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Cutting-Edge Articles on Cutting-Edge Approval Plans

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Against the Grain

"Linking Publishers, Vendors and Librarians"

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Cutting-Edge Articles on Cutting-Edge Approval Plans: An Introduction

by **Beau David Case** (Head, Linguistics and West European Language Collections, Ohio State University, 1858 Neil Avenue Mall, Columbus, OH 43210-1286; phone 614-292-2594; fax 614-292-1918) <case.42@osu.edu>

There are two reasons for these articles on approval plans. First, the library literature on approval plans is becoming stale. We are reaching the expiration date of many published papers. So the intent is to add fresh papers to our pantry of ideas. Second, many of the published papers are too academic and impractical for the practicing librarian. These papers provide slices from real-life approval plans, and serve them up to the reader, along with the recipes.

In my national call, I emphasized the need for papers on interesting, innovative approval plans. From the ancient Greek poet Callimachus to the contemporary Danish filmmaker Lars von Trier, *Against the Grain* continues the artistic revolution tradition by also promoting a Manifesto of New. Thus, banned and censored are the dime-a-dozen approval plan

topics such as "how to select a vendor" and "comparative fill rates and turn-around times."

Instead, we advocate the topics "how to select a *French* vendor" and "comparative fill rates and turn-around times for *small presses, academic departmental publications, and other obscure publishers.*"

As well as papers being unique an interesting, they ought to be able to be replicated in a kind of blue-collar scientific manner. Our professional journals offer too many theoretical papers whose results may or may not be duplicated in another's workplace laboratory. Rather, we ought to be able to learn from the papers we read and then be able to apply printed methodologies and results in our own libraries and for the sake of our organizations and our clientele.

If Rumors Were Horses

Well ... The energetic, and always smiling **Sharon Cline McKay** has joined **SilverPlatter** representing the western U.S. effective May 15. Sharon, once at Ebsco and Faxon, is well-known to all of us as a frequent participant in **Charleston Conferences** of which I hope the 20th will be another.

Baker & Taylor has recently announced the formation of a new company, **Informata.com**, that will become the repository for all activities that Baker & Taylor conducts in the electronic business arena. Read our interview with the incredible **Bob Doran** in this issue, p. 62 to learn more.

And, as part of the above, the truly delightful, wonderful, and astute **Pam Smith** has been promoted to Senior Vice President, Internet Portals at B&T.

From the April 27 *Financial Times*, **Ingenta** has begun an aggressive expansion plan which began on the 27th with the "reverse takeover of Delyn, an Aim-listed investment vehicle, which will value the combined entity at £145m." Market uncertainty and anxiety over overhyped and overvalued Internet companies was given as the reason for the decision. **Ingenta** reported an £814,000 pre-tax loss in the year to September 1999 on revenues of £1.5m. See our interview

continued on page 8

If our profession is to take its publications seriously, and if through them we are to promote continuing education to and practical guidance for our colleagues, then we ought to subscribe to the principles of originality and practicality. For what other reasons do we librarians write? This special issue of *Against the Grain* exemplifies both excellent principles.

The first paper, by **Glen Worley**, examines approval plan binding preference services. Worley demonstrates significant financial savings without detrimental preservation consequences by receiving on approval lower-cost paperbacks whenever possible. His descriptions of vendor services and the methodologies for studying savings are directly applicable to our

continued on page 16

What To Look For In This Issue:

<i>Squeezing the Most out of the Approval Plan Budget</i>	16
<i>Origins of the Digital Dilemma</i>	45
<i>Library-Based Profiling</i>	36
<i>How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Merger</i>	38

Profiles Encouraged

<i>Rick Anderson</i>	40
<i>Allison Mays</i>	60

Interviews

<i>Bob Doran</i>	62
<i>Ed Collier & Bruce Funkhouser</i>	64

In Memoriam

<i>Gerry Stormer</i>	34
<i>Meta Nissley</i>	76

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Cutting Edge Articles from page 1

own libraries. Indeed, many vendors offer similar services; and, we all are confronted by ever shrinking acquisitions budgets and ever rising materials costs.

