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The National Media Market, a Buyer's Perspective

by **Winifred Fordham Metz** (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill) <freddie@email.unc.edu>

Media, Media Everywhere...

The use of film in the classroom is ubiquitous. Visual theses are on the rise. Interest in documentary studies is growing at an exponential rate. Resultantly, the importance of a rich and varied media resources collection is essential to academic institutions, public libraries, and K-12 media centers. It takes a lot of work, development, and research to maintain and grow a collection like this. Resources that aid this process are invaluable, and the **National Media Market (NMM)** is one such vital resource (www.nmm.net).

A Brief History...

About four years ago, **Philip Hallman** from **Ambassador Books & Media** interviewed **Ursula Schwarz**, the Executive Director of the **National Media Market (NMM)** in his *Against the Grain* column, "Media Minder."¹ The interview offered a great history of the **NMM**, an overview, and insight into what made this nonprofit organization unique. Readers learned that the **NMM** was conceived back in 1978 by a group of educational media professionals in Knoxville Tennessee who wanted to bring buyers, users, and sellers together in a professional marketplace, permitting them to deal with film purchasing directly. Notably, the **NMM** was the first forum to focus its efforts entirely on film, supplanting trade-shows, exhibits, and traditional library conferences existing at that time.

Schwarz went on to explain that one of the things contributing to the initial and continued success of the market is its intentional partnership and collaboration between vendors and buyers. Since its inception, the **NMM** has elected a Board of Directors comprised of a potent mix of librarians, educational media and film distributors, and filmmakers. This deliberate composition ensures a balanced and effective voice in the planning for the market each year, reflecting the needs and interests of all key stakeholders.

Executive Director **Schwarz** also commented that while much of the focus of the **NMM** remains on previewing or screening the films, attendees are also able to review related technology support systems, management software, streaming services, captioning and description services, etc. Additionally, the **NMM** provides a venue for professional development and networking, with a variety of discussion sessions and presentations offered annually.

One Perspective...

This year I am offering a buyer's perspective of the **NMM**. As the Media Librarian and Head of the Media Resources Center at the **University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill**, I am the principal selector for the media collection including documentary, educational film, and cinemas spanning the curriculum. When I began working at **UNC**, two colleagues at peer institutions recommended the **NMM** to

me as *the* venue for purchasing media, keeping abreast of emerging media technologies and copyright issues while networking with fellow film and media librarians. They were also careful to impart that it was an instrumental part of their jobs. No doubt here. Participation at the **NMM** combined with active festival involvement and attendance, academic literature review and research, film trades review, and scholarly communications work remains key to my Media Librarian work at **UNC**.

How I Prepare...

I prepare for the **NMM** by discussing with faculty their current media research or instruction needs and interests. I review course listings at **UNC** as well as associated institutions to identify emerging topics. This is extremely important in that the University Library at **UNC** is part of a thriving consortium known as **TRLN** or the Triangle Research Library Network, with **NC State University**, **North Carolina Central University**, and **Duke University**. I also check in with students and staff to get their feedback, and I look for gaps or areas needing enhancement in our collection. Everything goes into a spreadsheet by subject, checked with an ongoing list I maintain of documentary and educational films produced within the last couple of years (typically screened at Film festivals within the last two years).

With this starting point, I review the catalogs and new release listings of the vendors participating in the **NMM**, looking for these specific titles as well as films that embody the identified subjects of interest. I then compile a list of films to preview at the market (the vast majority being recent or emerging releases, with a few older titles that professors express interest in viewing), a list of vendors to meet with, and streaming products to review.

Notably, the **NMM** does a great job of announcing participating vendors early on, making it easier for me to map out who has what and try to estimate the time I will need for previewing films.

Preview is King...

At its heart, I think one of the strongest values of the **NMM** is the opportunity for previewing media. Attendees can choose to preview portions of the documentaries or screen them in their entirety. Educational and documentary films vary in cost, many often ranging between \$295 and \$495 per title. The films can also vary in content and production value, making preview invaluable.

