

## Against the Grain

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### Both Sides Now: Vendors and Librarians – What Happens Next?

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# Both Sides Now: Vendors and Librarians — What Happens Next?

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As parents, we are mindful on a daily basis of our responsibility to make sure that our kids are raised with certain values. We want them to turn out to be responsible and conscientious adults making their way in the world in a positive manner. After all, their actions in adulthood reflect the values we taught them as children. If you called my 40-year-old daughter today and asked her about some of the guiding principles I alerted her to when she was growing up, inevitably she would tell you that I advised her to always be aware of possible outcomes to her decisions. I advised her that some of her actions as a young adult should have the “what happens next?” litmus test applied. “If I do this, let me think of what will happen next as a result of my actions?” Only after careful consideration of the possible outcomes of my actions, will I then proceed” she would answer. It’s always good to be prepared for the present, but even more importantly to understand the possible outcomes in the future. You can’t predict the future, but you certainly can speculate as to what it might be. The process of negotiation comes with a significant degree of “what happens next?”

A vendor/library negotiation is comprised of many steps. At the beginning, middle and end of each step along the way to the completion of the sale, the question of “what happens next?” needs to be addressed by both parties. For the library, the first step is to be aware of the funding limitations and data’s technical requirements associated with the possible purchase of information to be provided by the vendor. You have to cover this important aspect because quite frankly, if you don’t have the money or the technical skills to present the data to your constituents there is nothing more left to say. It’s unfair to the sales rep to go through all the machinations of presenting a product if there no hope of an eventual sale. That’s because the “what happens next?” for the sales rep is that if no sale will be consummated then that means that there is better than average chance that the rep won’t achieve their sales goal. If a sales rep consistently misses their sales goals, their employment at the company will most certainly be in jeopardy. For the sales rep, the “what happens next?” needs to have a positive answer and if no sale is imminent, then it’s time to find other prospects.

On the other hand, if there is genuine interest combined with the knowledge that actual funds are available for a purchase after initial curiosity in the proposed product then the answers to the “what happens next?” question takes on a more significant meaning for both the buyer and seller.

For the seller, it means that it is time to begin to prepare a full presentation pointing out the features and benefits the product will have for the buyer. In addition, the sales rep needs to gather all those people within the organization that can be of help in preparing, and presenting the value proposition to the information professional. Most sales organizations operating in the information industry are well equipped in fulfilling this process and have fully staffed departments ready to assist in closing the sale.

For the buyer, a positive response to “what happens next?” at this stage means that there will be a significant amount of planning and orchestrating to be done. All the people internally that will be needed to aid in the negotiation process with the vendor have to be contacted and briefed. The library simply does not have the same ready-made facilities and internal resources available as the vendor has. It is therefore incumbent upon the buyer to be fastidious and efficient in preparing themselves and their support staff for the eventual negotiation with the seller.

The next time the “what happens next?” question is to be pondered is when the sales rep requests a face-to-face meeting. As part of the process, the rep will suggest topics to be discussed, mutually convenient times and dates to get together. Here is where the library begins to wrest control of the entire negotiation process away from the vendor by requiring that a written agenda be sent in advance of the meeting by the salesperson outlining goals for the meeting and who from the company will be there to accompany the rep. The library can say yea or nay to the proposed topics and be advised as to who will be there from the vendor side. Furthermore the buyer can suggest the day and time that is convenient for them, as well. The follow-up meeting from the agenda should be in the buyer’s control.

At this point, once the interest in the product has been deemed to be authentic, funds to pay for this product are available and both sides have established an amicable working relationship, then “what happens next?” is in full force. No meeting should end without clear “to do” objectives for both parties to be completed within a specified time period.

A vendor might say, “If I present a price of \$20K, will the buyer think it too high?” “What will be my fallback if they reject the offer?” “Do I have an alternate price in mind?”

And so it goes..... The most difficult aspect of negotiation is determining a fair price, but more importantly a fair price that is amenable to the buyer. In other words, “*what happens next* when they scoff at my first offer?”

Similarly, the buyer might say, “If the price presented is \$20K and even if we have room in the budget to pay a little more than that, I prefer to suggest a lower number to the sales rep. How far should we push on price?” “If we go beyond the guidelines, *what happens next* when the director reviews the deal on the table?” “Is it worth the grief that will most assuredly occur if my boss is unhappy with the deal?”

In reality, “what happens next?” is a way for both the buyer and seller to stay focused on the job at hand which is to buy and sell a product or service. Adherence to this concept will make the negotiations flow much easier and much more efficiently than not having this as part of the process.

In 2002, the group **Chevelle** released an album called *Wonder What’s Next*. All lyrics written by **Pete Loeffler**; all music composed by **Chevelle**. The lyrics give speculation as to the group’s future in the music business. 🐾

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*Mike is currently the Managing Partner of **Gruenberg Consulting, LLC**, a firm he founded in January 2012 after a successful career as a senior sales executive in the information industry. His firm is devoted to provide clients with sales staff analysis, market research, executive coaching, trade show preparedness, product placement and best practices advice for improving negotiation skills for librarians and salespeople. His book, “**Buying and Selling Information: A Guide for Information Professionals and Salespeople to Build Mutual Success**” has become the definitive book on negotiation skills and is available on Amazon, Information Today in print and eBook, Amazon Kindle, B&N Nook, Kobo, Apple iBooks, OverDrive, 3M Cloud Library, Gale (GVRL), MyiLibrary, ebrary, EBSCO, Blio, and Chegg. [www.gruenbergconsulting.com](http://www.gruenbergconsulting.com)*

