September 1999

Biz of Acq-Acquisitions Librarian at the Reference Desk-A Success Story

Brian Flaherty

New England School of Law, bflaherty@nesl.edu

Sandra K. Paul

SKP Associates, SKPAssoc@cwixmail.com

Albert Simmonds

SKP Associates, awsimmo@ibm.net

Rob Richards

University of Colorado Law Library, rrichard@stripe.colorado.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg>

Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Flaherty, Brian; Paul, Sandra K.; Simmonds, Albert; and Richards, Rob (1999) "Biz of Acq-Acquisitions Librarian at the Reference Desk-A Success Story," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 11: Iss. 4, Article 30.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.3550>

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

Biz of Acq — Acquisitions Librarian at the Reference Desk - A Success Story

by **Brian Flaherty** (Acquisitions/Government Documents Librarian, New England School of Law, ph: 617-422-7293) <bflaherty@nesl.edu>
<brian@nesl.edu>

Column Editor: **Rob Richards** (Technical Services Librarian, University of Colorado Law Library) <r-richard@stripe.colorado.edu> <http://alexia.lis.uiuc.edu/~rrichard>

Introduction

The traditional division of labor in libraries—between technical services and public services—has sustained larger libraries for nearly a century (a discussion of when libraries first divided into public and technical service is a topic for another paper). The division of labor worked: libraries grew, collections were well and properly cataloged, burgeoning information was organized in such a way as to make it accessible to librarians and patrons alike. The disadvantages of this division of labor were largely insignificant compared to librarians' collective success in taming successive information ages. As libraries have grown more electronic, however, these disadvantages have grown more evident. As automated systems have become more integrated, the disparities between the way the technical services folks do things, and the way the public services folks do things, have become increasingly problematic. Reference librarians don't always understand that possible subject headings are limited to those listed in a quartet of big red books. Cataloging librarians are often unwilling to transgress LC rules, even if it would mean dramatic improvements in information access. In many cases, the traditional division of labor has escalated into an adversarial relationship.

One solution to this problem is to have some technical services staff members work some time in public services. This solution has worked well in our library. Using a particularly troublesome issue—dealing with treatises accompanied by forms on disk—as a case study, I will show how having a member of technical services working with the reference staff has led to a workable solution.

In order for the case study to make sense, I need to tell a bit about our library, and about my own professional history. I “grew up” as a technical services librarian; I’ve been the head of acquisitions here at the New England School of Law Library since 1990. In 1995, I graduated from library school, took over the government documents department as well, and began to work at the reference desk for a few shifts per week. We automated our library in 1994—one year before I began to sit hours at the reference desk. Because I was heavily involved in the automation process, I came

to reference work with a thorough knowledge of both the foreground and background of our **Innovative** system. While the public services staff was still working to fit the OPAC and circulation modules into their work day, the III system had already become my work day.

By the time I sat at the reference desk, I knew how to extract more information from the system than the public service librarians, mainly because I spent my days putting information into the system. I could show other reference staff how to access order and checkin records to check the currency of a title, the difference between the staff and public displays, and how to check the receipt and catalog date to locate a book still in process. I also began to teach them how to manipulate the system—or request that the system be manipulated—so that they could more efficiently make it do what they wanted. I told them what “added titles” were, and how they could be used—provided they convinced cataloging to add them—to facilitate access to familiar books with unfamiliar 245 fields. At this point, I was pleased to serve as a bridge between technical services and public services.

Forms on Disk

Beginning in the late 80s and early 90s, legal book publishers began to enclose computer disks with their books, containing copies of the book, selected relevant documents, and legal forms. These became an immediate headache for technical service librarians: what to do with these aberrations? Because they couldn't be tattle-taped or security-tagged, nobody wanted to shelve them with the books. I know of several acquisitions librarians (whose professional secrets are safe with me) who simply let these creatures stack up in their offices. Some libraries, ours included, shelved the book in one place and the disk in another. We included several pointers, leading patrons from one place to the next. Books were labeled: “Accompanied by disk in the computer center,” disks were labeled: “Accompanies manual at KFM 2481 .M37 1990,” bibliographic records were littered with notes, and item records were created for each disk. This solution was unsatisfactory to patrons and reference librarians alike, who were loath to look in one place and then another to retrieve the whole item.

