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Biz of Acq-Paperback Prebinding: Finding its Place in the Budget

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Biz of Acq — Paperback Prebinding: Finding its Place in the Budget

by Neil Jaffe (General Manager, San Val, Inc.) <neiljaffe@aol.com>

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Column Editor's Note: "How can we squeeze more value from the monograph budget?" most acquisitions librarians continually wonder. Buying in paperback offers one choice. Budgetary pressures, and the use of alkaline paper in books issued by the majority of U.S. publishers, have compelled many libraries in recent years to purchase monographs with paperback bindings. Prebinding processes present libraries with viable options for obtaining hardcover bindings for paperback books, at a cost well below that of most cloth bindings. Yet how many libraries make use of prebinding processes? How do these libraries pay for such services? In this month's column, Neil Jaffe, General Manager of San Val, Inc., a binder that provides prebinding services, shares some answers to these questions, as well as suggestive ways to understanding the role of the binding industry in the "brave new world" of book production. — RR

Would you agree that improving the presentation, use, and preservation of library collections is an important task for acquisitions librarians? Would you also agree that it is difficult for librarians to balance the many trade-offs among cost, usability, and duration of quality use of materials? Add in the fact that every library has its own collection development policies, procedures, and budgets, and you've made these decisions even tougher to face.

I spend the greater portion of my day thinking about how to offer the most value among these trade-offs. Our company's mission is to help extend the life of books. We focus primarily on monographs, and specifically on new books. We work with book vendors all over the country to allow them to offer "shelf ready" books converted from paperback to hardcover. We refer to the process as "prebinding," a term with which 95% of you are familiar.

I decided it was time again to learn some new things about prebinding in libraries. Over the years, I've learned that few of you prebind

everything and the majority of you prebind something. I thought it would be valuable for me to compare current attitudes and trends to past empirical and anecdotal data.

This article details the results of my recent survey of acquisition librarians on their prebinding habits with a focus on which budget dollars are used for this service. In 1996, many of you will remember that I tested the power of technology by performing an e-mail survey of over 200 acquisition librarians.

After some preliminary research for this article, I determined that another survey would be appropriate. Our friend John Riley from Eastern Book Company suggested that I could get the best results through a posting to the subscribers of **Acqnet** (acqnet-1@listserv.appstate.edu).

This article reveals what I found out about how many libraries in a self-selected sample use a service for converting paperback books to hardcover books before they go on the shelf, and how libraries pay for this service.

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book on Bach, as I earn a living as a church organist, and my friend collects any recordings of music by Bach other than organ music. He liked the book, for which the list price was £40. The following morning he emailed me to say that he had ordered the book from **Amazon.co.uk** the previous afternoon, and it had arrived in the post that morning for a total cost of £27. Despite these price advantages, the number of book super-stores continues to grow. If you are visiting London do visit the new **Waterstones** bookshop in Piccadilly. Some of you will know the famous **Simpsons** store, which Waterstones has recently rebuilt with a lot of care into five floors of books, with around 270,000 titles. I visited it recently and was very impressed by the amount of space there was on each floor, making it a much more restful shop than **Borders**, which is near Oxford Circus. Of course, you will say, there is bound to be room in London for these large shops. However, I was in the historic town of Chichester a few days ago, whose main claim to fame is probably that it is the UK headquarters of **Wileys**. The population is less than 1% of that of London, and yet there is a large **Waterstones** in what was an old hotel, a branch of **Hatchards**, and

a branch of **Sussex Stationers**, which heavily discounts book prices. Add to that a branch of the national **W.H. Smith** bookshop chain and you have four booksellers within 100 yards of each other. The extent to which Internet-connected families browse in the shops and then buy online is of course an important question, but on the face of it bookselling the traditional way is still alive and well in the UK. However, some librarians are now considering whether it may be better to use Amazon as a supplier of books because of the discounts that are available.