The second paper, by **Thomas Marshall** and **Jennalyn Tellman**, details the processing of approval receipts without professional librarians. The authors also describe their library's "frontlog" for foreign approval receipts without OCLC copy, and the public services implications of the frontlog. Many of our libraries have reduced professional staff over the years and are also having trouble finding staff with expert subject and language skills. The success that Marshall and Tellman report should give us hope that our libraries too can implement such strategies.

The third paper, by **Sara Tompson**, relates an interesting innovation at a special library. Readers will recognize the scenario she describes as the problem of routing vendor proof slips to

continued on page 18

Squeezing the Most out of the Approval Plan Budget: The University of Texas at Austin and Blackwell's Book Services Preferred Edition and Paper Preferred Options

by **Glen Worley** (Manager, Approval/Selection Plans, Approval Unit, Acquisitions Department PCL 2.300, The General Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin, Austin, TX 78713-8916; phone 512-495-4149; fax 512-495-4410) <glen.worley@mail.utexas.edu>

The General Libraries of the University of Texas at Austin receives nearly 15,000 titles annually via its **Blackwell's Book Services** Anglo-American approval plan. The approval plan supplies the majority of new English-language monographs purchased by the Library. Due to all-too-familiar budget considerations, the approval plan budget has remained relatively constant over the past few years. Thus, the Library attempts to maximize the number of titles received from this plan. Last year the Library reduced its annual expenditures for its Blackwell's plan by nearly eleven percent by utilizing two options offered by the vendor:

- **Preferred Edition:** UK titles supplied at no discount from Blackwell's UK branch, instead are supplied by the US branch on discount and often at a lesser list price.
- **Paper Preferred:** Whenever possible, paper editions are supplied instead of hardbound editions, provided that the difference in price between the two editions exceeds an amount set by the library, and that the paper edition is available within sixty days.

This paper will explain how the Library restructured its US/UK approval plan profile

to take advantage of these options. This paper will also discuss the implications of these changes. Although the Library uses Blackwell's Book Services for its approval plan, other approval plan vendors may offer similar options achieving the same results.

Historical Background

The Library's Anglo-American approval plan originally was created to supply monographs from both the US and the UK. The Library had one approval plan with the former **Blackwell North America** for US imprints, and another approval plan with B.H. Blackwell for UK imprints. Because US only approval plan titles received a discount, the Library preferred to receive titles published in both countries (e.g. Oxford University Press titles) from the US plan rather than from the UK plan. A list was compiled of publishers that routinely published titles in both the US and the UK and these publishers were excluded from the UK approval plan. Since Blackwell's US approval plan routinely excluded titles published in the UK, we needed a means to include titles from certain UK publishers while excluding others. The only solution was to create "mirror" profiles for

each approval profile. The Library duplicated each US approval plan subprofile in order to create the mirror profiles. The duplicate subprofiles were open to the UK as the non-subject parameter "country of original publication," but publishers were restricted to only the list of acceptable UK publishers. These UK publishers were then excluded from Blackwell's UK approval plan to eliminate duplication. Unfortunately, the result was the doubling of US approval plan subprofiles, thus making maintenance of the combined US/UK plan tedious. For example, changes made to one subprofile, required the same change be made in the corresponding mirror profile.

Some problems arose from international publishing industry mergers and acquisitions, and others arose when American presses published UK imprints. In the latter case, the US imprints were considered UK imprints because of the non-subject parameter country of origin. These titles thus were excluded from the US plan. Maintaining the list of publishers was analogous to hitting a constantly moving target. Every time a publisher was added to or removed from the list, then

continued on page 18

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Cutting Edge Articles from page 16

appropriate selectors and liaisons. Tompson was able to work together with the vendor to disseminate electronically new title information to a diverse and decentralized group of selectors. Her strategy may be able to be utilized by other libraries large and small, even if those libraries also have Web-based vendor selection tools.

