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Biz of Acq-Crossing the Great Divide between Acquisitions and Collections: Selectors Order Online

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Biz of Acq —

Crossing the Great Divide between Acquisitions and Collections: Selectors Order Online

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Column Editors Note: Web-based vendor services are transforming, and improving, many aspects of library acquisitions and collection development work. Online ordering functions present rich possibilities for improving the speed and efficiency of monograph selection, as well as for allowing selectors more control. Yet decentralized ordering also presents potential complexities, no matter the size of the library. In this months column, **Lynda Fuller Clendenning** *describes how Web-based ordering has enhanced acquisitions and collection development at the* **University of Virginia Library***, and how librarians there have addressed some potential complications of decentralized acquisitions. The Apr. 2000 Business of Acquisitions column by* **Mary H. Kay***, entitled "Web-based Ordering for Libraries", unintentionally failed to mention two wholesalers that provide web-based ordering services:*

In their 1996 article, "Sleeping with the Enemy: The Love/Hate Relationship between Acquisitions and Collection Development," **Karen** and **Douglas Cargille** present the different perspectives and goals of acquisitions staff and collection development librarians in the process that unites them: building library collections.[1] While both groups have generally agreed that selectors are responsible for the selection of items to be added to library collections, the actual placement of the order with a specific vendor has generally been acknowledged to be an acquisitions prerogative. Karen Cargille, an acquisitions librarian, addresses the desire of selectors to place orders directly and the stiff defense they are likely to encounter from acquisitions staff:

There are increasing demands from some selectors who would like to get into the order database and place orders directly. Typically, Acquisitions will hold tight to their order database and will not welcome intrusions by others.[2]

Driven by new technologies, the divisions between collection development and acquisitions may be narrowing, but many selectors and most acquisitions staff may still experience the great divide between them on a daily basis. This article examines life after selectors get into the order database and place orders directly at the University of Virginia Library and the resultant benefit to library users.[3]

Like most academic libraries, the University of Virginia Library's priorities include the goal of acquiring information and materials when and where users want it. In order to meet this goal, all units in the library have been examining their processing procedures to find ways to improve performance in the delivery of scholarly information to users. In 1998, library collection managers studied ways to expedite delivery of approval books to users. As a result of these studies, they asked YBP, the library's US approval vendor, to supply approval notification slips solely in electronic form, discontinuing the long practice of shipping printed slips to Virginia each week. Once the technical infrastructure was in place, subject librarians (i.e., selectors) began to access approval notification slips online in YBPs GOBI order database where electronic slips are posted each Wednesday. Though GOBI offers a select

mode for selectors and an order mode for acquisitions staff, collections and acquisitions managers agreed to collapse those functions into a single process. Selectors both select and order by entering their initials and one of their fund codes in local order fields in the order mode. Two years later, both subject librarians and acquisitions staff find direct selector ordering so satisfactory that neither group could imagine returning to the days when selectors forwarded paper notification slips to acquisitions staff to be ordered. Blackwells Book Services also offers an online approval slip service, Collection Manager, with similar capabilities.[4]

This article will review the process that led to subject librarians ordering directly in the vendor order database and answer some of the questions that any collection manager or acquisitions librarian might ask, such as why did collection managers move to online approval slips review exclusively and how have selectors and acquisitions staff overcome the predictable anxieties of duplicating orders, selecting the incorrect title, and entering inaccurate order information?

Why Move To Online Approval Slip Review?

When subject librarians reviewed approval titles printed on paper slips, collection managers found that selectors held slips for various lengths of time before forwarding them to acquisitions to be ordered. By the time an order was actually processed for the title in the YBP order database, the YBP inventory was often depleted making re-order from the publisher necessary and causing yet another delay in getting the title on library shelves. The additional one or two month delay became untenable when Amazon.com appeared on the scene and could deliver the same book to users within 2-3 days. Collection and acquisitions managers realized that placing an order for a book while it was still available in the YBP inventory was a critical factor in reducing the number of days from order to shelf. The library now focuses on ordering approval titles immediately after the title is profiled and measures vendor/library performance by the number of days between the profiling of a title and its availability to users. When subject librarians review and order slips online, the library achieves an incredible improvement in order fulfillment and delivery times: book orders now arrive within weeks of the approval handling instead of months after the book is profiled.

