September 2005

Biz of Acq -- Collaborative Partnerships: Expanding the Vendor/Librarian Relationship

Ann Branton

The University of Southern Mississippi, ann.branton@usm.edu

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

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

Recommended Citation

Branton, Ann (2005) "Biz of Acq -- Collaborative Partnerships: Expanding the Vendor/Librarian Relationship," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 17: Iss. 4, Article 22.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.4525>

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 — Collaborative Partnerships: Expanding the Vendor/Librarian Relationship

by **Ann Branton** (Head of Bibliographic Services, The University of Southern Mississippi, 118 College Drive #5053, Hattiesburg, MS 39406; Phone: 601-266-4350; Fax: 601-266-6033) <Ann.Branton@usm.edu>

Column Editor: **Audrey Fenner** (Acquisitions Librarian, Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress, 101 Independence Avenue, SE, Washington, DC 20540-7480; Phone: 202-707-6213) <afenner@crs.loc.gov>

Column Editor's Note: *Librarians and vendors interact constantly, and the work of one directly affects the other. Ann Branton recognizes the important contributions vendors make to librarianship, and comments on the extended relationship that exists between librarians and vendors. — AF*

Introduction

From a technical services perspective, specifically in the acquisitions of library materials, one librarian's collaborative partnerships with library book vendors can be applied to all areas of doing business with vendors. These areas include vendor as service provider, vendor as mentor, vendor as collaborator in research and development, and finally vendor as professional supporter.

More often than not, acquisitions librarians are trained by their experiences during the ups and downs of the annual ordering cycle. We learn by our mistakes as much as our successes, rather than in a library science classroom. As a new supervisor over acquisitions during a very hectic book ordering cycle in 2001, I found that the book vendors were often my best teachers. Vendors provide an invaluable service to the library profession when they teach inexperienced librarians responsible for purchasing library materials how the wholesale publishing trade works, and how to master a sharp learning curve in the ordering process.

Vendor as Service Provider

Librarians are more dependent upon professional relationships with vendors than we may realize. The books on our shelves, the spine labels and barcodes we apply on them, and the many services we are able to provide our users are supported in some way by vendors who provide the products and services we in turn provide to our library users. However, for some of the same altruistic rationale that libraries keep their doors open to the communities they serve, vendors too make an ethical commitment in providing direct or indirect access to information resources and services.

Certainly, they have remained steadfast during a period of almost universal economic downturns in our library funding for the past five years. In spite of tight budgets, we enjoy excellent service from our book vendors, and good discounts in spite of a lower volume of orders each fiscal year; I have not seen lower standards in customer services.

Until my professional duties were expanded over three years ago, direct communication with vendor representatives was minimal, and I was not aware of them as collaborators or potential partners in my more academic view of librarianship. Before putting faces to names, before my business and professional interactions with a single sales representative, vendors were just the **Books-a-Millions**, the **Wal-Marts**, the **Office Depots** of the library world. Vendors were large, impersonal warehouses of products I required

to fulfill the mission of my library, to perform my responsibilities in support of that mission and to serve the information needs of my community of library users. Since meeting, talking and working more directly with library vendors, however, I have learned that they have been engaged in meeting the expectations of changing library environments, and in anticipating the information needs of libraries and library users, for more than a lifetime.

Many companies, both large and small, have dealt with libraries for decades: **Baker & Taylor**, **Ingram**, **Blackwell North American**, **Midwest**, **Ambassador Book Services**, and **EBSCO**, to name a few. Libraries and traditional vendor services have, in essence, grown up together and are familiar, indispensable resources in fulfilling our professional responsibilities. Others are relatively new to the modern library scene as advances in technology introduced new products and services to libraries: **OCLC**, **Sirsi**, **Auto-Graphics**, and **Ovid/SilverPlatter** are examples. These companies did not exist until the last quarter of the 20th century, yet we can hardly imagine our professional world without them.

Vendor as Mentor

In 2001, I was appointed head of the bibliographic services department at **The University of Southern Mississippi Libraries** due to my years of experience as head of cataloging, and related administrative duties, managing and supervising people, activities and projects. However, my knowledge of acquisitions was marginal. All I knew about acquisitions was through the ordering workflow in which cataloging staff selected the **MARC** record that was added to the **OPAC**, and, in turn, used by the acquisitions staff to generate an order record. The acquisitions personnel, who were more senior in experience with the ordering-receiving cycle, are to be commended for rising to the occasion and adapting to an environment of organizational change and a relatively inexperienced manager of acquisitions.

