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Meredith M. Babb Profile

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and to promote transparency among team members, the CD department uses a shared email alias for vendor contact. This shared email address functions like a listserv and copies multiple members of Collection Development on communications. With this email address, we receive both automated messages and vendor representative communications. The intention is to minimize confusion about vendor contact, reduce email forwarding, and to include pertinent parties in conversations from start to finish. Using a shared address requires that we have clear internal workflow indicating who follows up on what pieces of information shared by vendors. However, additional workflow processes with *trello.com* facilitate next steps and project management as action items are created.

Vendors plan site visits to share new product information, review accounts, and solicit product feedback. These visits are a chance to learn more about a company's business model, make meaningful connections, and to evaluate existing subscriptions or consider new resources. When a company has multiple vendors representing different product types this can mean multiple vendor visits per year. In order to manage a burgeoning visitation schedule, the **MSU Library** encourages vendor visits biennially. This standard is applied to all vendors with the goal of maintaining consistent and fair practices to cultivate vendor relationships. It also helps us relay a realistic and manageable schedule to our liaison librarians.

We also convey to our vendors that one of the most helpful interaction points with them for our library is the opportunity to understand more about our existing subscriptions and owned products to promote their use to our patrons. While vendor representatives frequently advertise new products during site visits, quite often ongoing vendor support is priceless. To maximize the value of current subscriptions and provide quality service to patrons, it is important for librarians and staff to become familiar and comfortable with subscribed products. Therefore, we encourage vendors to provide quick video tutorials, training webinars, and responsive customer service that reinforces the value of existing subscriptions, in turn fostering trust, a positive user experience, and good product usage. Creating time for patrons, librarians, and staff to become familiar with the functional aspects of product platforms, or new upgrades proves beneficial and is less time consuming than costly site visits.

Finally, caller ID on our library telephones helps us manage our vendor communications. When facing challenges like trying to troubleshoot a broken resource or negotiating a contract or having a colleague in your office, caller ID can be a big time saver. It allows us to answer a support-case call or to decline an unexpected contact. Likewise, some vendors have disregarded our communication preferences, in which case caller ID can provide the vendor an opportunity to connect with your voicemail if you are otherwise occupied.

against the grain people profile

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Meredith M. Babb

PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND BACKGROUND:

December 2005 – Present: Director, University Press of Florida, Gainesville, FL
October 1996 – December 2005: Editor-in-Chief, University Press of Florida, Gainesville, FL
February 1992 – September 1996: Acquisitions Editor, University of Tennessee Press, Knoxville, TN
November 1987 – January 1992: Acquisitions Editor, William C. Brown Publishers (now Times Mirror/McGraw-Hill Higher Education) Madison, WI
August 1984 – November 1987: Publishing Representative, William C. Brown Publishers, Dubuque, IA

IN MY SPARE TIME I LIKE: Gardening, surfing, rowing, biking, and of course, reading.

FAVORITE BOOKS: **J.Austen:** *Sense and Sensibility*. **I. Asimov:** *The Foundation Trilogy*. **J.R.R.Tolkien:** *Lord of the Rings Trilogy*. **Robert Graves:** *I, Claudius* and *Claudius the God*. **Homer:** *The Odyssey*. **Rumi:** *The Book of Love*.

MOST MEMORABLE CAREER ACHIEVEMENT: Creation of Orange Grove Texts.

HOW/WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS: All digital but not all open. 🌱

Attitudes from the Library Community

For more context into how other libraries approach vendor relations, we conducted an informal survey of librarians in June 2015 on Serialst, hosted by the **North American Serials Interest Group (NASIG)**. Followers were asked:

“Have [you] developed any policies or guidelines for communication with vendors? Between on-site visit requests, telephone calls received, and emails received from vendors, I find time-management to be challenging around these relationships. To be consistent and clear with vendors, I'd like to develop some policies, which might make this communication less time intensive. For example, might we limit vendor visits to a specific month or two of the year or only when we request an on-site visit? And, could we say we prefer email to telephone communication? I realize vendors have their own time challenges and needs to communicate so I want to respect that. How do others manage the communication relationships with vendors?”

Responses varied with many librarians noting that vendor representatives are required to promote and market their products as a part of their job responsibilities. Some libraries suggested they receive better pricing when they have regular interactions with vendors to foster positive relationships. Others indicated that they prefer vendor-initiated contact when it involves customer service and training opportunities rather than possible new purchases. Some respondents actively let vendors know their preferred communication preferences and these libraries appreciate it when vendors respect these wishes.

Next Steps

Vendor relationships serve a valuable role in support of libraries. As library goals and responsibilities evolve, reflecting on vendor relationships may highlight opportunities for new communication methods or data management techniques to manage workflows. We share our experiences with the hopes of engaging in a broader discussion focused on improved understanding and mutually beneficial library/vendor relationships. As noted earlier, we established the Vendor Relationship Guidelines with the goal of setting honest communication boundaries based on our bandwidth is to establish meaningful connections with vendors based on understanding of our needs. Ideally, we would take vendor needs and challenges under advisement in setting these policies.

A cursory gauge of library community attitudes on the Serialst provides some sense of what is happening in libraries and communities. From here, we intend to conduct two additional, broader surveys of the community for analysis and broader dissemination: one survey for libraries and one survey for vendors. The results of this survey will be shared at the **2016 Electronic Resources and Libraries Conference**. Ideally, libraries will convey their challenges and preferences in a way that reflects realities around competing pressures for time and projects. Equally important, vendors will be able to present their expectations and needs from corporate, individual sales, and support perspectives that will help the library community understand how to better manage our needs and the desires of our vendors. Our goal is to encourage conversation and understanding between two different yet entwined communities. 🌱