New Chief Executive for the Library Association

In September **Dr Bob McKee** took up the post of Chief Executive of the Library Association. Bob McKee began his library and information career as a library assistant in **Birmingham Central Reference Library** while completing his doctorate. But he subsequently went on to teach, in secondary, further and higher education, as well as working in the IT industry. Prior to his appointment Bob was Assistant Chief Executive of **Solihull Metropolitan Borough** having formerly been Director of Arts & Libraries. He has served on the **British Library Advisory Council** and the former **Library & Information Services Council** for England, and

has always been active in professional affairs, including serving on the **Library Association Council** and as President of the **Association of Assistant Librarians** (now the **Career Development Group**). He has been a member of the **Library & Information Commission** since its inception in May 1995, and has had a significant involvement in the development of a number of important policy papers, including "Libraries: the Lifeforce for Learning." One of his urgent priorities is to guide through the proposed merger of the **Library Association** and the **Institute of Information Scientists** to create one unified organisation to represent the 20,000 or so information professionals in the UK.

The management of electronic journals

If you are reading this paragraph, the Editor has been generous in allowing me a commercial break. Before I left **TFPL Ltd.** in September to start up my own business my colleague **Peter Kibby** and I, together with assistance from **Suzanne Wilson-Higgins**, **Christine Stamison** and **Andrew Pitts** from **Blackwell's**, wrote the **TFPL/Blackwell's Guide to Electronic Journal Management**. This 106 pp. book is published by **TFPL Ltd.** (www.tfpl.com), but will also appear on the **Blackwell's** Web site at www.Blackwells.co.uk in due course. 🌱

Of the 101 responses to the survey, 90 were from librarians at academic libraries, 8 were from public libraries and 3 were from special libraries. Community colleges were included as "Academic."

Question #3 of the survey asked, "Does your library have paperback books converted to hardcover before they go onto the shelves for the first time?"

Over half (52%) of the 101 respondents stated that they have some or all of their paperbacks converted to hardcover before the books go on the shelves. Only 3 of the 8 public libraries responded yes to this question.

Most who responded yes to this question provided details on how the service is performed, which books get bound, and why they find this service valuable. For example, one respondent stated, "[S]ome are pre-bound by the vendors[,] some go to our binder with the monthly periodicals shipment." Another said, "(Prebinding) depends on the anticipated level of use, monetary and/or substantive value of the book, and its physical characteristics." Another stated, "[T]he cost of binding and processing is still a great deal less than purchasing a cloth edition of the same book." Another commented, "We save money (for the collections budget) by buying books in paper where possible and binding locally with our commercial binder—and we also get better quality of binding. Many publisher bound books are of very poor quality binding."

In my 1996 survey, 30 of 59 respondents

Paperback Binding Budget Survey Results

Library Type

90	Academic
8	Public
3	Special
101	Total Respondents

Prebinding

1999 Results

53	52%	Prebind paperbacks
48	48%	Do not prebind

1996 Results

30	51%	Prebind paperbacks
29	49%	Do not prebind

Budget

28	53%	Binding/Tech Serv
20	38%	Acquisitions
4	7%	Combination
1	2%	Service
53		Total

(51%) responded that they prebound books either through their book vendor or with their library binder.

Of those that answered "no" to the question of prebinding in the 1999 survey (48), 17 offered comments. Of the comments, 9 mentioned that they reinforce paperbacks with plastic laminant covers before circulating. Some specifically stated that they perform this process in-house, while others stated that they have their vendors perform this service. The 8 others who commented after responding "no" to Question 3 stated that they simply put paperbacks on the shelf "as is."

Question #4 of the survey asked, "Does money for this come from your Binding (preservation/technical services) Budget or from your Acquisitions Budget?" As you can imagine, the responses to this question were quite diverse.

Of the 53 respondents who use the prebinding service, 28 state that this money comes from the binding budget; 20 state that it comes from the acquisitions/materials budget; 4 state it is a combination; and one states that it is from a service budget. However, the results are not black and white. For some libraries, the binding budget falls under a larger acquisitions budget. For others, the binding budget is part of technical services as a preservation budget.

