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Both Sides Now: Vendors and Librarians — Hey Vendors, Do You Really Understand Your Marketplace?

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One of the great joys of having a consulting business is that one never knows what project or question will unearth itself each day. Since I spent the majority of my sales management years working for a number of major information industry companies, my daily plans were pretty much set for me. Customer/prospect meetings with the sales reps, preparation of sales projections and analysis for my manager, trips to the home office, etc., were all part of a daily, monthly, yearly schedule. Same stuff; different day pretty much sums it up.

In my current role as an independent consultant, the opportunities presented to me for my consultation usually involve Negotiation Skills classes for librarians and vendors, speaking about my book at various library meetings and of course, sales force assessment. Although recently, I was asked by a librarian friend of mine to take some time to speak to a particular vendor. She wanted me to talk to them about that vendor's inability to understand a new marketplace where they were trying to sell their product.

Apparently, the vendor in question has a product that is being used in the library market on a corporate library level. In attending the various ALA and SLA meetings they noticed that the University market had potential for their data and decided to immediately call on libraries at Universities with little success. As is so often the case, the intent is good, but the execution of the task left much to be desired. Apparently, the vendor did not understand there is a vast difference between selling the same product to corporate as opposed to public sector.

My background in the information industry began with selling microfiche copies of documents filed at the **Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC)** by public companies. That morphed into the information to be sold being contained on CDs and then of course, online. Our company was based in New York, so at the outset of my sales career I was given a territory of accounts to sell in NYC and in addition I was responsible for a territory in New England. Banks, financial companies, brokers were my prime prospects. Unfortunately, many of those "prospects" in New York were customers already so they didn't need to see me unless I had something new to sell. And the ones that remained seemed uninterested. I exhausted my prospect list in the city and set off for New England.

Given that there were few, if any large financial institutions in Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine, I concentrated my efforts in Boston. So, on a regular basis I took the air shuttle from New York to Boston to sell my wares. And although I had some minor victories in selling there, my overall performance was less than stellar.

On a particular rainy and cold November afternoon that saw many a door closed on my smiling face, I ducked into the public library on my way to catch the T out to the airport. While warming up and drying out in the library, I noticed that they had a significant paper collection or corporate reports. To make a long story short, I convinced the librarian that I was the person to help convert all those reports from paper to fiche, by doing so, I would save the library a ton of money and the collection would now be complete for all their users. The order was forthcoming I was told.

Flying home that afternoon, I was quite pleased with myself. I turned a negative day into a positive one with an apparent order that would ensure my employment with the company. That joy turned into grief when I realized that the public library was not in my territory. I learned early on in my sales career that a sales rep's territory is as sacred as marriage, family and sports affiliation. In actuality, I sold to a prospect not in my territory. As the plane descended into LaGuardia that evening at dusk, I saw my commission ascending up and out of my needy pockets. Yikes! What was I to do?

In sales parlance, we say that commissions are paid on "signed orders" not "mind orders" which means that unless you present the company with an order that is approved by the customer in your assigned territory, it really doesn't exist. I knew that the order that I was about to secure would not be mailed into the NY office for a few days. This would give me time to contact some universities and public libraries to ascertain if there really was a market for our data. If my premise was correct that such a demand truly existed, then I could present myself to my boss as the person to sell in this market especially since there was no one else on staff interested in this position. If I were to become the Public Sector salesperson, I would have new territory and be paid a fat commission for my magnificent sale.

In the song, "Up on Cripple Creek" by the Band, the phrase "good luck had just stung me" comes to mind because that week, a significant order came in through the mail from a major University library in New York, without the assistance of a sales rep. With that order and my soon to arrive order, I felt that I had good standing to ask my boss to create that territory and give me that market to sell our data.

I did the research by calling various university libraries, visiting the ones in New York and started the process to ascertain what they would buy, why they would buy it and what they expected to pay for the service the company was able to provide. When the public library order came in, I presented my case to my boss and the rest, as they say was "history."

I became the first Public Sector salesperson for the company.

With my new role, I deepened myself in learning the intricacies of the public sector market and as a result, became the most successful salesperson in the history of the company. There was no question about that market that I couldn't answer and I knew that the customers appreciated my diligence in learning about their needs and budgets.

All of which brings us back to the vendor who wanted to sell to a university library, but did not have the wherewithal to understand that market. So there are a number of steps a vendor should take when undertaking the task of selling their product into a new market. Clearly, the thought process for the vendor in this case was good because it is always wise to expand the universe of potential buyers. However, expanding the potential market is one thing, successful expansion is yet another. You don't just expand for the sake of expanding. Careful research has to be part of the process.

At the outset of the proposed expansion is realizing that "you know that you don't know." That means you realize that you need to learn something new. In my business career, I was never leery of people who knew that they didn't know. On the other hand, it was tough to deal with people who didn't know that they didn't know and thus, were unable to learn.

Other than hire a consultant such as me to educate them, a vendor looking to sell in a new market needs to talk to the target audience about their needs. Not the needs that the vendor envisions, but the needs as defined by the potential customer. Too often, companies go through elaborate machinations in developing a new product or service without first analyzing the market potential and speaking to the very people to whom they will target their sales projections. So the first step is to talk to your market. An added benefit that results from talking to your new market is that it helps develop a stronger relationship between the library and the vendor. And after all, relationship selling is the key to success for any seller. And libraries are always open to the concept of helping a vendor improve their offering to the library community.