Finally, and with much consternation, it was decided that despite their susceptibility to vandalism and theft, the disks should be pasted into the books and put on the shelves sans security. The convenience of having the accompanying forms on disk readily available to the user was worth the risk of theft. As well, we could take precautions: it was impractical to make copies of every disk as it came in, but if the item was “high-risk,” e.g., a heavily used or reserve item, we could make a back-up copy of the disk (the **Digital Millennium Copyright Act** allows us to do this). I would myself reorder any other disks that should “go missing.” For anyone contemplating such a solution for shelving accompanying disks, we have been shelving them with books for more than two years now; in that time, I have replaced only two disks. The publishers, **Nolo Press** and **MCLE**, were happy to replace the disks free of charge.

We were all satisfied with the solution we had come to—disks circulated with books and were returned unharmed. Librarians no longer had to go on expeditions whenever they saw the dreaded “accompanied by disk” label. All was well, until one day a patron came to me with the following question: “Do you have any bankruptcy books that are accompanied by forms on disk?” Certainly I could answer this: using the **Innovative** create list function, I ran a search for “disk” in the Description field, and “Bankruptcy” in the subject. I don't recall whether or not we had any such disks, but I do remember thinking, “there must be an easier way.” After the patron left, I spent some time trying the search in different ways. “Disk” or “forms on disk” did not appear in an indexed field. The correct items could not be isolated by limiting the search to material type (all of the materials were books) or material location (the patron was looking for circulating books). I went to the other reference librarians and asked them how they would answer the question. We could find no easier way of searching for disks from the staff display, and no way at all to search for disks from the public terminal.

After much discussion I brought our problem, and our possible solutions, back to the cataloging librarian. The consensus among

continued on page 73

Biz of Acq
from page 72

public services staff was that we should be able to search for "Forms on disk," and retrieve all books with forms on disk. This could be achieved by using the "Added title" field. Of course, this suggestion gave our cataloging librarian fits. "Forms on disk," she told me, "must appear somewhere for it to be entered into the added title field. Our rationale for creating this added title cannot be because it would be convenient. It runs entirely against AACR2 rules ... we can't do it." The cataloging librarian's solution was to put "forms on disk" into a note field which could be indexed and searched using the keyword index. It would involve creating an indexed note field for each book with forms on disk. We would be able to do a keyword search for "forms on disk," and limit the results by subject, though we would not be able to go the other way, i.e., we would not be able to do a subject search and limit it to forms on disk. The solution was inelegant, but workable.

The final answer came at a small conference for local acquisitions librarians who use the III system. One of the librarians present said that her library was using the "alternative title field" to index familiar names for books. Innovative will index this field—793 in the MARC record—as an added title. On the staff display it shows up as an added title; it does not show up at all on the public display. Significant for our purposes, entries in this field would not be governed by stringent AACR2 convention. "Alternative titles" do not have to appear anywhere on the item in question; they can be made up "out of whole cloth." I realized that this was the answer to our problems. We could use this field to enter the title "forms on disk."

We have gone on to use the 793 field to index all sorts of non-AACR2 language. Most recently, one of our staff has begun indexing books by color. This will eventually become a clickable page on our WebPAC—handy for such questions as: "I'm looking for the contracts casebook—you know, the green one." Subject: contracts, Limit by: color. The point of the study, though, is not the success, but the process. Having someone familiar with the workings of both departments to serve as an intermediary was essential to solving the problem. The reference department says: "Here is the problem (cannot search for forms on disk) and here is what we want (added title access)." The cataloging department says: "Here is why we cannot do that (AACR2)." In many institutions, the discussion might end there; the adversarial relationship between public and technical services would be preserved. A person who works for both departments, however, can better negotiate between the two. In our library that meant that I could go back to our cataloging librarian and say, "I understand that AACR2 doesn't allow us to do this. Is there another indexed or indexable field we could put this in?" And when we came up

with a workable but inelegant solution, I was in the best position to keep looking for a better one.