The final two papers, by **Stephen Corrsin** and **Anthony Oddo** (see <http://against-the-grain.com> for Anthony Oddo's paper which will also be published in the Sept. issue), provide insights into non-Roman foreign-language approval plans. Corrsin describes the histories, varied definitions, and uses of Slavic and East European studies approval plans in the United States. Oddo describes the frustrating history of Greek-language acquisitions at his library, and the consequential creation of a new approval plan as a means to end that frustration. At the same time, Oddo also offers us a practical guide to the creation of a foreign-language approval plan. Both Corrsin and Oddo offer valuable and unique contributions to the library literature.

All five papers (and we hope two more papers in a later issue) provide fascinating reads. And, for those so inclined, the papers are teeming with ideas for approval plan innovations in our own libraries.

Squeezing the Most from page 16

Blackwell's personnel would have to make the corresponding change in over one hundred US and UK subprofiles.

In addition to profile maintenance difficulties, other problems existed. The approval plan for UT Austin is paid out of a single fund controlled by the library collection development division, whereas firm orders are paid out of allocated funds controlled by individual bibliographers responsible for specific subject areas. It is the Library's policy to return approval titles that have been duplicated by a firm order. Occasionally a title published by one of the selected UK publishers would not be available through Blackwell's US, and because that publisher was excluded from the UK profile, the book would not arrive on either approval plan. The scenario was particularly troublesome in the cases of publishers such as Macmillan and St. Martins, which often published the same title, but also published titles which their overseas partner did not. The result was confusion on the part of the bibliographers. They debated whether or not to firm order titles, because in their view approval book were free, whereas they had to use their own allocations to firm order titles.

Blackwell's Preferred Edition Service for UK Titles

In 1996, Blackwell's began to offer a Preferred Edition service for their approval plan customers having both US and UK approval plans. Blackwell's would send the US edition

of a UK title, subject to certain conditions, rather than sending the UK edition. The most significant of these conditions was that the US title must be listed as forthcoming in the US approval title database. Blackwell's UK personnel would search the US database for each title assigned to the Library's approval plan by the Blackwell's UK approval matching program. If the title was listed as forthcoming in the US database, then UK personnel created an "approval force," causing the US title to be sent on approval, and allowing libraries to take advantage of their negotiated discount for US approval titles. However, if the title had already been treated for US approval customers, then the UK edition would be sent. By the end of 1999, the integration of Blackwell's UK and US computer systems made it possible for Blackwell's to automate the Preferred Edition process and thus eliminate the need for the US edition to be forthcoming.

The Library decided to try this service due to the problems with the approval plan strategy mentioned above. Some restructuring of the approval profiles was necessary in order to configure the US/UK plan to use this service. Each subprofile of the US approval plan had to have a corresponding UK subprofile identical in terms of publisher, subject, and non-subject parameters with the exception of the non-subject parameters country of original publication and country of source. The Library's existing UK profile was similar to the US profile, but two changes were needed. First, subject coverage for some areas was expanded. Second, a few new UK subprofiles were created in order to completely duplicate

all the US subprofiles. Initially this plan was a cause for concern, as there were no hard data to predict the financial consequences of this new approach. It was agreed to let the new US and UK profiles run for a trial period of six months and then assess whether or not to continue.

It took several weeks to reconfigure the US and UK profiles and the new Preferred Edition Anglo-American approval plan began with the UT Austin fiscal year 1997 (September 1, 1996). In order to monitor the plan, Blackwell's UK sent a weekly list of the "forced" titles that were to arrive on the US plan. By comparing the UK and US prices for each title and computing the discounted US price, we gauged the effectiveness of the new service. After the first few weeks, already a considerable amount of money was being saved, and so the service was made permanent.

In order to obtain sales and return information reports, Blackwell's personnel created a library code (similar to a customer number or account) to which all Preferred Edition titles would be assigned. The code went into effect about the third month of the fiscal year, and allowed the Library to use the standard Blackwell Sales and Returns management reports to determine the effectiveness of the new plan, as data for all Preferred Edition titles would now be listed under this library code.

Consequences of Using Preferred Edition

For collection development purposes the Library uses four library codes with corresponding fund codes to classify approval

continued on page 20