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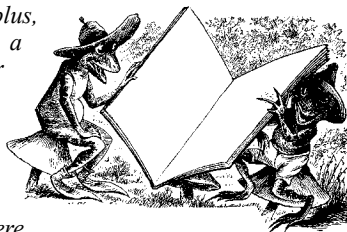
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Long Live the Approval Plan, Even in a Time of Financial Constraints..

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and **Suzanne Kapusta** (Senior Collection Development Manager, YBP Library Services) <SKapusta@ybp.com>

Author's Note (Suzanne Kapusta): As a vendor representative for YBP, I consider what **Elizabeth Lorenzen** and I worked together to accomplish as a best practice for a number of reasons. The fact that **Elizabeth** contacted me with the information that their budget was declining and asked for help and support is the first "best practice." So many times decisions may be made internally to halt the approval plan or to hack away at it without consulting the vendor representative to see if they have any suggestions for different options that may be available. One certainly doesn't have to take the vendor representative's advice, but, particularly in this case, the vendor representative was able to present a few options that made their budget reduction less of an issue. They were then able to choose from the options, evaluate them, and decide which options were best suited for their library. Although personally I might prefer one option over the other, I try not to let that affect what I propose to the library, since ultimately it is up to them. In the end, whether they are happy with the results is what remains most important. The ability to continue the approval plan in a way that continued to bring them quality books without any additional work on their part contributed to the seamless integration of the budgetary constraints into their normal workflow. Vendors and librarians working on a solution together is a good practice in collection development. The ability to work with a colleague, even when that colleague works for a vendor, is a good thing! As a vendor representative, my advice for librarians is to make sure you work with a vendor whose representative you can trust. When you have an issue arise, whether it is a budget cut, a budget surplus, a potential change in ILS, a workflow issue, or whatever – experience indicates that a "best practice" is to discuss it with your vendor representative. We travel from library to library and see what works well out there, and even what doesn't (although we don't usually tell that!). We know what our system is capable of doing and can use this knowledge to help you in a number of different situations that you face.



Author's Note (Elizabeth Lorenzen): Now more than ever, professional librarians have many time constraints placed on them. Here at ISU, we have fewer subject liaisons now than we ever have, and there is very little time to practice what I would call in-depth, traditional collection development. Utilizing

the expertise of YBP's subject bibliographers ensures that we will get a certain number of core titles for the collection that are at the research levels that we need for the university's various curricula. Liaisons still have funds that they can use to round out the collection nicely, but the obvious, easy to identify titles that are needed have already been purchased for them. Also, by utilizing the approval plan and thereby consolidating the bulk of our purchases with one vendor, we realize deeper discounts for books and the use of the vendor's database makes collection development activities quicker and easier to perform.

Although approval plans were developed during a time when libraries had much more generous budgets and were purchasing on much broader levels than they are today, there is still a place for them in the collection development process and they can help with defining specific needs within an institution for its core collections (Schmidt, p.155). It might be easy to think that in order to truly save money, the only solution might be to pull back on approval plans, and concentrate more on firm ordering monographic titles to gain budgetary control. However, with careful management, approval plans can be fine tuned to allow the automatic receipt of core titles in subject areas where coverage is critically needed. Therefore, the selector can still realize the time saving benefits of an approval plan and have time for other more complex collection management activities.

At **Indiana State University**, approval plans have been utilized for a number of years, including a trade plan with **YBP Library Services** that was written in 2003. However, budgetary constraints in 2005 dictated that the overall approval plan budget be cut by thirty percent, and the decision was made to consolidate three approval plans into one. At the same time, specific program needs still had to be addressed efficiently and with cost effectiveness.

During this period, **Elizabeth Lorenzen** and **Suzanne Kapusta** began working together to revamp the library's YBP trade approval profile, and to merge the other plans into one cohesive plan. The university press approval plan, which previously had been handled by another vendor, had been switched to slips only, with liaisons choosing titles and pur-

chasing them with firm order funds. This coverage was added to the YBP trade plan with all university presses still set to allow only notification slips, not books. In addition, the children's awards approval plan was also set to only allow notification slips. This alone was not sufficient for the approval plan to meet budget. It was apparent that something needed to be done quickly; ways to cut back had to be found. We wanted to find a way to fine tune the plan so that the best books would continue to be shipped automatically, thereby saving the liaison's time as well as the time of the acquisitions staff that would have to place orders for titles that didn't ship on approval. However: we still needed to look for more savings. The amount that was saved so far still did not amount to 30%. Additionally, to make the process even more difficult, there were areas where the plan actually needed more in-depth coverage, so it was clear that some specific

"...with careful management, approval plans can be fine tuned to allow the automatic receipt of core titles in subject areas where coverage is critically needed."

areas of the profile also needed to be rewritten in order to more fully reflect the changes that had recently transpired with **Indiana State's** programs and services.

In the fall of 2005, the dean inquired about the possibility of moving to a paper preferred plan as yet another way to cut costs. An analysis was performed, and it was found that with the given subject area concentrations, this profile would not realize a significant benefit from a paper preferred plan, so it was back to the drawing board to find some way to continue to allow some approval books each week without fearing that the plan would have to shut down midway through the year.

One solution that was finally explored, though, was the utilization of a YBP profiling category called **YBP Select**. The category constitutes a quality judgment that is made when the book is profiled by YBP's subject bibliographers. Titles are coded with various select categories, including Basic Essential, Research Essential, Basic Recommended, Research Recommended, Specialized, or Supplementary. The remaining titles fall into a "Not Select" category. To ensure the receipt of some core materials on approval, various Select categories were set to ship as books within certain subject areas. Rather than an "all or nothing" approach, library liaisons at **Indiana State** reviewed various titles within the **Select**

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categories in their subject areas in order to gauge the types of books included within each category. Then, they decided which **Select** categories they would specify within the LC ranges for which they were responsible.