Overall, it appears that, for those libraries that have books bound through their book vendor, money for this service comes from the acquisitions/materials budget.

One respondent states, "The only bindery budget we have is to bind our loose periodicals and serials. Nearly all paperback monographs are bound by our book vendors before we receive them." Another states, "We also have our vendors do additional processing on our books (both paperback and cloth) as well, such as: stamping, due date slip, tattle-tape, etc. This processing also comes out of the acquisitions budget. We are then able to debit departments in an equitable manner."

Finally, another respondent states, "It (money) must come from acquisitions as part of a value-added service. Binding is bid by the state and must be sent to the contract binder (which would add an entire extra level of work, expense, and time to the process). We had to have a special clarification requested to do the prebinding as part of acquisitions."

Question #5 asked, "Does your library anticipate any changes to this method of budgeting for paperback conversion?"

Of the 53 libraries that have books prebound, only 3 anticipate changes to their process. Two libraries specifically mentioned that they are considering binding books only after heavy use. "We may decide to purchase more books instead of have them come prebound, and we may reduce the number of paperbacks we send to the bindery before use." One library specifically mentions a change to their budgeting process: "In the past, all the professional binding was paid for

out of the binding (tech services) budget because we sent the books away to a professional bindery. Two of our vendors are to do the binding of all paperbacks over \$20. The cost will be added onto the price of the book, so we've asked to have the money from the tech services budget for binding transferred to book acquisitions. They agreed to do that."

Summary

As you can see from the results of this survey, libraries have a variety of approaches to the budgeting process for converting paperback books to hardcover books before they go on the shelves. Some choose to view the cost of this service as a segment of their acquisition budgets, while others treat binding as a separate technical services and preservation expense. Overall, I believe everyone would agree that these budgets fall under a greater "collections" budget that includes the acquisition and maintenance of the collection.

Just as for any project, in the end, I realized a few things that could have made this survey even better. Most importantly, I should have separated out those that bind through their book vendor and those that bind with their library binder. I believe that would have helped clarify the budget question. Also, I think I should have included some of the same questions about prebinding that I asked in my 1996 survey. That would have created more consistent trend information from survey to survey. Finally, I should have given myself a few extra weeks between my survey posting and the deadline for the rough draft of my article. There were at least five respondents whose data was not included because they took longer than I expected to respond. That extra time could have made my survey even more accurate.

As many of you know, I take the topic of paperback binding very seriously. Recently, I have been elected to the **Library Binding Institute (LBI)** board of directors. At LBI meetings, we spend most of our time finding ways to increase the quality and use of books for libraries. We have also learned that, as an industry, we are in the prime position for adding value to the world of digital communication and on-demand book production. Only a few of us in the world have the ability to take a single book, bind the pages, and make a new case that is an attractive, informative, and durable exterior for the book.

Paperback books and prebinding are simply an evolution of how publishers can focus on content and marketing, and allow the end-user purchaser of the book to determine what format best suits his or her needs. Our service to **Replica Books** is a perfect example of this evolution. For these "now-back-in-print" titles, the pages and the covers are brought together as the customer orders the book. Binding and format decisions are being delayed until the customer is certain of his or her needs. At the bindery, we take digitally printed book pages from the printer and our digitally printed covers, and bind them

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were set for out-of-print status are now saved. In addition, books that may have never been given a chance are now available in a format suitable for libraries. The book industry, just like most other industries, is offering book purchasers more options to meet their dynamic and specific needs. Librarians will have even more choices, and thus more challenges and trade-offs for maintaining their collections.

Though this may seem overwhelming, you can be assured that your book vendor and local library binder can help you make choices. Virtually all of the book vendors in the country offer our prebinding services. They are well-versed in helping you choose when prebinding makes sense for you. And, your local library binder will be a wise guide for discussing all of the benefits and costs of the various binding types.

I welcome any questions and comments in regard to this topic.

Additional Reading

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