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Stemming the Tide: The Role of Subscription Agents and Consortia in Library Communications

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Cooperation is Key ...
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tation to lead a focus group on social media in the library held at the **Taylor & Francis** office in Philadelphia in August 2014.

Michael Arthur, **Barbara Tierney**, and **Elyse Profera** also had the opportunity to present on the impact of the collaboration from the library-publisher workshops during the **Charleston Conference** that November. Their presentation at Charleston focused particularly on how **Taylor & Francis**' sessions and efforts helped the **UCF** subject librarians build enthusiasm for librarian involvement with faculty on campus.

Keeping the Momentum Going

With the workshops completed, **Taylor & Francis** and **UCF** have continued to maintain a professional relationship built around trust and open communication. Both sides realize the challenges that face the scholarly publishing industry, and they've seen first-hand that working together and preserving close connections can only help them achieve their goals.

There are still challenges, and it can be difficult to keep the momentum going and to continue to cultivate relationships like the one between **Taylor & Francis** and **UCF**. Staff turnover can make it difficult for librarians and publishers alike, which means it is even more important to establish close ties with numerous people within an organization to help ensure that history isn't lost. **Michael** has moved on from his post at **UCF**, and **Elyse** is now a

against the grain
people profile

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Stacy V. Sieck

PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND BACKGROUND: I've been with **Taylor & Francis** since 2008, when I started out as the manager of the library and information science journals portfolio. Before that, I was on the other side of publishing and was the Editor of a medical magazine published by **Merion Matters**, the media, marketing, and merchandising company behind the popular **ADVANCE** brand.

IN MY SPARE TIME: I love to run and hike with my two dogs, Georgia and Chase Mutley (named for the former Philadelphia Phillies baseball player, Chase Utley). I also love sports, traveling, and food. I'm a huge foodie!

FAVORITE BOOKS: *The Rabbit Series* by **John Updike**; *To Kill A Mockingbird* by **Harper Lee**; *The Paper Bag Princess* by **Robert Munsch**.

MOST MEMORABLE CAREER ACHIEVEMENT: Creating and implementing **Taylor & Francis**' Library & Information Sciences Author Rights Pilot Program, a zero embargo pilot program for the LIS author community. 🐾

Journals Sales Manager at **Taylor & Francis**, but the relationship between **Taylor & Francis** and **UCF** remains close.

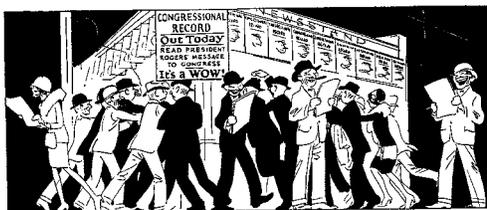
It's also made **Michael's** transition to the **University of Alabama** slightly easier. **Elyse** now oversees university accounts in the central U.S., including the **University of Alabama**,

and their pre-established relationship means **Michael** doesn't have to start over to build new relationships at **Taylor & Francis**. In fact, **Michael** and **Elyse's** replacement — **Stacy Sieck** — is already considering a similar event at his new home at the **University of Alabama**. 🐾

Stemming the Tide: The Role of Subscription Agents and Consortia in Library Communications

by **Lindsey Reno** (Acquisitions Librarian/Subject Specialist, University of New Orleans, Earl K. Long Library;
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One of the benefits of working with a subscription agent or a consortia is streamlined communication. One need only work with their designated representative or online interface of their vendor to accomplish a host of tasks related to subscription orders, such as claiming, invoicing, troubleshooting, ordering, or licensing. Unfortunately, these relationships do little to mitigate the onslaught of communication directed at Academic Librarians from publishers in the form of phone calls, emails, post cards, letters, catalogs, and site visits. This method is not only bothersome, but ineffective, like a magnified version of the spam and junk mail one receives at home. Phone calls are screened, emails are marked as read, paper mail is tossed without a second glance, and visits are tolerated in the



name of vendor relations. The proliferation of communication leads to a sort of blindness in librarians. Making more robust use of subscription agents and consortia would be more beneficial for all concerned, but some things need to change before this can be a reality.

The Current Reality

How many emails do librarians receive from publishers and vendors on a daily basis? How many of these emails are actually read? How many of these emails lead to fruitful communication? The daily deluge of contact from publishers is vast and vastly ineffective. When I scan my inbox on a Monday morning, few emails receive such swift and total annihilation as a product email from a publisher. No amount

of word-smithing or graphic design magic is going to change that.