That same year, I had the opportunity to attend the **Charleston Conference** in Charleston, SC in the fall of 2001, to learn as much as I could in a few days about the issues and concerns related to collection development, the acquisition of books and serials by libraries, and the impact of the publishing trade on libraries.

Among the attendees was a representative from **Book House, Inc.**, a vendor that we used at **USM Libraries**. **Peter Bence** was just about the only vendor representative I had met at that time and he made me feel comfortable with the fact that I was new to acquisitions librarianship. During the conference, I asked **Peter** to be my mentor, for the short term, to educate me about the many aspects of ordering books. Our arrangement was very informal but it provided a friendly contact for me to ask questions about the business aspects of book ordering from the vendor's perspective. Little did I know that every ordering cycle has its unique challenges!

Peter took time to explain my options in ordering academic or trade publications, and how to evaluate a vendor profile and set up special ser-

continued on page 65

Cases of Note from page 62

their wry quip about old markets always being roiled by new technology.

And this raises two thoughts. (1) If the T.V. moguls had prevailed on Sony, the cost of a VCR would have become prohibitively expensive. No movie rentals. (2) Given that America's youth has been totally trained to steal music, the next **Grokster** that comes along will not have to foster infringement. Everyone will know exactly what to do without being told. Which will put them outside this ruling. So why are the Supremos wasting our time with this?

Party on, dude.

Questions & Answers from page 63

fees to the **American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP)** and **Broadcast Music Inc. (BMI)** to cover the public performance of music. These royalties go to the composer. In recent years Web casting royalties were added to radio broadcasts that are also transmitted over the Web; these royalties are paid to the record companies and performers through Sound Exchange. So, sound bytes played on the radio are covered under these licenses as is the playing of the entire song.

As to whether this applies to education, it depends on what is meant by this part of the question. If by "education" this means college and high school radio stations, the answer is yes. They also pay annual blanket royalties but the amount is considerably less than for commercial radio. If the question is focused on general educational uses of music, the answer is no. There may be exemptions in the Copyright Act that cover those specific uses, but there is no blanket license for education.

vices. He explained what the difference is between a fixed and a sliding discount and how to negotiate them; he also provided quarterly reports of the fill rates and the number of orders per category. In other words, I learned the right questions to ask all our vendors, questions that were often as important as the answers. After a year of using this information to track and compare vendors with whom we do business, I was able to determine which vendors were best at meeting the needs of our library.

Vendor as Research Collaborator

As an academic librarian, I am well positioned to perform research in an environment where it is generally emphasized and highly respected. Sharing research through publications or presentations is sometimes due to our individual commitment, or through combined efforts with another library colleague, and sometimes, we collaborate with non-librarians as well, such as our faculty. However, I found an opportunity to collaborate in my most recent research efforts with a vendor representative/librarian, **Stuart Grinnell**, of **Ambassador Books and Media Services (ABS)**.

Due to my review of vendor performance to maximize purchasing power in spite of diminishing budgets, I noted a problem with fill rates of paperback editions. Why did the cost of binding per book by the vendor cost more than our local bindery charged for serials binding; and why were the books sometimes received well over 45 days later? I needed a partner in this research query and I needed a vendor to answer my questions.

In the spring of 2004, with **Stuart Grinnell** of **ABS**, in collaboration with our local bindery, **National Library Bindery Company of Georgia**, we beta-tested a new ordering process whereby the paperback edition was preferred and sent directly to our locally selected bindery, which would drop ship the rebound paperbacks directly to our library. The expected results of the new workflow were to decrease the turnaround time between order placed and received, and to reduce the binding costs, too. Due to the support and flexibility of the vendor and bindery, the test in streamlining workflow saved the library over 50% in binding costs alone.

Vendor as Professional Supporter

Vendors support our conferences by attending as exhibitors, oftentimes as guest speakers for our programs, and they are dues-paying members of our professional organizations. Vendors support our organizational efforts by providing opportunities for professional growth and development through programming grants, scholarships, and gifts. Many are active members in our professional organizations and participate in meetings such as the **Charleston Conference**.

