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Op Ed -- Adding Value to Bulk Licensing

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Adding Value to Bulk Licensing

by **Rollo Turner** (Secretary General, Association of Subscription Agents and Intermediaries, 10 Lime Avenue, High Wycombe, Bucks HP11 1DP, UK; Phone: 01494 534778) <rollo.turner@dsl.pipex.com>
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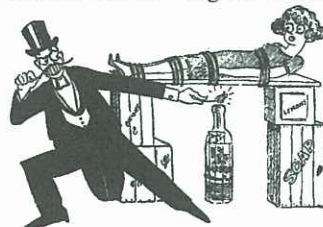
Over the past few years libraries and consortia have often dealt directly with publishers to negotiate bulk licences. This has had some real advantages in that both parties can talk directly and perhaps obtain a better understanding of each other and what needs to be included and excluded from the licence. In addition libraries have sometimes managed to negotiate more favourable terms and conditions for themselves than the first offer from the publishers.

But such direct dealings have also brought disadvantages. The process is lengthy and time consuming and has left little time for dealing with equally important but smaller specialist publishers. Scaling the licensing operation within the institution to handle the increasing numbers of such licences has not always proved easy to arrange. And although some savings may have been made on the content cost as a result of the negotiating process, there has sometimes been greater expenditure on the administration of the electronic journals purchased through such bulk licences, resulting in an overall increase in the cost to the library.

Both libraries and publishers are beginning to realise that the current system could be costing them far more than necessary, especially if the number of such arrangements continues to grow. More and more, libraries particularly are seeing an overall increase in their administration costs connected with their e-journal licences when compared with similar arrangements negotiated with subscription agents and intermediaries. As a result, there is a movement towards reducing the costs of administration by using such intermediation, and insisting that the licence is managed and purchased through an agent.

For publishers too this can make sense. Agents provide a number of administration services which help both parties reduce the cost of their administration. Quantifying the cost savings is always difficult for libraries to gauge, because these costs are notoriously difficult to measure, but real for all that. It is made even harder because when they receive quotes from agents for specific content, this normally includes a number of administrative services which are taken as part of the service from the agent. But these services are often lacking when ordered directly with the publisher. As a result, comparing Agent and Publisher is not really comparing apples with apples and it is only after the event that the library finds that the carefully negotiated agreement with the publishers has led to an increase in the amount

of scarce resources used to administer the arrangements — even if the cost of the content is slightly less than that quoted from an agent. This is fine if the library has the resources free, but the likelihood is that such resources are made up of highly skilled people who



could be much better redeployed onto

more productive roles than administering the licences and managing access problems, for example. The agents' service often turns out to be more cost effective when measured over the full range of activities affecting e-journals. A comparison of publishers and intermediaries services are shown in the table below.

Service	Description	Publisher	Agent (not all agents can offer all services)
Negotiation	Price Negotiation	YES	Possible
	Terms negotiation	YES	Possible
Invoicing	Customised invoicing e.g., faculty and dept coding etc. and electronic invoicing	NO	YES
Database populating	Title by Title Metadata for ILS etc.	Sometimes	YES
URL Maintenance	Titles can be added to system across publishers	NO	YES
Gateways and Link Resolvers	Title and article metadata can be added to common gateway and/or link resolver systems across publishers	NO	YES
Licence Knowledgebase	Licence terms can be added to common knowledgebase across publishers	NO	YES
Help Desk	Titles can be added to common help desk for all enquiries	NO	YES
Tracking	Tracking of individual titles in package	NO	YES
Alerting	Alerting of new issues, changes etc as part of common systems	Not as part of common system	YES

As can be seen in the table, most of the services provided by agents and intermediaries relate to the integration of specific publishers' content into a single complete system, whether the libraries' own system or one provided by an intermediary does not matter. All these activities still have to be carefully executed, managed and controlled. Invoicing at the title/de-

partmental level to meet the libraries internal budget requirements is a particular challenge for most publishers, but routine for most agents, as is electronic invoicing. Other services such as priming knowledgebases and tracking changes can and do cause everyone problems, but a single system clearly has a great number

