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Online Auction Services Orders: An Order Librarian's Reflections on OLAS

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If this happens, it can be taken as a sign that their own aggregation strategies are working! Publisher-based aggregation strategies face a challenge. They cannot afford to become isolated islands. They will only be successful in the long run if they are seen to interoperate efficiently with other Web services: which must include other and rival aggregation strategies. It will be interesting to see how this situation evolves.

**Limitations of Aggregation**

Aggregation helps the librarian and end-user directly through accelerating a process of standardisation in the provision of electronic resources; and indirectly through economies of scale that encourage the publisher and the aggregator to add more content to the service. But there are some potential dangers. By and large librarians are not overly concerned by the thought that aggregators are to some extent invading the traditional function of the librarian (perhaps they are simply pleased that some aspects of their traditional function can be outsourced). But librarians are very wary of becoming hostage to a quasi-monopoly supplier who may be tempted to increase subscription prices once a significant market has been established. The scientific serials market is a particularly painful precedent or warning. University librarians are particularly sensitive to this possible development.

From the end-users and the librarian’s point of view one of the most important safeguards here is the insistence that, wherever possible, aggregators and other information suppliers should be encouraged and required to design services which are not “closed content boxes.” If the advantages of aggregation are to be achieved there may inevitably need to be a degree of concentration in each particular information field, but the competitive situation will remain healthy if the suppliers are required to develop and sustain models of co-operation and interoperability. The CrossRefer initiative in the ejournals field is an important example of what can be done. This has been a sensible and efficient (albeit partial) solution to an obvious need: that users should be able to seamlessly navigate between electronic citations in different journals.

As an aggregator of reference material one is especially alive to the importance of avoiding “closed content boxes.” There are reasons for thinking that reference works are especially unsuited to being delivered to users in closed aggregations. The reasons for this flow from two of the defining features of “reference” titles:

- Reference works tend to be episodically consulted rather than read from cover to cover (incidentally this is the reason that reference works are not well-suited to eBook formats of the PDF or Adobe Acrobat type).
- Reference works tend to be consulted whilst users are engaged with other (often “non-reference”) library resources.

If we put these two points together we might say: reference works are consulted episodically and these episodes are punctuated by moments when other works are the focus of the user’s attention.

Reference books tend to be consulted or browsed or referred to when a user is engaged with other material (primary resources or secondary resources, ie periodicals or textbooks etc). Reference resources are needed to help us understand and navigate the electronic library and they are only truly useful and valuable if they can be immediately available as and when they are relevant. This puts a great deal of responsibility on the librarian and the aggregator to ensure that reference resources are well-integrated with other resources in the electronic library. Having spent a lot of time atRefer figuring out a consistent way of developing a relevance linking framework for reference material, we now feel that the big challenge we face as a reference aggregator is this: it is not enough for the interlinked reference resource to be available in the electronic library. It needs to be immediately available to the reader in the most intelligent, relevant and discriminate form. It needs to be available through the appropriate Web linkage services. When a student reader is learning about the Punic Wars, they should be able instantly to “click through” to reference items about Hannibal, Carthage, Scipio and to historical maps of the battle of Cannae. When a Ph.D. is looking at an abstract of an article titled “Effects of intrapartum zidovudine therapy on fetal heart rate parameters in women with human immunodeficiency virus infection” she should be able to select from a dozen of the most relevant entries with a bearing on this publication: a definition of HIV, and of fetal heart rate, a short overview of the toxicity of zidovudine, etc. Making this happen may not be easy, but it should be doable.

In conclusion: aggregation helps. But it is a first step. Having aggregated resources into a convenient Web service it is important that these Web services are mobilised to become as useful as possible for their users and consumers. Libraries and librarians will play a vital part in this. If this is right, we conclude that eLibraries should be libraries without walls in a double sense:

- The eLibrary loses its walls because users can consult the library from any place/time, provided they have a Web connection and authorisation to use the resource.
- The eLibrary will also inevitably dissolve some of the internal walls which keep content in closed content boxes. The constituent services of an electronic library necessitate inter-connection and interoperability.

The library without walls should become a library that encourages the maximum deployment of the resources it provides, but no longer contains — since the walls have come down.

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**Online Auction Services Orders: An Order Librarian’s Reflections on OLAS**

By Nick J. Vincelli (Order Librarian, Davis Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC 27514-8890; Phone: 919-962-1120; Fax: 919-962-4450) <vincelli@email.unc.edu> www.lib.unc.edu/

Beginning in October 2000, the UNC-Chapel Hill Academic Affairs Library began acquiring material sold through eBay.com auctions. Although the Library had acquired material through auctions in the past (through auction houses such as Sotheby’s and Christie’s), obtaining material from eBay.com established a precedent for the Library, engendering a new workflow that was eventually named Online Auction Services (OLAS). As the Academic Affairs Library’s Order Librarian, I registered with eBay.com, often placed the bids (under guidance from the selectors) and coordinated the creation of the firm order record, payment to the seller and receipt of the selected item. OLAS has proven a challenging, rewarding, fascinating and sometimes frustrating experience for me and other staff members. This article will provide a narrative of our experience with OLAS, as well as a description of the guidelines we developed to ensure bibliographic accuracy.