Many national, regional and state professional publications enjoy the support of library vendors and suppliers. As past editor of *Mississippi Libraries*, I became keenly aware of the support that some vendors have provided faithfully by advertising over the years in our **Mississippi Library Association** publication, many of whom attend our annual state conference as well: **National Library Bindery Company of Georgia**, **The Library Interiors Group**, **Ambassador Books Services**, **Southern Library Bindery Company**, **SIRS**, **Brodart Library Supplies and Furnishings**, and **University Press of Mississippi**.

Conclusion

Due to my own experiences with vendors, particularly since 2001, I have come to respect and appreciate the many contributions our vendors make. These contributions include the quality of products and services they provide, their willingness to train and inform librarians to do business with them more effectively, sharing in the discovery of new ideas, lending their support to the library profession, and celebrating our professional partnerships at conferences and meetings. Librarians and vendors have been partners and collaborators for a very long time. We are both interested, often intensely, in the needs and concerns of libraries, collaborating always in our efforts to serve our users in the best way possible.

Reference

Wilkinson, Frances C., and Linda K. Lewis. 2003. *The Complete Guide to Acquisitions Management*. Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited.

And They Were There

Reports of Meetings — 24th Charleston Conference Issues in Book and Serial Acquisition, Charleston, SC, November 3-6, 2004

Column Editor: **Sever Bordeianu** (University of Mexico)
<sbordeia@unm.edu>

See additional reports from the **Charleston Conference in Against the Grain** December 2004-January 2005 issue, v.16#6, p.66-80, the February 2005 issue, v.17#1, p.82-84, and April 2005 issue, v.17#2, p.74-80. The entire **Charleston Conference Proceedings** has just been published by **Greenwood/Libraries Unlimited**.

Session — **Measuring Success** — Thursday, November 4, 2004 —
Presenter: **David Brown** (Head of Publisher Relations, British Library)

Report by **Caryl Ward** (Head of Acquisitions, Binghamton University Libraries) <cward@binghamton.edu>

What values and successes can the **British Library** celebrate? Is the value of that **Library** and its services being recognized, and how can other libraries measure their own value? The **British Library** is one of the five largest research libraries in the world. **David Brown**, Head of its Publisher Relations, graciously stepped in for **Natalie Ceeney** to speak of the need to establish some measurement of the **Library's** success in order to enhance goodwill internally and to establish reasons for the British government to continue funding the **Library**. **David** recapped a project that used an outside firm to query individuals and organizations using the **British Library**, then assess the value of some services, including document supply, bibliographic services, reading rooms, educational services, and public programs.

David reports that the results were positive, indicating that the **British Library** generates a value of 4.4 times the level of its public funding. "What now?" **David** asked following the analysis. He suggests that librarians must continue to strive for success in a changing world by developing strategies to increase libraries' value. **David's** recommendations to other libraries wishing to embark on a success-measuring analysis include taking care to determine what success actually is for an individual library, and monitoring its economic and social value. He also says to identify the target market, to articulate a clear strategy for the process, and to continue to measure and review all performance regularly. This was a fascinating presentation, relevant to all publicly funded institutions. For details, see **Natalie's** power point presentation on the **Charleston Conference's** Web page: <http://www.katina.info/conference/2004%20Presentations.htm>.

Session — **New and Improved Serials Review Process in the Age of the Electronic Journal** — Thursday, November 4, 2004 — Presenters: **Jill Emery** (Director, Electronic Resources Program, University of Houston Libraries), **Mary Beth Thomson** (Head, Acquisitions & Collection Development, University of Houston Libraries)

Report by **Caryl Ward** (Head of Acquisitions, Binghamton University Libraries) <cward@binghamton.edu>

Many academic librarians and teaching faculty are not familiar with the options and costs associated with e-journals, not surprising since each subscription period brings changes. **Jill Emery** and **Mary Beth Thomson** shared the methodology and results of a recent project, part of which investigated the selection and evaluation of e-journals at the **University of Houston Libraries**. For libraries facing another serials review that includes online journals, their report and strategies are enormously helpful. At the **University of Houston**, the annual serials review involves the faculty, who suggest new titles, cancellations, and format. The entire process had become more complex as electronic journals were added. The project was developed to document if e-access was available for current print journal subscriptions, to identify open access titles, to

continued on page 66