December 2002

Books Are Us

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Recommended Citation

Robichaux, Anne (2002) "Books Are Us," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 14: Iss. 6, Article 29.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.3961>

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competencies? What are the determining factors the RFP-issuing institution will consider in which one or multiple vendors will be selected (price, service, vendor innovations, references)? Does the institution intend to issue a single vendor award (sole source) or award the business to multiple vendors? What are the estimated annual expenditures to be expected from the institution, should the vendor be awarded the business? Another area vendors often scrutinize is how questions are worded. There are instances where the way certain RFP questions are posed might preclude a vendor from bidding. An example of such wording would include a question indicating that a particular vendor offering is "required" as opposed to "preferred" or "desired." A vendor could easily conclude that an inability to offer the "required" item would eliminate the vendor from consideration and thus discourage submission of an RFP response. Lastly, and perhaps the most important vendor consideration, should it be awarded the business/contract, will it be profitable? Should the vendor be selected, will the resulting relationship with the institution be a "win/win" scenario for both parties? Ensuring customer satisfaction and vendor profitability are both critically important. Based on these considerations, and others too numerous to mention, a vendor may decide to issue a "no bid" response to the RFP. This response would be submitted to the bidding authority (generally the institution's purchasing department or library) usually stating the reason for declining to bid.

Once a decision has been made by the vendor to respond to an RFP, the vendor often takes a holistic approach to crafting a response. A central point person (the bid administrator) assumes responsibility for organizing the response, assembling exhibits that support responses to questions, providing references and ensuring that the response is prepared and delivered on schedule. Supporting the bid administrator is a team of "specialists" who help formulate responses to RFP questions based on their areas of expertise. For example, an RFP that includes questions pertaining to monographic serials would require the input of the Serials/Continuations manager. Similarly, an RFP that requests that the vendor state its technical service capabilities (cataloging, physical processing) would need to draw input from the internal specialist(s) in these areas. Once this information is collected by the administrator (and this can require several face-to-face meetings), the information is plugged into the RFP response. Vendors try to be careful not to introduce their own internal terminology or acronyms into their responses as some of the same verbiage may be used already within the institution with differing connotations.

So what can RFP-issuing institutions do to help vendors deliver a complete and well-thought-out proposal? First of all, recognizing that Purchasing departments are integral parts of the institutional bid process, it is important to remind Purchasing that librarians are purchasing a service, not a good. This is made clear in Frances Wilkerson's and Connie Capers

Thornson's terrific book, *The RFP Process-Effective Management of the Acquisition of Library Materials* (Libraries Unlimited, Inc., 1998). Full service vendors prefer to have the opportunity to be evaluated on their ability to offer solutions and services that address the library's needs rather than to be evaluated primarily on price.

One recent trend worth noting is the shortened length of time vendors are provided to respond to RFPs. Ideally, a vendor should be permitted a minimum of 30 to 45 days (or more) to prepare and submit an RFP response from the date the vendor receives the RFP. A recent sampling of RFP due dates required written vendor responses within two to three weeks of the RFP's issue date (usually the mailing or Web posting date of the document). Such a limited timeframe does not permit the vendor to provide its best possible response, which ultimately poorly serves both the issuing institution and the vendor. The timeframe conundrum can also be compounded by the fact that on occasion, there may be multiple RFPs being concurrently prepared by the vendor. Given the importance of this overall process to both institution and vendor, providing ample response time is crucial to all.

Many RFPs request that vendors provide an onsite presentation of their services. These presentations can occur either before the RFP is actually issued (generally to help determine which vendors should be sent an RFP) or after receipt of an RFP response to allow the vendor to not only present their services but also to engage in questions and answers pertaining to the RFP. In either case, the institution should allow the vendor sufficient time to provide a complete overview of its services while including time to demonstrate any databases germane to the needs of the library. Such presentations should be in a meeting area that offers the necessary audiovisual capabilities (Web access, projector, etc.). Allowing a minimum of two hours presentation time per vendor is considered ideal. Vendors prefer not to be "clustered" into back-to-back timeframes as this can make for awkward transitions (such as one vendor setting up while another is removing equipment). For the audience, viewing back-to-back or multiple pre-

sentations in a single day must assuredly be a difficult task at best. When scheduling vendor presentations, it is important to keep in mind that the key vendor personnel who would participate in the presentation are often scheduled weeks in advance. A vendor would prefer to have a minimum of 30 days advance notice for a required appointment to present its services, to ensure that the appropriate vendor team can present and schedule the necessary travel (most major airlines require a 21-day advance purchase to obtain the most competitive fares).