Secondly, the vendor has to understand that the sales cycle for selling to the public sector is vastly different from selling to the corporate sector. Having false expectations of the time it takes to prospect, present, follow-up and close the order will frustrate both the sales rep and their manager. It will probably take more time to close an order when selling to a university or public library as opposed to a corporate sale.

Pricing is yet another consideration. Many information companies in the information industry that sell their data to both public sector and corporate markets realize that by providing

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their product to students on an undergraduate and graduate level they are in fact, training those students on the use of their data with the expectation that when those students enter the job market, they will request those resources at their new job. So it is in the best interest of both parties to offer the university library their product at a reduced cost from what would be charged in other markets. This acknowledges the funding difficulties faced by most university libraries, gets the vendors product into the library and begins to train those students on the virtues of the data as presented by the company.

And finally, the most important part involves the people that must be hired to sell in the public sector market. Sales reps in the information industry that sell to corporate libraries need to be differentiated from the ones selected to sell to universities and public libraries. I have seen over the years companies making the mistake of saying their reps can sell in all markets. Usually, that is not the case. To ensure success, hire people familiar with the markets you want to sell in. If you hire the right people, the vendor has a good chance of success.

As a post script to the story, I contacted the sales rep who was working for the vendor in question. We had a few conversations, but in the end, he told me that his manager did not want to invest the time and money to learn more about the public sector market. At the last conversation that I had with my university librarian friend who suggested that I speak to the vendor, a sale had not been consummated.

In closing the song that best describes my thoughts on the topic at hand that ran through my mind as I wrote this column for ATG was from the musical, "The King and I" written by **Rodgers and Hammerstein** as sung by **Julie Andrews**, "Getting to Know You." The lyrics say "Getting to know you; getting to know all about you; getting to like you; getting to hope you like me." Sounds simple, but the first rule in successful selling is to create a positive relationship with the customer and getting to know about them to understand their needs and fulfill them. 🌸

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

Being Earnest with Collections — Advancing Textbook Affordability: Considerations for Open and Affordable Course Materials

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Column Editor's Note: *This edition of **Being Earnest with Collections** explores Open Educational Resources and the challenges libraries face when trying to help address the high costs associated with textbooks. In the article, **Ariana Santiago** has provided ATG readers with an overview of the project she has lead at the University of Houston. She provides comparisons between OER and library funded resources, outlines the pros and cons, and provides practical advice for other libraries considering similar programs. OER has been explored here at **The University of Alabama** though we have not stepped in at the level seen in Houston. On a personal note, I have known **Ariana** for several years and remember when she made the decision to become a librarian. She has now moved from being in a staff level position at the **University of Central Florida** to her current role as an up and coming leader in our profession. I am happy to have this contribution to the **Being Earnest with Collections** column. I am sure others will find some key takeaways from this article. — MA*

Textbook costs are widely recognized in higher education as a significant burden to students, preventing many from being able to access required course materials. A solution to this problem that is seeing growing success is to replace costly textbooks with open educational resources (OER) — learning materials made freely available via open licenses — so that all students benefit from having immediate access to resources that support their academic success. Along with OER, many replace traditional textbooks with other resources that are freely available to students, though are not openly-licensed, such as journals, eBooks, and other resources licensed through the library, and websites, videos, and other resources that are freely-available online. Should an institution's OER program focus on resources that are truly OER, or be inclusive of non-OER resources (which will be referred to here as "affordable course content")?

Grant programs, often spearheaded by the academic library, have emerged as a leading strategy in encouraging adoption of OER or affordable course content in order to eliminate textbook costs. There is wide variety in the scope and structure of such grant programs, including whether they are intended only for

OER adoption or are inclusive of non-OER affordable resources. For example, the **University of Arkansas** OER Course Materials Conversion Program offers faculty "extra compensation funding to encourage moving from high cost commercially published textbooks to open educational resources (OER)" at three different levels, distinguished by whether the faculty adopt, adapt, or create OER (University of Arkansas, 2019). **Miami University** also focuses its program on OER adoption, offering professional development funds to faculty who replace traditional required materials with OER and assess the impact on course outcomes and student learning (Miami University, n.d.). Others, like **Kansas State University's** Open/Alternative Textbook Initiative, provide funding for the adoption of "free alternatives to traditional print textbooks," which can include any combination of open access textbooks, library resources, OER, multimedia resources found on the open web, or faculty-authored materials (Kansas State University, 2019). Similarly, the **University of Oklahoma's** Alternative Textbook Grant can be applied towards the adoption of OER or library resources, though they specify that grants for library resource use are "applied to the purchase of multiple concurrent licenses" rather than awarded to faculty directly (University of Oklahoma, 2019). Many more examples are available in the "OER & Textbook Affordability Initiatives" document created by **Grand Valley State University Libraries** (Yahne, J., Rander, J., and Ruen, M., n.d.).

At the **University of Houston**, our Alternative Textbook Incentive Program (ATIP) takes a broad approach to resource type, awarding instructors for replacing required commercial textbooks with adoption, adaptation, or creation of OER, assembly of library-sponsored or freely available resources, or any combination thereof (University of Houston Libraries, n.d.). Launched in 2018, our incentive program is new and growing: in the first two ATIP cohorts, we have awarded thirty-nine alternative textbook projects which will result in an estimated student savings of over \$960,000 by the end of the 2019-20 academic year. As an institution that has recently implemented a grant program to advance textbook affordability, we have seen some benefits and drawbacks to both OER and affordable course content. Based

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