In her article "Vendor Relations: Tales from a Vendee," **Julie Kitchen** reminisces about the "good-old-days" of acquisitions when a representative would simply drop by for a cup of tea and laments the current climate of "bombardment of electronically mailed, slightly breathless announcements about the latest publication or service."¹ Before the prevalence of electronic resources, the relationship between librarians and publishers was less difficult. The environment in which publishers and vendors work has become much more harsh.²

Adding to that harshness is a declining library market. In this new environment, publishers and vendors have the need to hold onto libraries and prevent poaching by competitors. One of the ways that they attempt to do this is by staying in constant contact with customers.^{3,4} Is this really necessary or effective?

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tive? According to **Diane Smith**, librarians tend to be too polite and string vendors along even though they do not intend to subscribe to a new resource. She has also seen, from her stint with a library vendor, librarians agreeing to meet with her, only to read email and look at social media while doing so.⁵ Is this a good use of anyone's time?

Do you really want to cancel that? Yes. Usually, the answer is yes. At the **University of New Orleans**, a review of all continuing resources happens annually, as a matter of course. A flat budget plus inflation equals cuts. In the acquisitions department this means, in addition to the painful process of cutting titles, fielding weekly phone calls direct from publishers throughout the ensuing subscription year. They want to confirm that the cancellation was intentional and they want to know why the title was cancelled. Lodging complaints with our subscription agent yields no solution and there seems to be no way of avoiding it. Perhaps, in addition to the very deliberate process of cancelling a subscription, one could provide a reason, selected from a drop-down box, that could then be communicated to the publisher alongside the cancellation.

Library Consortia

Those librarians who work with consortia may find that emails to consortial listservs

about product offers do not get the standard eradication that befalls most other product offers. How is this possible? Firstly, there are a lot fewer of them. They stand out in their rarity. They come from a trusted and established source that has your best interests in mind. The product has likely been vetted already and there is probably a discounted offer in place. It is like getting a recommendation on a laundry detergent from one's parent instead of heeding the call of a shiny **Procter and Gamble** advertisement. According to **Bernie Sloan**, "If a library consortium puts its **Good Housekeeping** seal of approval on a new e-resource and discusses it on consortial listservs and at consortial meetings, this helps create an interest and buzz about the e-resource among member libraries."⁶ It would stand to reason that publishers and vendors should focus more on consortia than on individual libraries.

Working more with consortia has benefits for publishers, such as reducing overhead. Consortia often do much of the work that a vendor or publisher would do themselves, including billing and trouble-shooting.⁷ This is the case with the **LOUIS Library Consortium** in Louisiana. Licensing, billing, and trouble-shooting are handled by the consortium. Publishers would also have the ability to reach a wider audience more quickly and with less effort. They could make one sales pitch instead of fifty. They could send out one email instead of a thousand. Feedback would come from one source, instead of a hundred different li-

braries. More effort could be put toward group events rather than individual site visits. For example, the **Statewide California Electronic Library Consortium (SCELC)** has an annual event called Vendor Day where vendors and publishers come to meet with librarians and library staff from all over the state. There is also a day-long colloquium where librarians and vendors alike give presentations. There should be more local and regional events like this, where librarians, publishers, and vendors can meet, exchange ideas, and discuss services, rather than the usual sales pitch and tales of budget woe exchange. Both librarians and vendors have discussed the need for a different type of partnership.^{8,9} In order to do that, we need to move past the current model.

Subscription Agents

Librarians might also find that emails from one's subscription agent often receive less scorn in the inbox. Usually, these emails are important and do not get "marked as read" with all of the other vendor and publisher emails. There is a recognizable name. You may have met this person. This is someone that you work with many times throughout the year on renewals, invoicing, and trouble-shooting. Yet, subscription agents are not in the habit of promoting resources outside of their own organizations, even though it would benefit them with additional subscription sales.

One of the most wondrous aspects of using a subscription agent is that of information gath-

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ering. Aside from general information about titles, such as price and licensing, we find the most vital information is gathered into reports that one need only make a few clicks in order to acquire. EBSCO offers any number of easily accessible reports, so why not a report of new offers from publishers? One might imagine a process whereby the subscription agent would gather offers from publishers into one secure location and notify (or not, according to specified settings) the contact librarian about said offers. As is usually the case in databases like EBSCOnet, one can sort the offers by a number of variables such as price point, subject area, type of purchase, and publisher. Imagine how much more streamlined it would be, during times of unforeseen and increasingly rare end-of-fiscal-year budget surplus, to look through a report of this type, rather than go through emails and try to remember which vendor was offering that discount on a package of eBooks about some obscure topic two months ago.