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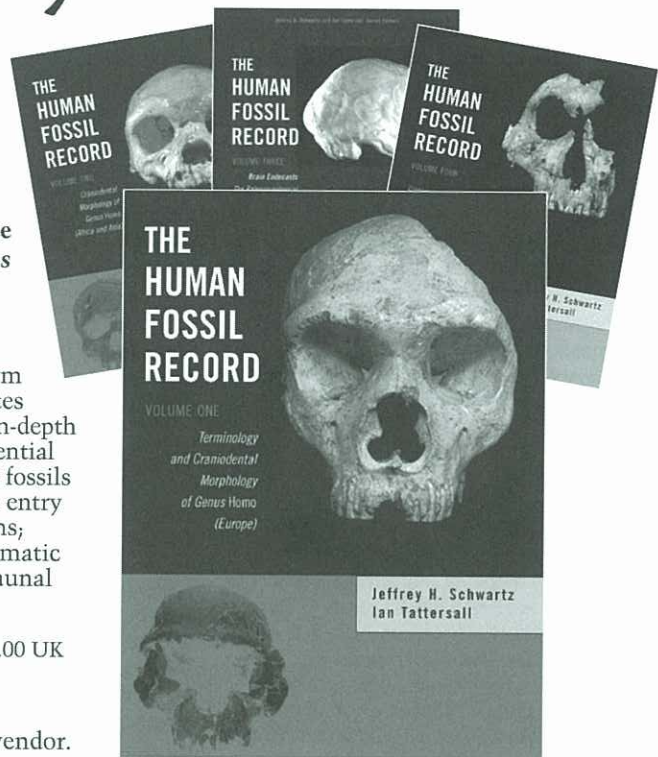
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Op Ed


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of benefits compared to many different systems!

Over the last few years many publishers, often but not always the larger publishers, have exhibited a strong preference for selling their bulk licences directly to the library. In doing this they have managed to pass along the cost of the management directly to the library, since they would not be paying any agents' discount. But this is in general a false economy. Libraries rarely have the number of trained people to fully resource all the potential administrative challenges that can and very often do occur with bulk licences. Everything from title and publisher tracking to the demands of making payments in a foreign (to the library) currency by a date outside the normal budget period can cause problems. All this means many harried calls to publishers' help desks, increasing the publisher's expenditure on customer support, and each new deal adds additional costs since this is a people intensive requirement that is not easy to automate. Were an agent to be involved, then one query to the help desk often solves many customers' problems (and vice versa), reducing the pressure for customer service on the publisher. So agents' services can also dramatically help the publishers by reducing costs, especially of customer service and the need to provide services such as invoicing, with which their systems are not generally designed to cope.

It is strange then that there are still some,

although decreasingly few publishers who demand that their customers do NOT use an agent. Such a policy condemns both library and publisher to spending more on administration than need be the case. Demanding the customer conform to the supplier's system is in most industries bad business practice, since if it does not suit the customer, will the supplier continue to get the business? In such cases both customer and agent need to make their demands as customers known to the suppliers and work with the publishers concerned towards a system that

will benefit all parties. In the end, anything that helps reduce the libraries' administrative costs is helping to increase the amount of money available for spending on content, and is also likely to reduce the pressure on publishers' customer support, thereby lowering the publishers' costs. Working together towards agreed goals will in the end transform the whole irksome business of the administration of electronic journals and is only really likely to be realised by using intermediation combined with effective technical solutions to automation. 

CCC & IIR Interview

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right Clearance Center as a resource in WebBridge by contacting Copyright Clearance Center at 978-646-2592 or Innovative Interfaces at 510-655-6200.

ATG: What does this service cost? Tell us about the billing procedure.

CCC: There is no additional cost for Innovative customers with the WebBridge, Circulation, and electronic course reserves elements. It is a feature that Innovative Interfaces has provided to enhance user productivity and satisfaction. Existing links for staff productivity, like the one to Copyright Clearance Center, already exist at no extra cost, such as Millennium's linkage to Ulrich's Periodical database (www.ulrichsweb.com) for technical services staff. Royalty fees for the materials

posted in Millennium electronic course reserves will be billed to the Copyright Clearance Center account used to obtain the permissions. Copyright Clearance Center does not charge any additional fees for this integration and standard pricing and billing procedures are used.

The Process

ATG: Describe the mechanics of the process for those who need copyright clearance for e-reserves. What information must be provided to request permissions?

CCC: When a user needs to get copyright permission from Millennium's electronic course reserves, they simply click on the copyright permission button and all of the necessary bibliographic information needed to request permission, such as the title of the article, date, etc., is automatically populated in the corresponding fields on Copyright Clearance

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