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Talk of the Trade

Barry Fast

Deltabooks, barry0112@attbi.com

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"remainder" status while in print. Practices differ among publishers and across trade vs academic publishers, but a decision to "remainder" a title is basically an accounting decision based on the fact that there are more copies of a title in the warehouse (or on their way back to the warehouse...) than are likely to be sold — potentially ever.

Remainders houses differ as well, but their basic role is to purchase stock that has been substantially written down and redistribute it for sale at drastically lower prices through stores and online. For trade books, remainders houses increasingly play a role in processing returns as well — again, often at drastically lower prices than the original publisher's list price.

Out-of-Stock (OS)

Out-of-Stock means that the title is out-of-stock with the publisher; at the same time or separately, distributors may be out-of-stock as well or may have stock on the title. As **Bob Rooney**, from **Taylor and Francis**, noted, the first time this happens to a title, it's the publisher's best friend — it means that demand actually exceeded supply, thereby at least partially funding the vast number of titles for which supply exceeded demand (and those that were remaindered).

Publishers try to monitor demand and supply, but clearly imbalances will happen. Publishers also try to ensure that demand gets met — it's in their best business interest — but practices vary as to how well this gets managed. Typically, titles should be able to be brought back in print and available in a three to six week period. This gets quickly messy if there are overseas sourcing issues, printing issues, or other multi-party problems.

Out-of-Stock Indefinitely (OSI)

OSI is a status that essentially means that a book is not only out of stock, but that there are no plans to put it back in print. OSI is a legal designation as much as a print run decision — it's the publisher's method of holding on to the rights to publish a title instead of having those rights revert back to the author(s) by declaring a book out-of-print.

Out-of-Print

An official declaration that a title is so far out of the realm of probability of ever creating sufficient demand that a publisher was willing to give the rights back to the author.

Technologies

The advent of digital printing and print-on-demand will have impact over time on the number of titles that go OS (and for what period), OSI and OP. That impact has been much slower than most expected, but other than DVD players such is the course of many recent technology innovations.

The adoption and usage of these new technologies are mitigated by several factors; many of these will be moderated over time, but some will not:

- Not all electronic files are made alike. Just because there is an electronic copy

in some format of a title does not mean it is ready to print; even presence of a PDF file, while a help, doesn't prepare for all the different potential print methods (or even some of the basics). This will likely change over time, but will be slow and back catalog will present serious questions about level of investment warranted.

- **Quality isn't at offset levels.** Particularly for graphically intensive titles, digital print technologies range from adequate to murky. Again, this is in part dependent on the source materials, but also on print quality. This too is likely to improve over time.
- **Setup and support costs are not zero.** Beyond setting up files, the process of continuing rights management, author management, marketing and distribution are not zero. Thus, publishers have to decide whether it's worthwhile to continue to invest behind a title even if the print run economics support very short print runs. This issue will always exist.

At the same time, online resource like **Alibris** have increasingly brought together a wider range of materials (used in print, remainders, OS, OSI and OP titles from global sources) with a broader range of ways to purchase them (directly shipping from the seller, consolidated with purchase orders and invoices, through major distributors and wholesalers). The technologies here are a lot more straightforward, if challenging once you're dealing with over 30 million books.

Choices

One of the more interesting points of conversation and debate was where different libraries handle the "cutoff" on trying to still acquire a title based on its OP/OS/OSI status, and how they handle resolution after the cutoff.

A wide variety of practices exists regarding when or if to "give up" acquiring a new copy of a title from traditional sources. Some libraries continue to claim OS/OSI titles from distribu-

tors/publishers for up to 540 or even 720 days (1.5 to 2 years!). Some libraries immediately assume that OP/OSI books are essentially unavailable, and decide to cut their losses on those titles more or less right away, and cancel (as there are plenty of other new books to buy). Some other libraries set a decent mourning period of six months or so before trying to acquire any combination of OS, OSI or OP titles via the relatively new array of reliable secondhand sources.