Lastly, (and this might sound rudimentary, but it's important nonetheless) vendors would like to encourage all institutions to please advise them regarding the awarding status of the business. As noted earlier, vendors invest substantial time and financial resources in preparing and delivering a well-thought-out RFP response. All vendors submitting RFP responses do so with the expectation and optimism that theirs will be the proposal selected. While the end result invariably leaves some vendors disappointed, if they are provided notification that they were not selected, with some explanation as to the factor(s) that led to the selection of another vendor, they at least gain a better understanding of where they might have fallen short and how they can be more competitive in future RFP response situations. Just as important, too, is to notify the selected vendor of the award. Interestingly, I can recall several instances where substantial numbers of book orders suddenly began arriving at YBP as a result of an RFP award that we were not officially made aware had been awarded to us. While delighted to have been selected the new monograph vendor for the library, we would have been even more pleased to have had accounts set up to greet the incoming book orders!

In this current period of library budgetary and staffing challenges, the importance of a vendor's thoughtful response to an institution's RFP request is more paramount than ever. Perhaps this overview of how vendors generally respond to RFPs and other types of tenders will help us mutually achieve our common objective of ensuring the best possible written proposal to address the specific needs of the library. 🍌

Books Are Us

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Column Editor's Note: This column is supposed to cover fiction about people like us — librarians, publishers, vendors, booksellers, etc. All contributions, comments, suggestions are welcome. — AR

I digress from "Books Are Us" to "Films Are Us." I recently saw the 1947 film, *Good News* with June Allyson and Peter Lawford, now in DVD (2000, Turner Entertainment and Warner Home Video). June Allyson is working her way through college as the Assistant Librarian

(not a student assistant?). She is the "brainiac" who tutors the campus football hero, Peter Lawford. Of course, she falls for him (but it takes the whole movie before he falls for her). In one scene, they sing together, dancing through the library, while she shelves books helter-skelter, not once looking at call numbers, or the books themselves, for that matter. In another scene, she is dressed to catch his eye, in a lace covered form-fitting, yet demure dress, with puffed sleeves, and a Peter Pan collar. One of

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her sorority sisters comments, "You don't look like a librarian," and she replies in a joyful tone, "Oh, I don't feel like one!"

There is a fairly traditional looking library and librarian in George Lucas' *Star Wars II, Attack of the Clones* (LucasFilm, LTD production, 20th Century Fox, 2002). The library itself, housing the Jedi Archives, is grand, reminiscent of the Great Hall (Prunksaal) of Austria's National Library in Vienna — marble busts (of famous Jedi Knights) lining two levels of stacks with a high arched central hall. There the similarity ends. The "books" on the shelves are eerily glowing phosphorescent blue, and in the hall itself are long tables with elaborate computer monitors, where Obi-Wan Kenobi sits looking for a planetary system he cannot find. The stereotypical librarian/archivist arrives, white hair in a bun pierced with two apparent knitting needles, formal long brocaded

gown (well, that's not so stereotypical!) asking Master Obi-Wan if he had called for assistance. A conversation ensues but the planet isn't found on the system. Obi-Wan suggests the archives aren't complete, whereupon the librarian replies in haughty tones: "If an item doesn't appear in our records, it doesn't exist!" She turns on her heels and leaves the Jedi Knight to go help a child standing near by. Such authority! Such audacity! But I take comfort in knowing that at least George Lucas believes that libraries and librarians exist in a galaxy far, far away!

Both movies reminded me that a few weeks ago I was alerted to a Web site devoted to the depiction of librarians in film (thanks to **Teri Lynn Herbert**, MUSC, and **Ramune Kubilius**, Northwestern, via CHAT on the MEDLIB-L Listserv).