Some **Select** categories were set for notification slip coverage, or in some cases, were totally excluded from any coverage at all. For example, the supplementary titles were set to be reviewed as slips across the board; this decision was made based on the budgets remaining within each of the class ranges. If there would not be much money to spend, there would be little point in viewing notification slips for “Non Select” titles that one couldn’t buy. A retrospective could always be done in the future to retrieve titles not purchased at this time, by viewing **GOBI**-generated reports organized by the individual liaisons’ respective fund code(s).

The results were actually quite excellent, with approval plan coverage that was reduced so much that there was room to increase the flow again slightly. So, the next step was to analyze university press firm orders for the past fiscal year, and see what top presses were favored by the liaisons as a whole. **Suzanne** and **Elizabeth** were able to identify about thirty university presses that had high firm order activity. In the fall of 2006, these presses were switched to allow for book coverage from within the established profiles. This allowed the other filters in the profile to work with regard to these presses, such as format, price, geographic region, and other non-subject parameters.

One more cost saving measure that was identified during this process was to fold as many of **Indiana State**’s blanket orders into the approval plan as possible. This was achieved either by adding the publisher to the press list when possible, or writing special instructions into the plan itself. This allowed **ISU** to take advantage of the special discount and shipping charges that were applied to the approval plan and therefore save a few more dollars. In a

Rumors from page 16

Kathleen Parker (mentioned on p.16) is a “column person.” Read **Bob Nardini**’s column, this issue, p.70. It’s about the contrast between **blogs** and **columns**. And, while we’re in the blog space, did you read **John Riley**’s **Bookseller’s Who Blog** (*ATG*, April 2007, p.80)?

The **University of Washington Libraries** is the first to pilot **WorldCat Local**, a new service that builds on **WorldCat.org** to allow Web access to one of the world’s richest database for discovery of materials held in libraries. The goal of the pilot is to provide users with a single search and request service that covers the **University of Washington Libraries, Summit**
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against the grain people profile

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BORN & LIVED: Born: Rochester, NY.

LIVED: Too many places to mention! NJ, NY, NH, MA. Tampa, FL (for six years now — a record!)

EARLY LIFE: Catholic school, youngest of family of five.

FAMILY: Two grown children — **Emily**’s in Manhattan; **Ted**’s on his way to L.A. Dog — Bailey, a golden retriever.

EDUCATION: BA — **St. John Fisher College**. MLS — **SUNY Geneseo**.

FIRST JOB: Cashier at **Altier**’s shoe store in Irondequoit, NY.

PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES: Ten years at **YBP**, prior to that have worked as a school media specialist, at **Rochester Public Library**, and at **New Hampshire College** (now **Southern NH University**).

IN MY SPARE TIME I LIKE TO: Garden, read, or visit my children.

GOAL I HOPE TO ACHIEVE FIVE YEARS FROM NOW: Enlightenment or win the lottery. Not sure which is more likely.

HOW/WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS: “The more things change, the more they stay the same.” Same players, same issues, different formats. 🐾

very few cases, some publishers were set to slip only so that titles could be firm ordered by the liaison, but in most cases they were left set to book or an instruction called SEND ALL.

Voila! The budget is now on track, with just the right number of approval books being shipped so that the budget is met but not exceeded. In fiscal year 2006-07, the approval plan return rate was 3%. For the fiscal year 2007-08 year so far, **ISU** has received 61% coverage of approval materials (as books or slips), and has acquired 8% of **YBP**’s approval universe. They’ve received about 38% of their purchases automatically on their book approval plan, and the remainders are firm ordered from notification slips or from other sources, such as faculty requests. Liaisons continue to make choices of materials to round out their coverage, but with the understanding that most of the basic materials in their subject areas are arriving automatically on approval. This gives them more time to view notification slips, reviews, as well as to examine other publishers, societies, associations, or esoteric resources that may not be covered by an approval plan.

By working together as library and vendor partners, we were able to come up with a good, revised approval plan that continues to supply a core of select materials. This saves time for the liaisons, and reduces the extra work for acquisitions that would have come had the approval plan been stopped. In this particular case, this seemed to be the best solution. At another library, a different solution might have been found, such as cutting back on the number of publishers considered on the approval plan, or possibly tightening up allowable formats. Even

slashing book coverage in a particular subject may be warranted at times. Some schools opt to move their whole plan to a “virtual mode” where what would have shipped as a book is reduced to a notification slip, but with the notation “BOOK” in a fund code field. They then give these “BOOK” virtual slips a different priority. But that really is no longer a true approval plan, and the time savings for selectors and acquisitions departments, and the timeliness of approval books shipping every week, are lost. In this particular case, both **Elizabeth** and **Suzanne** were happy that the select option was still available, and the library liaisons overall have found it to be a good compromise. Of course, had we been trying to increase the approval plan, a whole different approach would have been needed. We remain optimistic that this may be the next challenge we face in a few years!

In conclusion, a preliminary study of **Indiana State**’s collections has found that circulation statistics for approval plan books and firm order books are quite comparable, and in some cases, circulation statistics for approval plan books are higher. Further studies will identify whether the approval plan’s circulation performance reveals a further need to modify the plan. But, an approval plan is a work in progress, and is constantly changing. 🐾

Endnotes

Schmidt, Karen A., ed. *Understanding the Business of Library Acquisitions*. Chicago: American Library Association, 1999.