Typically, I reach out to vendors for any specific titles I know I want to preview, making sure they'll have a copy on hand at the **NMM** (especially with any older titles). My film preview list is usually pretty long, so I

have to be careful about how I spend my time each day during the preview sessions. I kind of brood over my list a bit to make sure I am mapping enough time for my previewing but retaining time for needed vendor meetings and product review. Luckily, the **NMM** added a new resource to the mix last year that helped alleviate some of the stress of making sure absolutely everything was seen during the confines of the **NMM**. At the end of the **NMM**, each registered attendee was provided access to a Preview Portal. The Portal contains full streams of all of the materials presented at that **NMM**.

Many attendees will team up with a colleague or two for tandem previewing or working in small groups. This often elicits useful conversations and helps in the preview process itself: You might see a film that was not on your list or find out about a new resource. And, tandem previewing often promotes more effective time management, keeping folks motivated to stay on track so everyone gets a chance to see their previews.

In the Know...

I may often run into vendors at film festivals or library conferences, but no other professional symposium has offered the opportunity to engage with them like the **NMM** provides. At the **NMM**, I spend considerable time with the vendors discussing documentaries and educational media currently available in their catalogs as well as upcoming productions or new films under consideration. This forecasting and dialogue often yields much more content specific to topics and themes needed

for research and instruction in our collection, beyond my lists and their catalogs. Meeting with vendors is extremely valuable, not only in discussing subjects and content of the

documentaries, but I am able to get a better understanding of public performance options for their titles, talk about format concerns, and provide feedback on streaming media packages and tech products. This interaction is enormously helpful, it seems, to both the vendors and the buyers. And, beyond the previews, selecting, buying, and selling — the **NMM** engenders an open and ongoing dialogue (sometimes debate) between all of the participants on a myriad of media related topics important to the field.

Best Practices, Guidelines, and More...

While the **NMM's** primary focus for me is collection development, it also provides a notable venue for interacting with media colleagues, professional development, and education. There is ample time to promote new ideas

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Issues in Vendor/Library Relations — Air Show

Column Editor: **Bob Nardini** (Vice President, Product Development, Ingram Library Services)
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Last week a librarian asked me if I knew of a price index for eBooks. Journals price indexes are not only a budgeting tool of long standing, but became annual news in their own right over the course of the everlasting “serials crisis.” You can also find price indexes for print books, and we book vendors are often asked for one-off price projections. But since this librarian was asking for an index, not a forecast, I couldn’t help. If there’s anything like a price index for academic eBooks, I’ve never seen it.

I’ve offered those projections myself and have sometimes felt a little like a highwire walker in making them. What if I fall? If you know what you’re doing, though, a fall is unlikely, as **Nik Wallenda** proved on the wire to everyone this summer, right here in Niagara Falls. What a budgeting librarian really needs in a price forecast is for it to be plausible. For plausibility, there’s nothing like leaning if you can on years of data from an ongoing price index. If a forecast turns out to be accurate too, so much the better; but the truth is, no one is likely to go back later to check on that, and push you off the wire.

The way publishers, aggregators, vendors, and libraries interact with one another to agree on a price for eBooks is so specific to any number of particular situations, I’m not sure an index would ever be easy to devise or use. The eBook transaction is such a localized event, in fact, I’m not so sure there’d be a consensus price to index in the first place. When you look at buying from a publisher vs. buying from an aggregator; buying a package vs. buying a title; buying in a consortium vs. buying alone; licensing for a single user vs. licensing for any number of concurrent users; buying “in perpetuity” vs. not “buying” at all but instead subscribing, or renting, or opening a short-term loan, or paying for a fixed number of user sessions, you end up with an equation

that’s unlike anything applicable to print books. It would be as if someone asked you to create a price index for cars, and to take into account buying new and buying used, leasing, renting, taxi rides, car sharing, and whatever else is out there.

I doubt it would take long for any of us to think of academic libraries using all the above methods at once, and no time at all to think of libraries using more than one of them. If a library, say, bought one eBook at a certain price; bought another following several short-term loans whose fees were apart from the sale price; subscribed to several dozen titles in a publisher subject package for the year; bought a few dozen titles outright in another subject package; and licensed an aggregator package too, what was the average price they paid for an eBook?