LIBRARIANS IN THE MOVIES: An Annotated Filmography, is maintained by **Martin Raish**, David O. McKay Library, **Brigham Young University-Idaho** (<http://www.byui.edu/Ricks/>)

[employee/raishm/films/introduction.html](http://www.byui.edu/raishm/films/introduction.html)). The site acknowledges that "The librarian stereotype has long been the focus of articles, letters, workshops, conversations, and possibly even dreams and nightmares. But analyses have usually been based on limited personal experience with a small number of examples, whether books, television programs, or in this case, commercial motion pictures....This filmography is an ongoing attempt to expand our collective memory, to find a more comprehensive and defensible basis for our acceptance or rejection of the typical movie librarian." The site lists over 400 productions, sorted into four groups: films with persons clearly identified as librarians; films that feature a library; films that mention librarians or libraries, but don't show them; and a miscellaneous group. There is a title index, a list of actors who have portrayed librarians, and a bibliography of articles about librarians in the movies. Mr. Raish (raishm@byui.edu) invites feedback and contributions to the site. His work is indeed an impressive effort, and both of the films mentioned in this column are also included in his lengthy filmography. 🌿

Bet You Missed It

Press Clippings — In the News — Carefully Selected by Your Crack Staff of News Sleuths

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GIVE US YOUR DNA, YOUR DATA by **Pamela M. Rose** (University at Buffalo)

Scientists extoll population databases as sure-fire ways to better health care, while critics charge that they are "still mostly hype" and ethicists worry about confidentiality and profit. Since Iceland's controversial decision to entrust the nation's health records to one biotech company, **deCODE Genetics**, a half-dozen other countries and some U.S. health care providers are beginning to collect DNA and compile databases using the Iceland experience to inform their designs. While federal U.S. projects are still in the early planning stages, other U.S. health care providers such as the **Marshfield, Wisconsin Personalized Medicine Research Project** and the **Major Clinic**, are moving ahead on their own.

See — "Population Databases Boom, From Iceland to the U.S.," by **Jocelyn Kaiser** in *Science*, Nov. 8, 2002, p. 1158-1161.

END OF THE DAY CENSORSHIP? by **Pamela M. Rose** (University at Buffalo)

More than a dozen social scientists have written to Education Secretary **Rod Paige** because of a leaked internal memo directing over 13,000 pages not "consistent with the Administration's philosophy," unless needed for legal, historical, or non-political reasons, to be deleted from the Website (www.ed.gov/index.jsp) as part of an overhaul. **Patrice McDermott** of the **American Library Association** says this is "public information" that should not be removed at the whim of political appointees. Education spokesperson **Dan Langan** says "...at the end of the day the information will still be available in a Web-based format."

See — "Educational Overhaul?," in ScienceScope section in *Science*, Nov. 29, 2002, p. 1697.

MARTHA HITS THE SKIDS by **Bruce Strauch** (The Citadel)

It's well known that **Martha "Domestic Diva" Stewart** dumped Imclone shares and got the SEC sniffing around for insider trading. But did she publicly lie afterwards because her personal fortune in **Martha Stewart Living Omnimedia** was tanking? And, yes, if true, she can be sued by purchasers of the stock. Her reputation is the company, and to tell lies about it is fraudulent.

And by the way, the stock has slid 70%.

See — "Now, Stewart's Public Statements Are Probed," by **Jerry Markon** and **Charles Gasparino**, *Wall Street Journal*, Oct. 10, 2002, p.C1.

BLOOMSBURY WIZARDRY by **Bruce Strauch** (The Citadel)

Financial analysts wonder if **Bloomsbury Publishing** is a one-trick pony. **Harry Potter** is quite a trick, but the two year interval between Nos. 4 and 5 in the series has investors — dare we say — spooked.

Once an obscure literary publisher founded in 1986, only known for "The English Patient," it started to reap **J.K. Rowling** riches in 1994. **Bloomsbury** has been using its **Potter** bucks to buy up quiet-but-steady publishers of **Brit** reference works such as their "Who's Who" and **Bradford's** crossword dictionaries.

But is there a best-seller life after Hogwarts? **Bloomsbury** lost the **Potter** sales in the U.S. to **Scholastic Corp.**, but it has hooked up with **St. Martin's Press** for distribution, set up shop in the Flatiron Building, and intends to bid aggressively for U.S. authors, and turn fiction into films via **Creative Artists Agency**.

See — "U.K. Publisher Plans for Wane of Harry Potter," by **Charles Goldsmith**, *Wall Street Journal*, Nov. 12, 2002, p.B1.