Conclusion

Using the case study above, I have tried to show one advantage of having technical services staff work in reference and/or public services. There are many others. Working on the front lines of public service, I hear the praise of our library, of our collection—praise which in large part belongs to the technical services staff. From the distant land of the back office, it's easy to forget: patrons do very much appreciate what we do. Also, for those of us who spend the days acquiring and organizing information, it is very helpful to know how people ask for information. Remember, the entire case study above was borne of a reference question: "Do you have any bankruptcy books that are accompanied by forms on disk?"

Automated library systems have started us down the path of integrating public and technical services. As libraries grow more electronic, that integration will grow even more essential. What good to a library is a technically dazzling

BOOKS & PERIODICALS ONLINE

a directory of online publications

JUST A
CLICK AWAY!

editor • Nuchine Nobari

HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE YOU TO FIND
WHAT YOU'RE LOOKING FOR ONLINE?

- 97,000+ Sources Online
- 14,000+ Fulltext
- Links to 3,000+ URLs, all verified

AVAILABLE AT
WWW.PERIODICALS.NET

FULLTEXT • ABSTRACTS • CITATIONS

LIBRARY TECHNOLOGY ALLIANCE, LTD.
POST OFFICE BOX 77232 (202) 789-2099 PHONE
WASHINGTON, DC 20013 (202) 789-2474 FAX

Used to Call it Publishing Endnotes from pg 76

¹ LaPlant, W. and St. Pierre, M. Taxonomy of Metadata Standards. Copies are available from the U.S. Bureau of the Census, Statistical Research Division, Attn: William LaPlant, Room 3000 FB 4, Washington, DC 20233-9100.

² Dublin Core: <<http://purl.oclc.org/dc/>>.

³ USMARC: <<http://www.loc.gov/marc/>>.

⁴ Federal Geographic Data Committee (FGDC): <http://www.census.gov/geo/www/standards/scdd/CDsupplement.html>.

⁵ Government Information Locator Service (GILS): <http://www.usgs.gov/gils/prof_v2.html>.

⁶ Directory Interchange Format (DIF). <<http://gcmd.gsfc.nasa.gov/difguide/difman.html>>.

⁷ Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) Data Documentation Initiative (DDI): <<http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/DDI/>>.

⁸ Survey Design and Statistical Methodology (SDSM). Bureau of the Census Draft Standard. Copies available from the U.S. Bureau of the Census, Statistical Research Division, Attn: SDSM, Room 3000 FB 4, Washington, DC 20233-9100.

⁹ Gillman, D.; M. Appel; and S. Highsmith. Building A Statistical Metadata Repository, Second IEEE Metadata Conference 1997.

¹⁰ LaPlant, W. P. Jr., Lestina, G. J. Jr., Gillman, D. W., and Appel, M. V. (1996), *Proposal for a Statistical Metadata Standard*, Census Annual Research Conference, Arlington, VA, March 18-21, 1996.

¹¹ Consortium for the Computer Interchange of Museum Information (CIMI): <http://www.cimi.org/downloads/CIMI_profile/profile.htm>.

¹² Information Resource Dictionary System (IRDS) Content Model Standard: <<http://www.irds.org/gradwellworkshoppaper.html>>.

¹³ Murata, M. DTD Transformation by Patterns and Contextual Conditions, GCA SGML/XML 1997, pp. 325-332.

Element 1 In GILS, Contact Name is subordinate to Point of Contact.

Element 2 In DIF, the First Name and Last Name elements are subordinate to the Technical Contact element.