Before And After Online Slip Review/Direct Orders

It is instructive to look at delivery performance first from the date a title is ordered (the old model of performance), then to measure delivery performance from the date the

title was profiled (our new model of performance).

Before Online Ordering (a typical case)

On April 13, 1998, ninety-four University of Virginia approval slip orders were mailed to YBP where they were manually entered in the YBP order database. Of the ninety-four orders, YBP staff invoiced 63% of the titles within one week; 84% of the titles within two weeks; 93% of the titles within one month; and 100% of the titles within 3-5 months.

The actual book shipments typically arrived in the acquisitions department one week after being invoiced, and acquisitions staff generally received items the following week. Once received, items were forwarded to cataloging and physical processing. Thus, another two to three weeks passed before users had access to items ordered on approval plans. In the days when receiving a book ordered from a US vendor within thirty days was judged to be excellent performance, acquisitions received most of the items ordered on April 13 within thirty days of the library's ordering the title. But the new component of performance review now focuses on how long it takes subject librarians to order a title after it is profiled. Looking again at the 94 items ordered, collection managers found that only 6% of the titles were ordered within one month of its being profiled; 48% were ordered within two months of profile; 90% within three months; and 100% within five months of being profiled.

After Direct Selector Online Ordering (a typical case)

When selectors began reviewing approval slips online and placing orders directly in the YBP order database, the library experienced a dramatic reduction in book delivery times.

Subject librarians ordered forty-eight items from online slips posted on November 11, 1998, within the following timeframes: 94% within three days; and 100% within eight days. YBP invoiced the forty-eight items as follows: 89% within one week; and 100% within two weeks.

Within two weeks of the invoice date, books now arrive in the library shelf-ready. (YBP processing adds one week and shipping another.) In the online slip review and order environment, it is now possible for an item to be profiled on GOBI and to be on a library's shelf ready for a user to check out in three to four weeks. Online order delivery times are within weeks of a title being profiled, not months. This is a vast improvement over the two to six months it once took a new item to reach a user from the time that it was published.

How Are Selector Online Orders Managed In Acquisitions?

Post order processing of YBP orders allows acquisitions staff to review each order placed online by a subject librarian. Order confirmation records (brief Marc-formatted records) are loaded into the library catalog each day via an in-house systems program that creates title and order records from the information selectors add to the YBP online order. Acquisitions order staff review the daily confirmation orders. At this point, an order is already in the vendor's database, yet order staff have time to resolve any order problems before the order is completely processed by the vendor. Selectors may push the order tab more than once, but duplicates are easily cancelled the next day. (Order staff report that this happens rarely.) Pre-order searching is replaced with post-order searching when it does not delay the placement of the order itself. Order records are now available to users who may wish to place holds on them the day after the selector enters the order in the YBP order database.

How Does The Item Get On The Shelf Quickly?

When the item ordered is shipped, YBP creates a file of bibliographic records which order staff import the week of the shipment in a batch file. In the bibload program, the upgraded CIP copy record overlays the existing order title records and creates an item record that matches the barcode item ID on the shelf ready item. Monograph acquisitions staff receive the items and catalog those with full DLC copy. Items are then ready to be shelved in the various University of Virginia libraries within days of arriving in the acquisitions department.

