Some companies do not have online catalogs, or include only selected items on their Web page. However, many vendors do have electronic catalogs, most of which are accessible via AcqWeb's¹³ listing of vendor Web pages. One shortcoming of many vendor Web pages is that they often fail to provide information on ordering products. My experience has been that on two occasions, we were unable to locate ordering information even with AcqWeb's collection of Web pages, but did find ordering information after using the Alta Vista Internet search engine (<http://www.altavista.com>) to successfully find the vendor Web page. Several respondents mentioned that print catalogs more adequately met their needs than online catalogs. One person noted that unlike online catalogs, print catalogs could be taken to meetings and passed around the room; another noted that her users still liked to browse her collection of print catalogs. Others admitted that they were simply accustomed to using print resources: "just a print junkie, I guess," and "Habit—still like paper" were two responses received. Proponents of online catalogs note that online catalogs can be more easily shared than print catalogs: "I get better responses when I email a

subject specialist a URL and say, 'Hey, have you seen this?' than when I send a hard copy," wrote one acquisitions librarian. Others mentioned that online catalogs were [usually] up-to-date and didn't require filing.

Online catalogs also eliminate the need for filing, re-filing, and routing, a concern to many librarians. Several librarians noted the amount of labor required by maintaining print copies. One librarian noted that while he stocked some print catalogs, he "didn't want filing to become a major undertaking;" another noted that catalogs were filed "haphazardly" because other, more important tasks took priority over constantly updating catalog files. All but one survey respondent stressed that they saved only selected catalogs, and several did not save catalogs at all.

In addition, distribution of catalogs can become difficult and time-consuming, depending on the accuracy with which publishers select recipients and maintain their mailing lists.¹⁴ Multiple mailings of catalogs can be a problem. As one person noted, "We do not want or need more than one copy of anyone's catalog. The rest are discarded on receipt." Out-of-date mailing labels with the name of long-departed librarians can also be a headache for staff routing mail. Staff at Western Maryland College must learn the names—and various misspellings of names—of several predecessors of each selector in order to route mail from vendors.

Announcing new resources via unsolicited mailings, fax transmissions, or phone

calls is a commonly used strategy for promoting books; during the week of October 26, 26% of the solicitations received from publishers consisted of flyers for individual books. Librarians responding to the AcqNet-L survey viewed such solicitations in a negative light. Some librarians indicated that such notification strategies actually decreased the chance that the item would be ordered. One exasperated librarian noted: "While I RECEIVE unsolicited mail and email from authors, I don't USE it except to say 'I'm never buying THAT book' since it's so irritating." Similar sentiments were voiced by other survey respondents. Librarians view self-promotion with suspicion.

Despite intense dislike of unsolicited contacts, some librarians indicated that such contacts can be useful for learning about some materials which aren't likely to be covered by review services and vendor slips, including: materials published by small presses, self-published materials, or materials of local interest.

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Endnotes

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² AcqNet-L is intended "to provide a medium for acquisitions librarians and others interested in acquisitions work to exchange information, ideas, and to find solutions to common problems." Information about AcqNet-L, including statement of purpose, subscription information, and archives, can be found at: <http://www.library.vanderbilt.edu/law/acqs/acqnet.html>.

³ Electronic versions of *Choice* are available from SilverPlatter (CD-ROM and online) and CARL (online). Additionally, it is included in *Brodat's TIPS* service (print or electronic), and *Books In Print Plus Reviews* (CD-ROM). A Web-based version is in beta testing. For more information, see: <http://www.ala.org/acrl/choice/subscr.html>.

⁴ <http://www.chronicle.com/books/>.

⁵ <http://bookrev.accesshost.com.sg/>.

⁶ Berry, Henry. "Small Presses and Academic Libraries." *Choice* v. 25 (March 1988) p. 1045.

⁷ Arnold, Amy E. "Approval Slips and Faculty Participation in Book Selection at a Small University Library." *Collection Management* v.18 no.1-2 (1993) p. 100.

