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On the Street: A Survey of ATG Subscribers - Do You Prefer Paperbacks or Clothbacks When Both Are Available?

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On the Street

A Survey of ATG Subscribers: Do You Buy Paperbacks Rather Than Clothbacks When Both Are Available?

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As library budgets become even more restrictive librarians are looking at a variety of ways to stretch their materials budgets and extend their buying power. Some librarians are buying paperbacks instead of clothbound materials; and, others, are buying vendor or publisher's "pre-bound" material.

Your investigators asked twenty-five librarians about their selection policies regarding any changes in their buying policies as concerns the purchase of paperbacks instead of hardbacks, and, if they choose to buy paper rather than cloth, what factors go into their decision-making process.

The answer to the first question: "Does your library ever buy paperbacks instead of hardcover books when both are available?" was an overwhelming eighteen "yes" answers to seven "no" answers. The "no" answers were modified in a variety of ways. For example: "If by paperback you mean the mass market variety, then no we do not buy these. If you refer to 'trade' editions, we normally purchase these only when the hardcover version is not available," and "We only buy paper when that is the only way we can get the book." In several cases the decision to buy paper rather than hardcover was left to the selectors. One library answered, "yes, we buy paper because circulation of paperbacks is limited." That same library buys most of their general literature books in paper too. Another librarian thinks that we are seeing a change in the quality of binding of cloth materials — cheaper text block attachments, lighter boards, and "fake" cloth covers — and that all these changes make the purchase of paper more appealing. This library then sends paperbacks out for commercial binding, or, as in the case of one public library, they use a plastic, protective covering that they apply themselves. Several librarians said that they have better quality control of the paperbound product if they handle the process in their preservation office or department.

Purchasing paperbacks on approval plans brought a more balanced response of eleven "yes" answers to fourteen "no" answers. Several librarians mentioned the **Blackwell** and **Yankee** "Preferred Paper Programs" because those plans supply paperbacks automatically when there is a great difference in cost between paper and hardcover. Another librarian commented that they had a small binding budget, and "that paperbacks are not always suitable." Still another librarian said, "Vendors send the hardcover unless the paperback is the first format is-

sued or the only format available." It seems that more than one library is considering buying paperbacks on approval plan and, especially, if they are in a university press plan.

The decision-making process question brought some interesting responses some of which are listed as follows:

"We buy hardcover . . .

". . . unless the price difference is excessive, as in the \$40-\$100 range,"

". . . when hardcover is not available,"

". . . depending on availability — we buy hardcover when cloth is not available."

". . . only when there is a difference in price,"

". . . depending on project use and cost,"

". . . depending on subject, use, and price,"

". . . depending on price, availability (in stock vs. back order), added copies needed to supplement hardcopy edition, and shelflife expectancy."

"The primary consideration is the price differential. We currently use \$25 . . . We are also concerned about preservation issues, staff time in bindery preparation, delay in getting the material to user, etc."

One surveyor reported that five out of six responses said cost was a factor. Another surveyor received the following answers: paperbacks are purchased if: "books do not have extensive use, or . . . a short shelf life;" and "only if the work is expected to receive heavy use."

When it came to whether or not libraries prebind paperbacks before shelving, the answers entered into a third category: eight "yes" answers; four "no" answers; twelve "sometimes" answers, and one "no response." The overwhelming response seems to be "sometimes," with a variety of reasons given:

"We bind softbacks . . .

". . . for juvenile books and some adult books."

". . . only if we determine it will have high usage."

". . . of all genealogical titles."

". . . our Preservation Department decides based on quality of binding, paper, and other factors."

". . . in certain high use areas, such as nursing."

". . . not necessarily."

". . . sometimes."

". . . individual selectors make the decision based on worth to collection, etc."

The final question dealt with whether or not the libraries involved in the survey used a publisher's binding program; and, if they do, are they satisfied with that program. The replies were a resounding twenty-one "no" answers, with another three librarians

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saying they used vendor programs (and that they were satisfied), and with one librarian saying they used a publisher's program and that they were satisfied with that program. Other interesting answers included: "Use a vendor's program because of the low cost;" "We only use plastic covers that we apply ourselves;" "We adhere to LBI Standards so we use a commercial binder that is an LBI Member;" "We did this at one time, but not now." Five of the twenty-one "no" answers also added that they use a commercial binding program for paperbacks. It will be interesting to see in these days of increased interest in "outsourcing," whether or not more libraries will turn some, or more, of their binding budgets towards the economical vendor's prebinding programs — either by choice or necessity.

One librarian raised the interesting issue that there seems to be a move towards producing more inexpensively bound products — probably because of a cost savings, and that in some cases those materials are either being damaged in the binding process or in the shipping process. As a result they and their staff members are spending more time in returning books, and consulting with dealers and publishers, etc. about these problems.

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We enjoyed editing this column and we all hope you will enjoy reading it and, hopefully, find some of the issues thought-provoking or at least interesting. If you would like to help us call folks or contribute ideas and/or questions for a future survey, please contact one of the editors: **Kathy Miraglia**; **Barbara Dean** (Fax: 703-202-3135, Phone: 703-222-3139, E-Mail: bdean@leo.vsla.edu); **Eamon T. Fennessy** (Fax or phone: 508-927-9936); **Anne Jennings** (Fax: 803-722-2266, Phone: 803-720-4486, E-mail: jenningsa@cofc.edu) THANKS! 

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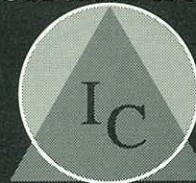
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