**OLAS**

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days to make arrangements with the seller),
the new workflow became somewhat routine,
though extraneous to the larger firm order operation.

A breakthrough in the process occurred
in December 2000, when I indirectly prepaid
a seller through PayPal. Many eBay
sellers are, in fact, set up to accept payments
through PayPal or BidPay—the
former's Website announces that it's "The
way to receive and send money online" and
the latter's Website states its more specific focus
in allowing its users to "pay for your auction
by money order," after receiving approval
from the Director of Financial Planning and
Administrative Services, I registered with
PayPal and completed an online form
which resulted in paying the seller. While
I'm not completely clear on how this works,
PayPal (according to its Website) only
requires that the buyer enter the seller's email
address and the amount—"The recipient gets
an email that says 'You've Got Cash!'...[they]
can then collect their money by clicking a link in the email. Relieved that
I could finally transcend the classical prepayment
process, I was hopeful that I could now
expedite and simplify the OLAS workflow.
Alas, my sense of triumph was deflated during
a subsequent OLAS transaction (resulting
in the acquisition of a medal from the 1939
New York World's Fair) when I
discovered that the seller could not accept a payment
through PayPal. Once again, I was
forced to revert to the classical prepayment
process—and the seller was eventually
prepaid with a check. In the next two eBay
orders/transactions, the sellers did accept
PayPal payments, so my hopes of using
PayPal to pay most sellers were renewed. But
I was disappointed when I hit a new snag—one that required almost Herculean efforts to overcome. In the course of trying to
pay for a photo of "Chang & Eng Siamese Twins P.T.
Barnum," PayPal informed me that I reached
a $250 limit. This surprised me in spite of
the fact that the fine print of the User Agreement
stated, "Unverified users are limited to
$250 of spending until they confirm an email
address and bank account"—a minor detail
that I glossed over in my zealous haste to set
up an account with PayPal. In order to raise
this "spending limit," I was instructed to "add
bank account information—i.e., bank name,
account type, bank routing number, checking/savings account, etc. Baffled by this new
and annoying obstacle, I used BidPay to pay
the seller (in spite of the $10 fee) and then
consulted with the Director of Financial Planning
and Administrative Services. She in turn
referred me to the Purchasing Card Admin-
istrator. I contacted her, inquiring if the bank
who issued the card could possibly relay this
bank account information (so I could thereby
fulfill the "verification" requirement and raise
the spending limit). I voiced my skepticism
that this could be done because it would be
information regarding a specific individual
account—but I hoped that I would receive a
response that would allow me to raise the limit
and unite my hands. The reply I received was
both unexpected and disconcerting. She
reported that, according to the Director of
Internal Audit, "PayPal is a service that
we cannot use with this vendor." Moreover,
"we cannot pay for services on the purchasing [state-issued Visa] card." I
was stunned by this because I did not regard
PayPal as a service (in the sense of an agency
that provides a non-physical product), but as
a vendor (albeit, a virtual one) we paid to
purchase material for the collection (in much
the same manner that we would pay other vendors to purchase the requested material
directly from the publisher, distributor or pro-
ducer and supply it to the Library). The
prohibition, of course, also extended to
BidPay and essentially resulted in a
moratorium on OLAS orders until it could
be resolved.

Months later, the Director of Financial Planning and Administrative Services
obtained approval from the Director of Internal Audit for using the state-issued Visa to
pay these third-party "services" after issuing
a justification for "the utilization of these
Websites." This development signified a
pivotal point in the OLAS process. The
Director of Financial Planning and Administrative Services issued a policy statement and
procedures for OLAS transactions. The new
policy shifted the responsibility of the actual
bidding to the selectors and made the excel-
 lent point that "Since the nature of such pur-
chases fall outside the main business stream
employed by Acquisitions for obtaining li-
brary materials, the standard procedures used
to purchase most materials are not appropri-
ate for on-line auction purchases and create
inefficiencies." The objective of the new
procedures was to "accomplish two goals":
assigning "the various tasks/responsibilities
required to participate in and complete such
purchases assigned to the appropriate depart-
ments" and "maintaining internal controls at
a level that will satisfy audit standards." Se-
lectors were "given the authority to initiate
such purchases and to handle the bidding
process [in accordance with the procedures], ...In
order to provide as much flexibility in us-
ing this process as possible..." In other
words, the selectors were now the design-
ated bidders.

I supplemented these procedures with in-
ternal guidelines designed to clarify details
of the workflow. It seemed that this internal
documentation was important because the
Searching Specialist was assigned to serve
as my backup (in the event that I was not avail-
able to coordinate the firm order placement
after the auction closed). Also, the selectors
might benefit from clarification of their roles
and the steps in the process. In a nutshell,
the internal documentation summarized the
following sequence: the selector identifies the
item in OLAS, decides on the maximum bid,
notifies the Order Librarian and Searching
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Specialist (who then works out the payment, order replacement and shipping logistics).