⁸ Fialkoff, F. "Publisher Secrecy = Late Reviews:

Marketing Strategy Poses Problems for LJ and Librarians." *Library Journal* 116 (December 1991) p. 128.

⁹ Rutledge, John. Playing the Game While Writing the Rules: The Impact of Electronic Technology on Collection Development Planning. Panel session at the American Library Association Annual Conference, Washington, D.C. (June 27, 1998).

¹⁰ Arnold, p. 97.

¹¹ "The 'Invisible Market' Made Visible: Library/Publisher Marketing." *Library Journal* v. 114 (May 15, 1989) p. 14.

¹² Fialkoff, F. "Marketing to Libraries Is No Gimmick; Publishers Need to Pay More Attention to the \$1.5 Billion Library Market." *Library Journal* 119 (November 15, 1994) p. 54.

¹³ <http://www.library.vanderbilt.edu/law/acqs/pubr.html>.

¹⁴ "Invisible Market," p. 14.

¹⁵ Schenck, William Z. "An Alternative Way to Acquire New Books." *Library of Congress Information Bulletin* v. 53 (December 26, 1994) p. 473.

¹⁶ Calhoun, N. "The Review that Launched a Hundred Thousand Sales." *Small Press* v.9 (Spring 1991) p. 18.

¹⁷ Hoffert, B. "Striking a New Balance of Power." *Library Journal* v. 117 (February 15, 1992) pp. 126-127.

Group Therapy — Replacing Missing Pages Through Interlibrary Loan

Column Editor, **Rosann Bazirjian** (Florida State University)

Hey y'all out there! Do you have any gripes? Come to your therapist! Try <rbazirji@mailers.fsu.edu> or FAX 904-644-5170.

Gripe

(Submitted by **Jeannette Skwor**, Serials Department, Supervisor, University of Wisconsin, Green Bay:)

We're having a discussion on the topic of replacing pages through Interlibrary Loan, and having some confusion. I would like to hear the process in other libraries, and any tips you can give us.

Generally, our procedure states that when a periodical is found to have pages torn out or otherwise missing, it is brought to the Serials Department office and we order the missing pages. When ILL and/or Circulation are the ones who first notice the problem, they tend to order the pages first, then bring us the periodical. This is fine, also, as long as we are informed.

The problem comes in when not all the pages are received. I am told that pages that have only advertising are not copied (which makes sense), but how are we to know that is the case? Another problem arises when an article title is requested instead of specific pages (and this seems to be often what is requested/required). Again, we don't always get the pages we do not have.

I must confess my working knowledge of ILL is zilch. And yet I am thinking there should be a way to specify that this is being ordered by the library, as replacement pages, vs. this is an article someone requested a copy of. I'm not at all sure I've expressed what I need to express, but am hoping for discussion and enlightenment.

Response

(Submitted by **Jane Clarkson**, Head of Collection Development, Florida State University):

At Florida State University, we've changed our procedure for missing pages requests during the last year so this is a timely subject for us also.

Technical Services, which includes the Binding Unit as part of the Collection Development Department, moved out of the main library several years ago. We also have separate Science, Music, and Information Studies library branches. Therefore, we look for ways to keep from sending items back and forth.

The Binding Unit used to handle all of the missing page request procedures except the actual ILL ordering. Now each library branch handles the process up to the receipt of the missing pages. The pages are placed with the item to be tipped in, bound or rebound and sent to the Binding Unit.

If more than 25 pages are missing, notice is sent to Serials Acquisitions which will try to replace the issue if it is less than three years old. At their discretion, whole volumes or film may be ordered to cover the missing material.

If less than 25 pages are missing, the concerned department searches the periodical title to see if the library has film for the same title. If we have the film, then the holdings are checked to see if we have the same volume and year. If we have the appropriate film, the searcher writes on the page facing the first missing page: "for missing pages, pp.xx-xx, please see film #xxx."