Beats me. Unless we decide to make the print book transaction a lot more complicated than it’s been in the past, it looks as if eBooks and print books, which as we know sometimes are as alike as twins but sometimes are more like first cousins, here are starting to resemble more distant relations, part monograph, part serial, part database, and even part inter-library loan. The ways we’ve become used to thinking about book prices no longer work in the world we’re all moving into.

In fact, the ways we’ve become used to looking at a lot of things don’t seem to fit so well any longer. Libraries have time-tested ways to buy print books, but what not long ago seemed routine — firm orders, approval plans — now can seem reckless, like gambling. *This* book will leap off the shelf, will beat the odds. Won’t it? Each one is ordered and received in that hope, anyway, as card and slot players know there’s hope for them to beat the house in a casino. For library selectors, while at least it’s not their own money, comfort levels were considerably higher before their odds were published so regularly.

Today bets are often hedged with “pilots,” programs to test out a new way of doing things, or in my dictionary’s definition, “serving as a tentative model for future experiment or development.” That “tentative” for more “experiment” part is a pretty good description of where we are. Libraries, vendors, aggregators, publishers — we all know eBooks will keep growing, we’re just not sure exactly how. We try this, and we try that. So many pilot programs have been launched we need an air traffic control tower.

Without one, we’re in danger. Not the danger you might think, though, that without air traffic controllers our pilots will collide and fall to earth. We have a different problem. We’re at risk that our pilot programs will not collide, that instead they’ll buzz about in the sky indefinitely, flying loops around one another, each on their own course, a thousand non-intersecting flight plans leaving majestic vapor trails that soar toward the sun. And then vanish.

We need some collisions. We need signals from air traffic control directing us toward contact. That means that publishers, aggregators, vendors, and libraries can’t fly past each other. We need pilots aiming for destinations beyond conference presentations or someone’s goals and objectives for the year. If this aggregator and that library run a pilot, or if that consortia and this publisher have one, of if this vendor and that aggregator work out a flight plan, we are all going to stay up in the sky.

This isn’t to knock pilot programs. Pilots are good, we learn from them. It is to say, though, that they aren’t an end in themselves. Publishers, libraries, aggregators, and vendors each have their own realities, realities not altogether unknown to the others, but too often unacknowledged. Publishers have concerns over piracy, and librarians want the best possible user experience for their patrons. Libraries want aggregated workflows with vendors, and publishers want direct sales channels. Everyone wants eBooks to grow, and many library users still want print. Aggregators and vendors want attractive pricing models for libraries, and publishers want to protect their revenue.

We can all wish things were easier, but a good first step might be to agree that it’s not easy, that all of these issues are real, real to someone who matters, and that if we all want altitude, we need to acknowledge this in going about our business. The **Wright Brothers** invented an airplane, but they didn’t invent aviation. Until we invent ours, what we have is more than a highwire act, but it’s still an air show. 🦋

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— discuss current media issues, best practices, guidelines and copyright concerns. All of the professional development sessions offered at the **NMM** focus on technologies, collections, and issues specific to media professionals.

This year, the **NMM** coincides with the Consortium of College and University Media Centers (CCUMC) conference, also being held in Las Vegas (<http://ccumc.unlv.edu/conference/>). Ever vigilant in providing opportunity to connect with other media professionals, the **NMM** and CCUMC are partnering up for a couple of days and offering access to key workshops like “Copyright and Fair Use: Matching

Policy with Mission” led by **Pat Aufderheide** and **Brandon Butler**. I am looking forward to attending this CCUMC workshop along with a host of **NMM** break out sessions including **Allen Chou’s** talk on Social Media. I plan to leave Las Vegas with a lot of films, new insights on copyright and fair use, and some fresh ideas on how to run a successful social media campaign. So, in this case, what happens in Vegas won’t be staying in Vegas. Well, perhaps some of it will... 🦋

Endnotes

1. *Against the Grain*, v.20#4 September 2008, **Philip Hallman’s** column “Media Minder.”