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Not Such a Big Deal

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As you may know, I am a magazine junkie.

So when a young college student who was selling magazine subscriptions came to the door, I welcomed him warmly. He was working to offset college expenses, he explained, and he had “wonderful packages” to offer.

The selection was mind-boggling: it included newswEEKlies; magazines devoted to parenting, sports, decorating, celebrity life, cars, boats and planes, health, wellness and nutrition, all were well represented, and there were the special interest titles that would appeal to wine aficionados or those who like to knit. Something for everyone and then some. I gave him my full attention.

The more magazines I would purchase, the better the deal would be. The bundling and packaging offers were seductive, and magazines I would not have subscribed to otherwise suddenly became very compelling. The per-title price was dropping each time I added another. That is where the deal got really good. I justified these magazine madness moments by reassuring myself that all these publications were necessary to feed my ever-curious brain. Well, maybe not. On the other hand, I might have overnight guests who would welcome such a stash on a bedside table. Perhaps my husband would welcome more magazines in his medical office reception room.

I wrote a check without buyer’s remorse.

Later that evening, I realized that my “More is Marvelous” mode had not taken into account that several new magazines that I really wanted to have were not included in my big deal, and my budget for my subscriptions was depleted.

But then, I am a sucker for such packages.

It is also tempting to buy book packages, but unloading books can become a package situation as well.

A local librarian recently bemoaned the fact that when local residents offered to donate books for their fundraising book sale drives, the neighbors do not offer them title by title. The library has to accept the whole package ...all of the books its owner wants to part with. After the book sale is over, the library finds itself with hundreds of books they don’t want in their collection and now they have to figure out how to dispose of them.

Aha, some of you are probably thinking... a swell rationale for the obsolescence of print. Not at all. The fact is that “Many Too Many” is “Much Too Much.” Selectivity is an option that may be becoming obsolete.

Package deals are very seductive — for journals, for books, for...

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Convictions — Lessons for Library Benefactors

by Matthew J. Bruccoli  (President, Bruccoli Clark Layman;  Phone: 803-771-4642; Fax: 803-799-6953)

Samuel Pepys provided a model and a warning for bookmen who desire to safeguard their personal libraries by placing them in institutional libraries. His books have their own library at Magadelen College, Cambridge University. But Trinity College never exercised its right to count them: his instructions were ignored. There are at least two morals in this history: You can’t run the world from the grave; although Pepys came close, and don’t trust librarians. Give your books to the library where you want them to be or where they ought to be. Then forget about them.

Charles Feinberg provides an exemplum. He came to America a poor immigrant and made his fortune — much of which he spent on Walt Whitman, who represented to him the spirit of America. Charlie wanted to express his gratitude to America by placing his monumental Whitman Collection in the Library of Congress through his generous gift-purchase arrangement. At the end of his life he was painfully unhappy about the mistreatment of his Whitman by the library’s collection. Among other betrayals, the Library of Congress failed to unpack and catalogue the entire collection.

Many other donors of great collections to libraries have had similarly bitter experiences. Libraries accept research collections they don’t know what to do with and may not really want, in order to avoid blame for rejecting them. Then they neglect the collections. A library benefactor who has donated a dozen major collections to a dozen libraries complains that none of these institutions has given proper attention to his books or to him. Admittedly he is a pain-in-the-ass; but he is a generous pain-in-the-ass who expected that his benefactions would be valued. He also expected gratitude — not systematic ingratitude. He is a slow learner: once or twice are bad luck; but twelve out of twelve are enemy action. The experienced benefactor understands that although it may be possible to make conditions or stipulations about cataloging, shelving, and maintenance, they will not be honored. There is no such thing as a grateful institution.

Until recently I deprecated collectors who justified auctioning off their collections by claiming that they could not have acquired their books if other collectors hadn’t sold out. I have written articles insisting on the duty of librarians to alert the importance of such publications to the fields they serve. Librarians should be alerted to the importance of such publications and any piggy bank should be so broken that there isn’t room in the budget for the inclusion of these periodicals.

This summer, I’m still hoping to put on a lavender “tee,” spread a beach blanket, and read the magazines I really want, most of which don’t come my way in “My Big Deal.”

Next time I’m offered “Big Deal or No Deal,” I hope I’m wise enough to say, “No, Thanks.” And I hope you’ll think about doing the same.

— From the Last Will and Testament of Samuel Pepys, 13 May 1703

8thly That my said Library be continued in its present form and noe other books mixt therewith Save what my Nephew may add to them of his own Collecting in distinct presses. That the said rooms and books so placed and adjusted be called by the name of Bibliotheca Pepysiana.... 12thly And that for a yet further Security herein the said two Colleges of Trinity and Magdalen have a Reciprocal Check upon one another. And that the College which shall be in present possession of the said Library be subject to an Annual visitation from the other and to the forfeiture thereof to the like possession and Use of the other upon Conviction of any breach of their said Covenants.