Practices for acquiring used and/or remaindered products vary as well. Some libraries have staff search across multiple online vendors and manage the purchase, shipping and processing from individual sellers using Websites like **Bookfinder** or **AddAll**, or directly on **Alibris'** consumer Website, **ABE**, **Amazon.com**, **Half.com**, **eBay** and other sites. Others use some variety of **Alibris Services** to manage larger lists themselves or use **Alibris' Library Services** staff — some even extract files from their library system monthly and transmit in **EDIFACT**. Others use partnerships that **Blackwell's**, **YBP Library Services**, **Ingram Library Services**, **Baker & Taylor**, **Ambassador Books and Media**, **Franklin Books Company**, and **Eastern Book Company** among others have developed with **Alibris** to fulfill their needs. Typically, these tradeoffs are made on the basis of availability of staff and desire to minimize systems costs of acquisition (costs such as product, shipping, receiving, processing, invoicing, accounting, and vendor management) versus individual copy costs.

I would invite an activity-based cost approach on an independent basis to the assessment of these alternatives — it would be instructive for all involved.

Column Editor's Note: Comments and feedback (and corrections!) are always welcome. Feel free to reach Brian at (510) 594-4530 or via email at <briane@alibris.com>. —JM

Talk of the Trade

by **Barry Fast** (Deltabooks, 186 Crooss Street, City Island, NY 10464; Phone: 718-885-9563) <barry0112@aol.com>

LITERARY WORLD SHOCKED, SHOCKED, AS PUBLISHING CEO TELLS THE TRUTH

When **Bertlesmann's Peter Olson**, head of American book publishing (**Random House**, **Knopf**, **Ballantine** and more) fired **Ann Godorf**, chief of **Random House**, he did not say she left the company to "pursue other interests" or "spend more time with her family." Instead, he explained that she had a profit goal of \$6 million for 2002, but only made \$2 million. The furies descended on **Olson**, criticizing him for being too obsessive about profits and for taking only a few minutes with **Godorf** to tell her the bad news. Most strange was the *New York Times* column by **Verlyn Klinkenborg**. He writes a charming weekly profile of the comings and goings at his upstate New York farm, his daily chores, the weather, the flora and fauna, the delights and hardships of rural life. In a bizarre departure from his usual country life musings, **Klinkenborg** lamented the driving force of profitability in commercial publishing, the ruthless pursuit of money over art, the big bucks paid big time authors, and the consolidation in the publishing industry. He portrayed **Godorf** as a victim of a greedy system that is spinning out of control. However, the business pages of the *Times* provided actual facts and

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figures, explaining how difficult it is for publishers to prosper and grow these days without the fiscal discipline that all successful businesses must exercise. Meanwhile, within a few days of **Klinkenburg's** mournful wishful thinking, **Godorf** was offered her own imprint at **Penguin**, where, I'm sure, she will be required to achieve her profit goals.

NEW YORKER EDITOR, DESPITE BIG NOSE ACCUSATION, PURSUES OLD WHITE MEN

In an earlier column I discussed the appointment of **Deborah Treisman** to the influential position of fiction editor at the *New Yorker* magazine. Noting that the number of female authors had declined during the tenure of her predecessor, **Treisman** recently said that she is trying hard to achieve a 50/50 gender record, but eight out of ten submissions, whether from established authors or neophytes, are from men.

The appointment of **Treisman** has generated much envy among the local literati, and she says, amusingly, that she stopped reading email gossip about her when someone admitted she was "very jealous" of **Treisman** and accused her of having "a big nose." She went on to describe the publicity surrounding her appointment, which seemed to indicate that "I was only going to publish, like, young Vietnamese women." However, she wants to continue to reassure "older white men.... It's alright, you still have a place." And the envious big-nose-accuser added her comment, stating that "**Treisman** doesn't really (have a big nose), I'm clutching at straws here." Ah, the gentle world of true literary publishing for art's sake.

LOVE STORY

Among the five finalists for Britain's prestigious **Whitbread Prize** were a 69 year old husband and wife. **Claire Tomalin** was honored for her excellent biography (which I've read and thoroughly enjoyed) *Samuel Pepys: The Unequalled Life*. Her husband, **Michael Frayn**, (the playwright famed for *Noises Off* and *Copenhagen*—I fell asleep during this drama about Nazi nuclear bomb intrigue) was honored for his World War II espionage novel, *Spies*. This is the first time in the 33 year history of the **Whitbread** that a married couple has competed for the prize. As the award was announced at a black tie dinner in London, **Mr. Frayn** gallantly rose and kissed his wife as her name was added to the pantheon of past winners. **Ms. Tomalin** thanked the committee and said, "I spent most of the evening praying I would not win so I would not have to get up

here and say anything." Later, her husband told the press that his wife's triumph over him gave him an opportunity to "feel rather noble. It gives me a tremendous moral advantage...." Every time they argued he would have the opportunity to say, "But darling, I behaved so well over the **Whitbread**."