If the library does not have film covering missing issues, a printout showing the title and call number is glued on the ILL request form and pertinent information of volume, number, date, and page numbers added. A photocopy of the ILL form is made and kept in the department while the original goes to ILL for ordering. If all of the requested pages were not to come, it would be reordered.

Response

(Submitted by **John Keeth**, Head, Acquisitions Department, and **Tom Miller**, Supervisor, Serials Check-In Unit, University of South Florida):

The University of South Florida—Tampa Campus Library—uses a very simple, straightforward procedure for replacing missing pages of journal issues. Regardless of who discovers that pages are missing, be it patrons on the Periodicals Reading Floor or Interlibrary Loans, the issue is taken to the Periodicals Information Desk where the process for replacing pages officially begins. If the missing pages are discovered at the binding stage, Preservation will initiate the process.

When the issue is brought to the Periodicals Information Desk, a simple form is filled out citing the pages missing. This form is then inserted into the issue at the point of the missing pages. Preservation picks up these issues on a daily basis, completes an ILL form, and forwards the form to Interlibrary Loans. Preservation then makes a note in the check-in record on our online NOTIS system indicating that the issue has missing pages. The issue is then returned to the shelf in the Periodicals Reading Floor until the pages are received.

Libraries filling the Interlibrary Loan requests seem to have varying policies regarding whether to copy full pages of advertisements. Some copy all ads if they are within the page numbers requested, and others will note that a page or pages are just advertisements and will not copy. When USF is determining which pages are to be ordered, if the last numbered page is followed by a page or several pages of ads which are unnumbered, Preservation simply orders all page numbers which are missing between the last numbered page and the next numbered page (ex. page 21 is the last numbered page before missing pages. The next two pages are full advertisements and the next numbered page is 30. Preservation would order pages 22 through 29.) The USF Library always orders missing pages from journal issues by page numbers only, never by article name.

When the pages are received by Interlibrary Loans, they forward them to Preservation which then pulls the issue and either tips in the pages or binds the issue, depending on the circumstances, and removes the note from the check-in record.

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Some librarians believe publisher promotions for continuations or high priced sets are useful. Since one of the chief objections to unsolicited contacts is that the materials being promoted don't come with unbiased reviews, one librarian not surprisingly noted that she ordered materials from unsolicited blurbs only if a selector had given her the flyer with a recommendation.

Reaction to email notification was even less enthusiastic. Survey respondents indicated that they received only small numbers of emails, and that "email is too busy already." Another librarian lamented, "We'd end up

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where in America had the constituency that we do, they would rejoice—not to mention, win! The potential we have in “passive” advocates in the library and throughout the organization is staggering. Our job is to turn passive support into active support. You are not, in all probability, going to increase the power and influence you and your library have single-handedly. It's important that you present your message as often and compellingly as possible and in as many venues as possible.

Once you have developed the message, it will be very easy to weave it into every public relations opportunity. For example, if your library has a newsletter you have the power of the press at your disposal. Typically, newsletters are used to communicate upcoming events, new acquisitions and items of interest to library users—the standard approach is to inform, not to influence. Time to change the approach. You don't need to change what you include, but to be more powerful, you should be sure to include why everything you do matters. If you are touting a new program, explain in terms of your message, why it matters—show what difference it makes to your institution and your institution's goals. Show how the library is a key player in the achievement of those goals.

Creating a strong base of support requires that all constituents are well informed about your goals and what it will take to achieve them. Further, they have to know how they can help. Depending on your own political environment, you (or a Friends' group or an advisory board) should stay in constant touch with the constituents and, when necessary, be very clear and blunt about how they can help. Look around and decide who holds the most

sway over decision-makers and target them. If it is alumni, send out a special newsletter using your message to influence them to influence the administration. Similarly, an annual newsletter to parents could be an extremely powerful instrument to influence those who have influence. Be clear about your message, how they can help, and why it matters to them.