At that point, it appeared that the OLAS gods were smiling on us—long overdue smile. PayPal's "Initial Spending Limit" fortuitously and mysteriously vanished—or, to be more accurate, was raised—when I logged into my account in August 2001 (I concluded from this that the limit is apparently cyclical, though I was initially given the impression that it was permanent). And, in one transaction (to my pleasant surprise) the selector persuaded the seller to ship us the item prior to receiving payment, so I could bypass both PayPal and BidPay (the latter has a smaller limit of $500 per item) as well as the classical prepayment process. The OLAS gods did not smile on us, however, when I attempted (on behalf of the Music Library) to place a bid for a manuscript autographed by Robert Schumann that was being auctioned on Sotheby's.com. After completing the basic registration process, I discovered that I needed to complete a "signature lot registration application" (apparently, a separate and special registration process) and furnish a letter of reference from a financial institution. We considered the option of having an agent place the bid for us, but then decided not to proceed with the bid after learning that we did not have enough money in the selected fund to purchase the manuscript. Incidentally, Sotheby's Website has since apparently merged with eBay (the new URL is http://sothebys.ebay.com/). This online partnership is described as a "joint online destination."

Many of the frustrations we experienced with OLAS have resulted from imposing the standard firm order placement, receipt and payment procedures (established, in many respects, to satisfy stringent auditing requirements) on the dynamic, 24/7 realm of online auctions where buyers and sellers have three days (after the auction closes) to work out the payment/shipping logistics, and sellers almost always expect to be promptly paid in advance. Fortunately—and thanks to the efforts of our Director of Financial Planning and Administrative Services—we were finally granted permission to use third-party online organizations such as PayPal (which was recently acquired by eBay) to pay the sellers under certain circumstances. The OLAS policy and procedures evolved in a trial-and-error process, as a result of consulting with various departments and trying to conform to university procedures.

While much attention has justifiably been focused on electronic resources, there appears to be a dearth of literature and discussion on the challenges faced by a library trying to purchase material won on an online auction such as eBay. Given the great variety of rare material offered in online auctions and the needs of special collections to acquire these esoteric items, I think more focus on OLAS is called for and hope this article might be useful to other acquisitions professionals and paraprofessionals preparing to take the plunge into OLAS.

Other acquisitions librarians and paraprofessionals planning to take this plunge would be well-advised to work out the procedures in advance, and clearly define the roles of all relevant parties. Based on our experience (which may or may not be applicable in other institutions), I can outline the following basic steps:

- Selector identifies item for the collection and places bid (or requests that acquisitions staff place the bid) and notifies acquisitions staff member responsible for coordinating OLAS orders
- Selector forwards any email notification from Online Auction Service regarding status of bid—especially, after auction's close—and indicates fund to use
- Acquisitions staff member contacts OLAS seller and negotiates payment logistics (stating preference to receive the item with an invoice, but not expecting seller's agreement to supply in this manner)
- Acquisitions staff member creates an order record in the automated acquisitions (or integrated) system to encumber funds and to provide bibliographic control
- If prepayment is necessary, Acquisitions staff member opts to prepay with a library-issued credit card if seller is willing and able to accept a direct credit card payment
- If the seller is not willing and able to accept a direct credit card payment, Acquisitions will use PayPal or BidPay to indirectly pay seller (if this is an acceptable option for all concerned), or prepay seller with a check
- Acquisitions staff member conveys purchase order number and ship-to address to the seller and requests receipt and/or packing slip indicating order number with the material

Finally, I urge you to determine if using PayPal or BidPay to indirectly pay sellers are acceptable options for your institution prior to your first transaction. These Websites are valuable and reliable resources—if you are permitted to utilize them. Good luck with OLAS! 🌟

Digital Reference: A New Library Paradigm or the Emperor's New Clothes

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Every so often the library profession loses its head over some peripheral issue and goes bonkers, often suggesting that current collection development practices have to be revamped, overhauled or possibly scrapped. It is like that now, if you have been following some of the profession's fascination with digital reference service. The term "digital reference service" isn't easy to define, but it can best be understood as reference in "which people submit their questions and have them answered by a library staff member through some electronic means (email, chat, Web forms, etc.), not in person or over the phone."

The champions of this new form of virtual reference aren't shy about their new-fangled alternative, nor are they about to downplay the magnitude of the changes that they fancy are upon us. The more rhetorical among them argue that reference, as we know it, is about to change forever. They insist that the user culture has altered drastically. Fiber optics, the Internet, and patron expectations have overturned everything. In fact, the new way of approaching things is so fundamentally different from the old that reference librarians will have to transform their role radically. The new revolution will mean altered codes of conduct and altered modes of op-

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