Direct selector ordering is at the center of the library's efforts to reduce the time it takes for a new publication to be ordered, cataloged, processed and shelved. It is the activity that has the greatest impact on delivery times and on the amount of staff time devoted to order management. As a result of online ordering, fewer claims are placed for items faculty see in publisher catalogs and announcements. The time saved in processing orders has allowed order staff to spend more time on labor-intensive customized services for users such as Purchase Express (rush orders for any item requested by a user) and the New York Times Book Review program which gives users access to reviewed items the week of the review.[5] One of the most effective ways collections and acquisitions staff meet the library's priorities for providing the information faculty and student library users need when they need it is for books to be on the library shelves when a user searches for it. Through online ordering, both groups achieve the goals they share in common, develop the mutual respect they desire, and build the kinds of collegial relationships that benefit users. When the focus is users, the great divide between subject librarians and acquisitions staff disappears. 🌲

Endnotes

1 Douglas Cargille and Karen Cargille, "Sleeping with the Enemy: The Love/Hate Relationship between Acquisitions and Collection Development," *Library Acquisitions: Practice & Theory*, 20:1 (1996), pp.41-47.

2. Ibid.,p. 43.

3. University of Virginia Library includes twelve libraries with the exception of the business, health sciences and law professional school libraries. All four libraries collectively comprise the University of Virginia Libraries. This article refers specifically to University of Virginia Library collections and acquisitions activities.

4. For more information on vendor online ordering, see Blackwells Website at www.blackwell.com and the YBP Website at www.ypb.com. See an evaluation of vendor Web-based ordering system in Anne Heller and Elizabeth Lorenzen article, "Online Ordering: Making Its Mark," *Library Journal*, (Sept. 1, 1999) 124 (14), p. 153. Also, see this column in *ATG* (Sept. 1998) where Rob Withers addressed Online Vendor Services.

5. See Lynda Fuller Clendenning. "Just In Time Acquisitions: The Case of the *New York Times Book Review*," *ATG* (Dec./Jan., 1997/98).

Issues in Vendor/Library Relations

Johannes Gutenberg and the Twenty-First Century

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I think that **Johannes Gutenberg** went to the grave without knowing what a fortunate man he'd been to have lived, worked, and invented in the 15th century, rather than in our own, and so able to develop movable type and change the world without need of a vision statement, probably without much of a marketing plan, and even with no statement of values.

He did it all without the benefit of focus groups, or of discussion groups. Websites and listservs were far into the future. He probably did do FAQs, but he did them orally, as needed.

Mailing lists, direct mail, space ads, color brochures, and packets full of literature all later became necessities, thanks to his invention, but he had no need of them himself. Press releases and newspaper feature stories, also, were unnecessary.

Gutenberg could afford to skip the strategic alliances and didn't have to locate customers who would partner with him, since he needed no beta sites.

If Gutenberg had lived today, he would have had to pin on his yellow exhibitor's badge, and attend ALA. And in 1999, there's no doubt he would even have had to register for a pre-conference, maybe even speak at one, and somebody would have had to explain to poor Gutenberg what that meant.

All of this probably would have discouraged him and Gutenberg might have burned his press, opened up a high-end scriptorium instead, muttering, "Let's just forget about the whole idea."

Actually, Gutenberg must have been quite a salesman of a kind, because he had to attract the best craftsmen to his shop and had to raise lots of capital in support of his idea. He went into debt past a million of today's dollars in order to produce his famous Bible in the 1450s. But he attended to the demands of invention and printing better than he did to matters of business. Gutenberg delivered the functionality, in today's terms, but he went broke doing so, and it was others who finally brought his invention to market.

Today, in the realm of e-books, we have the marketing end of it down pretty well; but we're still working on the functionality. Even the word "e-book" itself is a little odd, since what about them are like a book? Not all that much, if you think about it. The text probably starts out the same, and the original author is the same, and probably the title; past that, parallels get harder to find. We use the word "book" as a convenience, since we haven't thought of a better one.

Potential users of e-books are by and large taking a cautious, I'm-in-no-hurry, type of attitude. That stance is the one that library book vendors, at least until now, also have taken. The vendors, by the way, have also been extremely busy and somewhat distracted, maybe to a degree more than wise, by the need to deal with the 50,000+ new printed books published annually in the United States.

There also are plenty of electronic texts, or e-books, out there. But, in considering the possible role of the traditional book vendor in the dissemination of e-books, what has not yet happened is the ongoing demand for