Though studies have shown that as a group librarians aren't typically extroverts, assertiveness is critical to the establishment of power within the organization. Assertiveness can be difficult for shy people, but it does get easier with practice and nothing will sell like our own passion and belief in why we're important. Be prepared (“the message”) and willing to stay in touch with decision-makers and be sure they understand what support your library needs and can give an institution—even when your input has not been invited. To build power and influence, it's important to place yourself in positions to contribute to the overall strategic planning and policy setting within the institution. Be seen as a player in the institution's direction setting and show yourself as an expert in areas of information policy.

There's nothing magic about building political power within your organization. All it takes is focus, commitment, tenacity, and assertiveness.

A final note

If ever libraries existed happily in a microcosm, they do not now. Every day, legislation is being introduced at the state and national levels that will have or has the potential to have profound impact on you and your ability to provide comprehensive services. You must become involved and you must encourage your staff and supporters to become involved as well. I believe that now more than ever, the future of our services depends on it.

The electronic information environment is bringing new and influential players to the table. Legislation today is moving quickly ahead and is being urged on by private interests which, quite naturally, want to find ways to capitalize on the commercial potential of the Internet. If we do not protect fair use and open access, no amount of money will enable us to provide the limitless information to our clients that we currently do.

Government information is coming online and that is wonderful news for access, but issues regarding perpetual access and archives have yet to be resolved. Librarians are in the best position to educate legislators and ensure that today's information is safe-guarded for tomorrow. Again, legislation and policy regarding government information online is moving quickly—we must be vigilant and assertive.

Good intentions to protect minors are everywhere and passage of highly restrictive filtering laws have the potential to significantly reduce access to much useful information. Again, librarians are in an excellent position to help our legislators understand the risks as weighed against the benefits. Librarians can and must show themselves as the “information experts” best able to manage dissemination policy at the local level.

Being an effective advocate for libraries may be one of the most important roles for today's librarian. It is no longer a role that can be successfully played once a year at budget time and it is not a role that can be confined to the “home front.” These are exciting and perhaps even scary times, but if you became a librarian to make a difference, the opportunity to do so has never been greater.

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having to print off the info, so would rather have hardcopy to begin with.” As with phone calls and fax transmissions, only email messages concerning works of local interest were ever welcome.

One concern with all types of publicity distributed by publishers was inaccurate or incomplete information. Panelists at the “Libraries: The Invisible Market” seminar urged publishers to provide complete information, particularly ISBNs. An incorrect ISBN can lead to the receipt of an incorrect edition or title, since many vendors use the ISBN, rather than the title, to determine which item fills the library's order request. While not frequent, this problem occurs on average of once every semester at Western Maryland College.

Another concern is that much of the information distributed by publishers often supplements information derived from other

resources. A study performed at the **Library of Congress** indicated that materials located by selectors in publishers' catalogs were often already on order or included in the collection at the time the selector made the request.¹⁵

To be sure, some publishers are aware of these potential difficulties and are working to counteract them. One publisher, recognizing librarians' reliance on reviews, attempts to supply librarians with favorable reviews of their publications.¹⁶ Publishers do believe one obstacle to effectively marketing to libraries is that libraries order most of their materials through jobbers. Individual publishers are therefore unable to determine the amount or types of imprints which individual libraries purchase; therefore, they have difficulty in determining how to market their publications. Some publishers therefore rely on surveys, phone calls, or focus groups to determine the interests and needs of individual libraries.¹⁷

Conclusion

Vendors, publishers, authors, and review

media offer a wide array of resources for notifying acquisitions personnel of the appearance of new materials. However, not all of these resources are valued equally by acquisitions librarians and staff. Librarians especially value information gathered together into convenient packages by review services and vendors. Other resources are used to fill in information not available from review services. The most useful resources in this respect are publishers' catalogs for non-book materials, foreign imprints, and items of local interest. Electronic sources of information on new materials sometimes supplement or replace traditional resources, although resources in traditional media continue to thrive. Because acquisitions departments disseminate more information on new titles than they actually use, it is possible that electronic versions currently available may gradually supplant their traditional counterparts, and reduce the number of resources that acquisitions staff must consult or manage.