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Against the Grain
"Linking Publishers, Vendors and Librarians"

1997 from a Bookseller's Perspective

by Daniel P. Halloran (Academic Book Center) <danh@acbc.com>

The beginning of a new year is always a time for hope and optimism. Looking back through the past year, in contrast, it's natural for us to focus on some of the things that went wrong, the occasional missed opportunity, or other negative events that affected our professional and personal lives. From a professional standpoint, however, I would have to search long and hard for the negatives in 1997. In fact, it's apparent to me that this past year brought to fruition a number of important trends, and they will coalesce into guideposts for developments in the next few years.

Among these trends and developments are:

- The widespread interest in outsourcing certain technical services functions.
- The commitment to Web-based technology among the larger library booksellers.
- The central role of approval plans in libraries, including smaller libraries that traditionally had used other collection management tools.
- The emergence of consortia as fundamental platforms for resource sharing and other forms of cooperation.
- The creation of a new university in Florida that combines all of these trends to form at least one model for the future.

What has motivated these trends and developments? The apparent answer is cost, or stated more broadly, the attempt by library administrators to control costs, use budgets more effectively, and manage the human, technological and material resources better than ever before. But behind this cost control effort is something far more interesting. The amount and the variety of information is growing explosively. Libraries are charged with the mission of collecting and making accessible all this information in a variety of formats, and the task is becoming more complicated. For instance, a simple CD that children buy in retail stores has all sorts of implications when a library purchases the same product: How can it be shared among patrons? How are the fair use restrictions? Can it be copied and networked? How is it protected against theft? Each of these questions requires a different response, based on the many different producers of the information or the information itself contained on the CD.

And someone, or several people, have to make policy regarding these issues, and then manage those policies. The task gets more complicated in the electronic and database environment, and then there are the added requirements of knowledgeability.

If Rumors Were Horses

Well, it seems like something always happens while we are "in press." We have just learned that Williams & Wilkins has agreed to be acquired by Wolters Kluwer in a transaction valued at about $375 million. Apparently, there will be an integration between Waverly's business and Lippincott-Raven's. It is anticipated that Kluwer will maintain a "substantial operating presence and work force in Baltimore." The consolidations continue. See this issue, p. 30 for Judy Luther's article on consolidations and mergers in our industry. Also, in the future, the energetic and awesome Mary Brandt-Jensen will be writing a column for ATG on mergers and acquisitions in the industry. And there's more, Rob Richards (see Biz of Acq, this issue, p. 68) sends word over the lawlibrary listserv that there is an updated version of "A Legal Publisher's List: The Shape of Legal Publishing Today," available at http://www.colorado.edu/law/lawlib/ts/legalpub.htm.

Bradford Wiley II, Chairman of the

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increased cooperation between book suppliers and libraries. In 1997 we have seen a custo-
meter ask us to check their holdings in their
OPAC, before supplying certain types of
books on approval. The line between book
selectors in libraries and those outside is blur-
ing. There are all sorts of pitfalls that this
type of cooperation presents, not the least of
which is the fact that book suppliers are mo-
tivated by profit and librarians are motivated
by other factors such as collection excellence
and the need to serve their unique com-
unity. But there are areas of commonality, and
the emergence of a sense of collegiality in
solving the problems inherent in our sepa-
rate roles is a welcome trend.

Perhaps 1997 should be called the year
of the Web. The major academic library book
suppliers are offering Websites that are re-
ally useful. We are all going beyond mere
searching and selecting functions, giving our
customers the ability to manage their ap-
proval and firm order business online, at
their own convenience. The first steps to pro-
viding a truly seamless, paperless ordering sys-
tem were introduced in 1997 by Yankee
Book Peddler and Academic Book Center.
Blackwell launched their interactive Website
and promised rapid development of advanced

"In the last few years the debate within the library com-

munity was about whether certain functions could be
outsourced. In 1997 the debate has centered not on
whether to do it but how to do it well."

April 1997

features in the first part of the new year. It
became obvious that librarians are comfort-
able in the Web world, and they are demand-
ing as well. They want Websites that work
quickly and provide the same kind of
customization that has traditionally charac-
terized booksellers' array of services. These
three book suppliers demonstrated a commit-
tment to this in 1997, a trend that is certain to
continue into the next millennium.

Consortial library cooperation came of age in 1997. With the successful completion of the TULIP experiment and the OhioLink project getting off to a good start, as just two examples, library administrators are creating new models for inter-library cooperation. In

South Africa and Australia, library consorti-
a came of age with agreed agendas and real
projects identified. In Russia and some CIS
countries the acronym ILIAC. This effort
will facilitate the flow of information between
Russia and other former Soviet countries, and
the major information providers in the West.
In Asia, particularly Hong Kong, library co-
operation is being formalized. Some library
book suppliers view these developments with
trepidation. In Great Britain, for instance, a
consortium of universities in the southern

part of the country negotiated what all agree
is a ruinous discount, resulting in part in the
confirmation of the vendor who made the winning
bid. As I said above, none of these changes
taking place result in complete success. We
all make mistakes, and the better managed
libraries and vendors learn from those mis-
takes. Agreeing to supply books at discounts
that are so high that profits disappear hurts
all involved. The demise of a respected books-
seller who makes this kind of mistake is re-
grettable, but it's also a harsh lesson for all
of us. Consortia offer an opportunity for co-
operation on many fronts, including negoti-
ating pricing. I believe that these opportuni-
ties for library suppliers to increase their sales
be managed realistically within an envi-
ronment that brings benefit to all parties in-
volved in the process.

1997 saw the opening of the Florida Gulf
Coast University. We at Academic partnered
with OCLC, SOLINET and FCLC to pro-
vide a fully processed and cataloged shelf
ready collection on opening day. Working as
a team, we were intimately involved in the
new kind of university library, featuring a
heavy reliance on electronic resources as well
as a rich collection of books and journals to
support the teaching programs. While there
were some traditional ordering methods using paper, the majority of books were supplied in an en-
tirely electronic environment. We provided a Website that enabled the librarians to select and order books, monitor and manage their
approval plan, and track their money. Working with our partners, we created a database of on order
and on the shelf titles in the OPAC, and we
accomplished this without a cataloging de-
partment in the library. The success of the
FGCU project shows that librarians and ven-
dors, working together but under the firm di-
rection of library administrators, can create
a fine library collection in a new and effi-
cient manner. Is this the model for all librari-
es, or for all new libraries? I believe it is a
model for many libraries. It is certainly wor-
thy of discussion and examination, and no
doubt there will be plenty of that. But mean-
while the FGCU librarians are providing fac-
ulty and students with the resources they need
in 1997 and in the future.

A new year, and indeed a new millen-
nium, lie ahead of us. If 1997 was a reflec-
tion of the past, it was the year when debate
and discussion about new concepts, new
ways of working and cooperating, resulted
in concrete steps toward the future. If 1997
is an indicator of the future, it predicts a cus-
tomer-centered vendor community working
as part of a team with librarians and other
organizations in the library community.
In other words, a review of the highlights of
1997 means that the next few years look very
promising for all of us involved in libraries.