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Op-Ed-Opinions and Editorials-Library-Based Profiling: Speaking Out

John R. Secor

Yankee Book Peddler, Inc., jsecor@ybp.com

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Library-Based Profiling: Speaking Out

by **John R. Secor** (Chief Executive Officer, YBP Library Services) <jsecor@ybp.com>

"The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done; and there is no new thing under the sun." - Ecclesiastes 1:9

The host of consultants and academics who produced the plethora of New Age management concepts that mesmerized managers during the 1980s and 1990s—*downsizing, rightsizing, reengineering, business process redesign, empowerment, revitalization*, etc.—have been quiet over the past months. (Not surprising as most leaders, managers, and staff are tired of abstract panaceas.) Just when I was beginning to enjoy the quietness, **Rick Lugg** and **Ruth Fischer (R2 Consulting)** offer up a nostrum for our consideration: *library-based profiling* which they assert will reinvigorate library-vendor relations. (*Against the Grain*, June 2000, p. 36.)

The authors' motif for newness is the claim that "the library-vendor relationship is overly [excessively] complex." They support this observation by postulating that approval vendors (read **YBP** and **BBS**) are so overwhelmed with "requests, demands, and challenges" that they have little time to innovate—design a new generation of services. **BALDERDASH!** While it is true that library and vendor environments are technically dynamic, information rich, and very competitive, the same can be said of most industries today. Continuous change is the way of our world. As **Heraclitus** (Fifth Century B.C.) said, "All is flux, nothing stays still."

I must confess that I reacted personally to my reading of "Library-Based Profiling: The Real New Business Model." But then I've spent 30 years working with associates and customers to develop an approval service that is highly adaptive to the ever-changing realities of the library environment. It should come as no surprise that my blood pressure shot into the stratosphere when I read that "the few remaining full-service vendors" should jettison their approval services and rejoice over becoming distribution companies. And while my first reaction was not to comment on this scheme—even though "comments for or against, refinements, calumny, or quibbles" were solicited, the more I thought about it, the

clearer it became to me that a response was in order.

You will soon become aware that my comments have a sharp edge. Perhaps you will overlook this display of "attitude" if you can imagine some day opening up a copy of *Library Journal* and finding a plan titled something like *The Real New Information Model*; its motif for newness is the claim that librarians are caught in the reactive mode and unable to produce the large-scale changes necessary to thrive in today's technocentric world. Also imagine your consternation when reading the claim's underpinning: librarians are overwhelmed with customers' changing expectations, the need to secure higher levels of funding, and the challenges of setting future directed strategies and tactics.

My view of library-based profiling is that it is little more than a cobbled together stratagem looking for a well-heeled business partner. Ideas are propounded in such a way as to blur both the economic and service impacts on vendors and libraries; other assumptions show a surprising measure of business naivete. Library-based profiling is designed to "simplify the library-vendor relationship." How? By absorbing the profiling processes approval vendors have developed and carefully matured over decades. And once the relationship has been *simplified*—and approval vendors have become just distribution companies: books in & books out—our intellectual capital (profilers, bibliographers, etc.) will be absorbed like a sponge.

Collection management services are **YBP** competencies. Breaking the existing customer collaboration loop that is producing leading-edge collection management services will compromise on-going development agendas with libraries, ILS vendors, publishers, eBook producers... Approval competition will atrophy.

I do believe that useful change is critical to success. Customer and employee needs, strategies of competitors, technological advancements—all these factors, and many

more, have made change a daily reality at **YBP**. And adapt we have. Over the past 30 years I've spent more than half of my work time with customers, finding out what their needs are. Customer outreach is what gets the creative juices flowing and produces action, not specialization.

It is a source of personal pride that this commitment to customer closeness has rubbed off on **YBP's** senior management team. For many years, **ALA** conferences have provided a place to plug into the needs of customers—their pressing problems, their short and long-range plans, as well as insights into how we can improve **GOBI**. They also have proven to be the best place to bring ILS vendors together with joint customers. For example, **Gary Shirk**, **YBP's** president, conducted three eBook forums during Summer **ALA/Chicago**; and while Gary was learning firsthand what eBook

services our customers valued, **Ann-Marie Breau** was meeting with ILS vendors and joint customers to further collaborative agendas. Other senior managers who regularly visit libraries—**Bob Nardini**, **Stephen Pugh**, **Jannette Schuele**, **David Swords**, **Michael Zeoli**, **Jean Eaglesfield**—spend much of their time in one-on-one settings and group meetings, delving into customer needs that are in a near-constant state of flux.

I found no real new thinking in library-based profiling. The model is basically aged wine in a new bottle. This is not to say that the "characteristics" and "benefits" put forth in the model will not be valued by librarians, only that they should not be thought of as new.

