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A new kind of pricing for a new kind of world?

Dear Reader,

There are electronic products that you can get for free if you want. You need only pay what you feel they're worth. They've grown in leaps and bounds over the past decades and have brought education and enjoyment to millions. They are, of course, the broadcast services of National Public Radio and National Public Television.

For the past three months, I have been experimenting to see if this model could serve us in the library community. At the Consortium of Consortia meeting in Chicago last year, I proposed an experiment. Chadwyck-Healey will ask the library community to pledge what they think our ArchivesUSA product is worth. If we reach our target pledge of $400,000, we will make the database freely available to all educational and academic institutions for a year. In the following year, we will ask each institution which has used the file in the previous year to pledge according to their usage. We will keep the total pledge constant for three years.

I want to do this to establish ArchivesUSA quickly and to avoid large marketing expenditures. At current sales rates it will take me two to three years to reach this level of subscribership. There are also many historical societies, archives and individuals whom I cannot afford to sell to, because the cost of marketing to them is more than they are prepared to pay. These groups will not support the product, nor benefit from it.

The benefits to you of participating are many. This lets you be part of the largest consortium ever. Over 50,000 libraries will be paying an average of $4 each. And the administrative hassle is little harder than an ordinary purchase. Not least, this will establish a precedent for future products.

You can participate as follows: take a look at ArchivesUSA at: http://testdrive.chadwyck.com/ or sign up for a trial. If you like what you see, you can pledge any sum you feel is appropriate by sending an e-mail to archivesusa@chadwyck.com. On April 30th, 1998 we will total the pledges. If we meet our goal, we will make ArchivesUSA free to all academic and educational institutions in the United States. If you have purchased, or if you purchase between now and the deadline, your money will automatically be contributed towards our goal. Details of the offer can be found on our Website at http://www.chadwyck.com.

As of February 5th we have approximately $125,000 towards our goal. This is thanks to the generosity of the states of Texas, Georgia, Ohio, New York, and Indiana. There are additional verbal commitments for at least another $50,000. Thanks to Katina for donating this page. This will help get the message out.

The Web has challenged us to think in different ways. If this model proves effective, it will set a precedent. The precedent will bring many more products to more patrons at a significantly lower cost. I hope this -- and the excellence of the product -- will lead you to participate.

Sincerely,

Stephen Rhoad-Tutt
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