

June 2001

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Recommended Citation

Smith, Rodger (2001) "Public Prayers-The Reverant Wishes and Desires of a Public Library Collection Development Librarian," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 13: Iss. 3, Article 11.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.3491>

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Public Prayers — The Reverent Wishes and Desires of a Public Library Collection Development Librarian

by **Rodger Smith** (Collection Development Librarian, Charleston County Public Library) <smithr@ccpl.org>

It's spring and I too have been overtaken by a desire to clean, straighten, and organize. I'm responsible for all materials, all formats, all levels, all branches, at our library which serves 300,000 citizens, stretched along ninety miles of the Atlantic coast. From board books for the infant to large print for the seniors, from learn-to-read book and audio kits to GRE preparation cd-roms, from the World Almanac to the newest online database, it all passes through my door, leaving behind physical debris, confusion, chaos, and occasional despair. My office is a regular stop for staff looking for a good laugh, some comic relief. "Let's go look at Rodger's boxes. Let's go see if any of Rodger's piles have collapsed." Sometimes I can laugh along. Sometimes I just snarl politely. (We Southerners are always polite.)

I have to admit, however, that it's more than just sunshine and the scent of magnolias that has motivated me to get organized. Its time to plan next fiscal year's materials budget. July 1 is fast approaching and our administration expects to see some orderly plans for spending the \$2,000,000 allocated for materials. Most of the budget lines are easy calculations: an adjustment for inflation here, a minor readjustment of priorities there.

Over the past decade



Biz of Acq from page 34

announced that allow **Blackwells** and **YBP** to provide books from **Alibris** directly to libraries. ISBN searching was recently introduced. Library customers can instruct **Alibris** to ship in batches of at least ten orders, thus saving shipping charges.

Alibris is distinct in that it has a company-owned inventory and directly ensures quality. **Alibris** stock is listed in the database as "usually ships in one business day." Books owned by dealers are first shipped to **Alibris**, where quality is checked, and then they are reshipped to the customer.

21 North Main relies on its dealers to heed their quality instructions. All books are

our materials budget has seen significant growth. Almost all budget lines have seen increases, even after adjustments for inflation. And while the percentage of our overall budget devoted to print materials has decreased to 77% this last year, even those lines have seen healthy increases. The lines for juvenile, young adult, and adult non-fiction have all received substantial increases.

The budget lines for audio-visual materials present more challenges. In the past year we have added both circulating DVD's and books on compact discs. I have bad dreams, not quite nightmares, about the future of all our a-v formats. Currently we have video users complaining about new feature films being available in DVD but not VHS. I worry that all our current format a-v collections will be made obsolete by Internet developments. Until then, I worry about the money! Where will we get the funds to support comprehensive spoken word collections in both audio-cassette and compact disc?

But it's the electronic resources line that causes me to turn to prayer. Last year we spent 8% of our total materials budget on online products and CD-ROMs. Next year it will be no more than 10%. How can budgeting and spending only \$160,000 to \$200,000 be so difficult? The process leaves me feeling as if I'm trapped in a game of blind man's bluff. I'm blindfolded and being taunted by our administration, the reference librarians, assorted vendors, and the occasional irate patron who finds her way to my door. Our administration wants a well-defined array of electronic resources that will demonstrate to the community our commitment to the future. They also want a fixed budget with no surprises. Our reference librarians want products that are easy to use and won't add to their sense of electronic overload and Internet fa-

shipped directly from dealers to customers. Their system seems to work well, and I have not encountered any poor quality books.

The Future

This has been a quick overview of the new possibilities in o.p. searching offered by two new competitors, **Alibris** and **21 North Main**.¹³ Part of the secret to their future success will be getting even more dealers' stocks listed. Most dealers currently list only part of their stocks online. Both companies are aware of the need to list more foreign language books, and are currently addressing that problem. We should wish both **21 North Main** and **Alibris** well. It would be good for libraries for these vendors to succeed. 🌱

figure. Vendors not only our money, but our precious TIME: time to listen when they call, time to set-up trials, time to communicate URLs, usernames and passwords, time to try to explain why I don't have the time to do it all. And our diverse patrons want to know why we can't offer ready access to the specific electronic products they want NOW.

So, as I organize my office, eliminate some debris, re-organize my piles, and draw up a product specific electronic resource budget, these are my prayers:

1 Vendors, please be consistent and upfront about your pricing. If you're offering introductory pricing, we need to know what the renewal cost will be. Please don't cut prices just to get us to sign up. An unexpected substantial price increase can result in a cancellation no matter how valuable the product.

2 Vendors, please make online trials as easy as possible. Please use short, simple, reliable URLs. Please use simple username and password access as often as possible. I have sixteen facilities with sixteen managers and lots of interested reference librarians to inform for every trial.

3 **Baker & Taylor, Ingram, Brodart,** and other vendors, please consider offering electronic products, as you do print and other media, in a convenient one-stop selection environment. I simply do not have the time to deal with so many separate vendors and publishers.

4 Administration, please realize that the electronic resource market is incredibly dynamic, with new technologies and products appearing every day. Committing every cent of our electronic budget the first of the fiscal year leaves us unable to respond to developments as the year progresses.

5 Reference librarians, please look beyond the homeless person demanding another 30 minutes of Internet chat and the irate entrepreneur desiring to print address labels for every business in the county. Help us develop an information strategy that effectively bridges traditional print sources and these new electronic sources.

6 Patrons, please be patient. This is all so new to us. And we simply do not have the resources to offer you every electronic resource available.

7 South Carolina State Legislature, please find the money to continue to fund **DISCUS**, which provides every citizen of the state with access to key **Gale, Grolier,** and **SIRS** databases through state college, school and public libraries. 🌱