The Future

How do we realize this new world of quiet telephones and manageable inboxes? In short, one must be willing to say no. Librarians have to be willing to tell publishers that communications, offers, and purchases must be routed through an agent or consortium. One must also be willing to allow their publisher communications to be controlled by a third

party and the publishers would actually have to agree to this. Unfortunately, there would be a need for subscription agents and consortia to take on more work in order to field all of these communications, but they would also benefit from this arrangement in the form of additional sales. There would be far fewer direct purchases from publishers and vendors. There would also be more time for libraries, publishers, and vendors to invest in different ventures, perhaps even more collaborative development. Less time should be spent in the obligatory activities of the past and more time building libraries, resources, and infrastructure that will serve the needs of the future.

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Endnotes

1. **Kitchen**, "Vendor Relations."
2. **Stamison et al.**, "What They Never Told You About Vendors in Library School."
3. **Smith**, "The Reality Is...Everyone Is Selling Something."
4. **Coe**, "Managing Customer Relationships." book vendors have had to go beyond bookselling, and provide technical services to help libraries to become more efficient. This has required new levels of expertise from book vendors, who today work more closely with their customers than ever before." "DOI": "10.1300/J111v44n03_05", "ISSN": "9780789033529", "shortTitle": "Managing Customer Relationships", "journalAbbreviation": "Library/Vendor Relationships", "author": [{"family": "Coe", "given": "George"}], "issued": {"date-parts": [{"2006", 6}]}}, "schema": "https://github.com/citation-style-language/schema/raw/master/csl-citation.json"
5. **Smith**, "The Reality Is...Everyone Is Selling Something."
6. **Sloan**, "Understanding Consortia Better."
7. *Ibid.*
8. **Brooks**, "Introduction."
9. **Stamison et al.**, "What They Never Told You About Vendors in Library School."

ATG Interviews Franny Lee, Founder of SIPX and Kurt Sanford, CEO of ProQuest

by **Tom Gilson** (Associate Editor, *Against the Grain*) <gilson@cofc.edu>

and **Katina Strauch** (Editor, *Against the Grain*) <kstrauch@comcast.net>

ATG: *Some of our readers may not be that familiar with SIPX. Can you elaborate on what services SIPX provides? How do these services benefit libraries and their patrons? Do they compete with existing library services like online course reserves, open etextbook programs, etc.? How do they differ from similar providers like the Copyright Clearance Center?*

FL: SIPX is a perfect fit with *Against the Grain* readers because it empowers schools to leverage their own library content for digital course materials, works with open content initiatives, and simplifies the rights process for other content they want to use. It's an easy-to-use cloud-based solution that can be connected into campus Learning Management Systems, library course reserves platforms and bookstore coursepack workflows. It's even a natural fit for distance education, continuing studies programs and global Massive Open Online Courses.

SIPX is a nimble, innovative solution — we've always worked closely with libraries to

shape its development and we remain deeply in tune with library perspectives today. **Michael Keller, Stanford ULS**, was a board member since inception, and our early adopters and reviewers played a significant role in evolving SIPX's mission and design — demo users coming back to us from the early days would see their feedback realized in a system that schools are delighted with today!

Educators, librarians and support staff use SIPX to set up course readings lists and then students use it to get the readings they need for class. What's really great about the SIPX solution is that it always automatically checks to see if those works are available at no cost to students via library subscriptions or open sources. If they are, the faculty saves their students money and the library is the hero! When the selected readings are outside the school's holdings, SIPX offers the instructor alternate open and royalty-free options that match the same search criteria. If that non-subscribed first choice is really what the instructor needs to share with their students, then SIPX simplifies

all the complicated licensing, purchasing and invoicing processes. There's an easy, seamless online transaction for the student, that the library can configure to be invoiced for if that's the way things work on their campus, with no paperwork or permission payments for the library or bookstore to deal with.

SIPX is different from other providers in that we come at course materials from the perspectives of the instructor, the library and the student. We partner with many types of complementary third parties to combine products and services to create all-new solutions, including the **Copyright Clearance Center**. CCC is an important partner of SIPX and shares its robust copyright clearance and pricing information via a direct API to its database. However, SIPX also incorporates customers' institutional holdings (including where a school has purchased CCC's Annual Copyright License), open resources and other publisher sources to build an actionable reading list for students and satisfy the full user

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