YBP continues to demonstrate how well we've listened to customers' needs by delivering new and enhanced products and services that reflect what we've learned. **NewGobi** is the name of a project we recently launched that will redesign **GOBI**.

Bob Nardini, **YBP's** Chief Bibliographer and **GOBI** Project Leader, says, "We want to position **GOBI** as the one service which enables librarians not only to manage their own book selection and

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now. When the Internet was new and different, it was fun to talk about it. Now that my nephews and nieces think they are cool because they use the Internet all the time, I doubt there is any hope of convincing them that being there when it started is something they should be impressed by. They don't care about that, at least not yet. I just hope that these columns will be discovered in the future and that people will say - yeah, I remember that! 🐼

Do You Remember . . .

by **Nancy McKeethan** (MUSC Library)

- The card catalog • Boston Medical Classification System
- MTST (IBM's Magnetic Tape Selectric Typewriters) • Kardex
- McBee Cards • Acoustic couplers • TWX machines • Filmstrips
- 3/4" videotape • 6 mm films • VT100 terminals • VAX
- Beehive terminals • BRS • Faxon • Moore-Cottrell • Ballen
- Richard Abel Co. • 300, 1200, 2400 Baud modems • DOS • LIS • Gopher
- Premier Library Schools, e.g., U. Chicago, UC Berkeley, Emory, Columbia ... 🐼

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acquisitions workflow, but also to control virtually the entire English-language bibliographic universe; and, to locate their own patterns of activity within that universe through comparison with the activity of other libraries." Planned innovations touch virtually every aspect of **GOBI**'s functionality:

- Enriched Content
- Querying, Selecting & Ordering Titles in GOBI
- Support for eBooks
- Management Reports
- A Redesigned GOBI Interface
- Record Exporting
- Support for Consortia
- Customer Preferences
- Shipping Information
- Accounting Information
- Continuations Management
- Approval Plan Profile Management

Earlier I said that useful change is critical to success. Equally critical is balance. **YBP** will continue to preserve the best policies, practices, and services. We will change those that do not fit the new realities of today's environment. And while we are investing in e-services, we believe the company need not jettison everything that smacks of the old and offline. As a company, we've long believed that the vendor who has the most customer-focused and most innovative libraries as their customers will thrive. **YBP** is thriving and we intend to progress toward our goal of becoming a world-class full-service vendor. 🐼

Adventures in Librarianship: Fee for Service

by **Ned Kraft** (Ralph J. Bunche Library, U.S. Department of State) <kraftno@state.gov>

Memorandum

Date: December 29, 2000
To: All Department Heads
From: The Library
Subject: Fee for Service

In accordance with recent institutional directives, the library has developed a "fee for service" plan which it will implement at the beginning of the new fiscal year. Before entering the library, please review the guidelines. Send your comments by email to fullbox.library@insti.org.

The cost for claiming missing periodical issues (about 27.5 cents per claim) will be prorated among those who have used the journal. Patrons who have read full articles will pay a larger portion of the claim costs than those who have merely "skimmed." The heaviest costs will be reserved for researchers who have cited the journal.

Reference assistance will range from \$1.00, for simple directional questions (such as "where is the men's room") to several hundred dollars for complex research and reporting (doing your work for you). If you have asked a reference question and you are unsure of the value of the response, put one dollar in the "reference jar." If the librarian looks off in the distance, frowns, and taps her pencil, this means that you have not yet covered the value of the reference service. Continue depositing dollars until the reference librarian stops tapping her pencil.

Borrowing is a privilege, a privilege for which you must now pay. Again, we relied on the "prorate" principle in the development of the follow-

ing "reverse ponzi" scheme. The first borrower of a book will pay for the full acquisition costs of the book (list price, minus discount, plus standard processing fees). However, as more patrons borrow a book, they will pay the newly calculated pro-rate, thereby pushing refunds back to all earlier borrowers. If you have enjoyed a book (or if you have simply "read" a book), you may find it profitable to solicit other readers. The library can provide mailing lists.

Patrons will notice that the standard PCs that were located in the reading room have now been replaced by Vend-Dell machines. Use the new Vend-Dells for catalog and database searching. They are coin operated, quarters only, much like laundromat machines. Please do not ask the front desk for change. There are change machines located in the lounge.

As for inter-library loan, patrons will be pleased to hear that the library has reached a cost share agreement with Allsbreath Aluminum Company. With their generous support, the library can offer inter-library loan free of charge! If you come to the reference desk wearing the "I love Allsbreath Aluminum" t-shirt, the inter-library loan fee (\$17.50) will be waived. T-shirts will be sold in the lounge — \$17.50 for small and large, no mediums available.

Rare Book Room privileges will be granted as yearly subscriptions. Researchers gain full access for \$250 per year. White cotton gloves will be sold in the lounge.

We know our patrons share our excitement as the library moves toward its new goal of becoming a "profit center." 🐼