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Op Ed -- To Thine Own Self Be Dispassionate

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Op Ed — To Thine Own Self Be Dispassionate

by **Bob Schatz** (Director of Sales & Marketing, Franklin Book Co., Inc.) <everbob@yahoo.com>

Matt Nauman's thoughtful editorial in the September *ATG* raised many points worth considering. Exhibitions at major (and minor) conferences have real and substantial costs which can affect the finances of vendors. With that I agree. When it comes to **Matt's** suggestion that **ALA** and **BookExpo America** combine into a single annual conference, I remain dubious.

It isn't that the idea does not have merit. Those of us on the vendor side, and many librarians as well, have commented or complained for years that **ALA** seems to be the only professional organization that needs two major national conferences per year. And, as a result, we end up going to some rather daunting venues at odd times of year, because **ALA** can strike some good deals for using convention center services during non-peak seasons. The result, too frequently, is a poorly attended trade exhibit at great cost to our companies. **Matt** touched on those realities quite well in his piece, but some specifics may be worth examining.

Exhibits at shows like **ALA** are built around the rental of units of 10' x 10' space. Each of those units, just for the rental of the slab of concrete, runs around \$2,000-\$2,500. Adding carpeting and a few furnishings to said slab can easily add another \$1,000-\$2,000, more if you are also renting an exhibit backdrop. If you bring your own backdrop, there may be shipping and union labor set-up charges that can run another \$500-\$1,000. For larger booths used by bigger companies, you can multiply these charges to get an idea of their expense. You'll note, at this point nothing has been said about staffing the booth, which involves airfares and hotel rentals. Then there's entertaining, which many companies do over and above just exhibiting in the trade show part of the conference. In such a scenario, a small company can easily spend in excess of \$15,000 on a show, a large company \$75,000 or more.

Clearly (to me, anyway), **ALA** has no vested interest in walking away from the significant revenue stream that results from holding two national trade shows per year. No matter how rational the notion, there is no way vendors should expect that **ALA** will move to a single conference per year, with or without it being in conjunction with something like **BookExpo America**, no matter how good an argument is made by thoughtful guys like **Matt Nauman**.

To my mind, the real issue is whether we vendors can be dispassionate (or perhaps it is courageous) enough in the running of our businesses to actually skip some **ALAs**, instead of treating the twice-

yearly exhibition as sacrosanct and inviolable. Perhaps this is where smaller companies have an advantage; we have a longer history of picking and choosing shows at which we will have displays. For instance, **Franklin Book**, where I now reside professionally, attends and exhibits at **ALA** and a variety of law library, special library, and medical library shows, as well as regional and national conferences in Canada ... but not every single show nor every year. There are times when, in our collective wisdom, we feel that exhibiting at each conference may not make fiscal sense. Sometimes it has to do with the venue and the expected traffic. (We assume that an **ALA** in the middle of summer in Orlando will attract a very different attendance than, say, San Francisco.) Sometimes our decision is based on disappointing results from the last time we exhibited at a particular show. Sometimes the money saved allows us to attend a show we wouldn't otherwise be able to attend. The evaluation is complex and, admittedly, inexact (i.e., you never know when being at a conference will lead to a spectacular sale that would not otherwise have taken place.) But our viability as a business doesn't end just because we've made those difficult decisions, nor does our commitment to the library profession. Those important lessons are not lost on us, nor on the majority of our customers.

I perceive a certain amount of anxiety

among vendors when it comes to this particular discussion. Supported by very real events, we worry that customers will notice our absence at trade shows and draw hasty and damaging conclusions about our financial well-being, so we seek their permission to skip some shows in order to put those financial resources to other uses. Personally, I just don't think it is right for us to ask our customers to make those decisions for us; they have their own weighty issues to grapple with. Nor do I think we can expect **ALA** and other professional associations to let us off the hook. While our professional interests overlap, they are not identical, nor will they ever be.

The question **Matt** raised, "Are Two **ALAs** Too Much?" is a valid one. But the answer to the complex underlying questions that surround this issue lie not in our stars, dear Horatio, but in ourselves. If vendors are serious about resolving this issue for the long run, I believe we'll have to do so by changing our own behavior, and living with the associated risks. That's the nature of business. If we want to be relieved of the significant financial burden that comes with attending too many trade shows, let's do it by focusing on our own businesses and making the difficult decisions that will guarantee to our customers, our suppliers, our investors, and our employees that we'll be around for as long as it is economically feasible.

COUNTER:

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Objective 3: Define audit process and compile list of approved auditors

The **Code of Practice**, specifies the requirements to be met by data to be used for building the usage reports. A guiding principle is that only intended usage should be recorded, and all requests that are not intended by the user are removed. For example, all double clicks on an http link within ten seconds of each other will be counted as only one request. Where a PDF link is involved, this filter is set at 30 seconds, due to the longer time it takes to render a PDF. The proper application of these filters, along with the other specifications of the **Code of Practice**, will be subject to an audit from 2004. The audit process is now under development and will be implemented in 2004, once it has been fully tested.

Objective 4: Define and set up a permanent administrative structure

COUNTER was launched in March 2002 as a "project" supported by many companies and organizations in the library and vendor world. In 2002 and 2003 it was funded entirely by the generous sponsorship of these organizations. To provide **COUNTER** with the formal, legal structure it requires to go forward it has been incorporated in England as a not-for-profit company — **Counter Online Metrics**.

Under this form of company structure, **COUNTER** is owned by its members. Publishers, intermediaries, libraries, library consortia and trade organizations are all eligible for full, voting membership of **Counter Online Metrics**.

Annual membership rates for 2004 are: Publisher £500 (\$750); Intermediary £500 (\$750); Library £250 (\$375); Library Consortium £335 (\$500); Industry Organization £250 (\$375).

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