ANOTHER GUN NUT EXPOSED

Readers of this column will remember I have written twice about the since-resigned **Emory University** professor who apparently faked his research "proving" that America's early settlers rarely owned guns. Now a pro-gun "scholar," working for the **American Enterprise Institute** (sometimes referred to as a right wing think tank) has been caught in a triple whammy of fakery and suspicion. **John R Lott, Jr.** has been posing as **Mary Rosh**, writing fawning reviews of his book *More Guns, Less Crime* on various Internet book review sites. Dear sweet "**Mary**" has defended the research in the book, including the assertion that merely brandishing a weapon has prevented crimes in 97% of reported incidents where the potential victim owned a gun. **Amazon** posted a glowing review signed by **maryrosh**, who turned out to be **Lott's** 13 year old son. So not only has **Lott** faked reviews on his own, and with the help of his family, it turns out no one can discover where **Lott** got his 97% foiled robbery figure. **Lott** can't help locate the sources for this assertion either, claiming a bookshelf fell on his computer, destroying the research trail on his hard drive. Another guy named **Lott** getting himself in trouble.

IF YOU WORK IN THE BOOK BUSINESS AND ARE HAPPY, YOU'RE WRONG

Writing his weekly business column in *New York Magazine*, **Michael Wolff** recently asked "Why, for God's sake, would anyone want to work in the book business?" He went on to contend that publishing and other bookish pursuits are a "liberalish, feminist redoubt, but in some kind of retrograde inversion, the economic model requires that women mostly do the job because they have husbands who support them...." Continuing, "Virtually any other business, save for the more bureaucratic and regimented, has more day to day comforts, more joie de vivre and personality than book publishing." **Wolff** acknowledges that he has many friends in the business, who "against all evidence don't agree with me," but "this isn't where a kid with heart and imagination is going to end up. Rather, the book business is logically getting a dimmer bulb." One has to wonder how many friends in publishing he has left after this column. 🐱

Issues in Vendor/Library Relations — Decisions, Decisions

Column Editor: **Bob Nardini** (Senior Vice President & Head Bibliographer, YBP Library Services, 999 Maple Street, Contoocook, NH 03229; Phone: 800-258-3774 x. 3251; Fax: 603-746-5628) <rnardini@ybp.com>

The classic vendor gripe about libraries is that they take too long to make decisions. Why, vendors ask, must it take weeks, months, years to move on anything? Is there a library in the world, they wonder, without a host of committees and sub-committees, councils, circles, groups, task forces, teams, and who knows what else to study and usually stymie any proposal put to them, small or large? Not in my territory there isn't, every vendor rep has sometimes muttered. Why can't libraries make decisions like we do?

Of course, this griping is highly selective, always focused on un-made vendoring decisions where the rep's company has something to gain. And on made decisions going the wrong way. Clear opportunity, these instances, to cite flawed

process. When they gain or hold business, on the other hand, reps are always forgiving on process, no matter how long a library took to decide. Likewise, quick library decisions that went badly are immediately forgotten. It's the hangers, instead, that haunt the minds of reps.

Librarians might forgive reps their impatience here, because a long-hanging decision is a truly painful experience. For those old enough to remember a past era in social behavior, it's not unlike asking for a date ... and then waiting, and waiting some more, and then longer again, for the word yes or no and maybe a little reciprocal interest from someone who held every card. "I'm not sure I'll be here that day." "My cousin might be visiting." You know how it was. "The task force just scheduled its first

meeting,"
feels about
the same.

Naturally, it's none of a rep's business how long a library takes to make a decision. The task force has every right to hold whatever meetings it wants, whenever it wants, for as long as it wants. Anyone who needs to get an A on every test should find another line of work than selling to libraries. In this course they give out only two grades—A and F. Strictly pass-fail. Even a very good library sales rep, used to straight As on the other report cards of life, will see some Fs on this one, and even harder to bear, some incompletes.

Reps always believe that a library's decision

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