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Biz of Acq-Alibris and 21 North Main: Breaking New Ground in the Search for O.P. Books

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periodically. **Jill O'Neill**, director of Planning & Communication for **NFAIS**, points out that, "The activities of selection, collection development and management arose, at least in part, from the recognition by information professionals that not all information retains a constant value to a community of users over time."²⁰

The technical issues, while voluminous, aren't nearly as daunting. And they basically boil down to the need for large, continual funding for technology. With today's rate of technical evolution, it's possible that media will survive longer than the technology required to access it. A means of preserving both the content and the means to access it are critical to digital archiving.²¹ At that point, **Bruce** says, "The technological aspects of archiving can be taken care of by the libraries [or archiving bodies], be it preservation—retaining the original technology that the content was accessed by; emulation—emulating the technology that was originally used to access the content; or migration—moving the content to an upgraded piece of technology."²²

"If an archive is to be trusted, it will have to have a reasonable plan for generating the

resources necessary to cover the costs of regular and continuing migration of software, systems, and data that is going to be necessary to insure long-term accessibility," says **Heterick**.²³

With digital archives, the access infrastructure is well defined and growing on its own. However, the digital archives have to grapple with how to provide the means for people to access the content of the archive on a continuing basis even as the technologies change. And there is the pervasive funding issue lurking underneath this. "The practice cannot be considered cost-effective," says **O'Neill**, "if there is no balance achieved between the expense of retaining the information and the value derived by the use of the information. Not surprisingly, the value and use of an archive will be closely tied to the ease of extracting information from that archive."²⁴ **Heterick's** thoughts follow a similar path as he points out that, "If we're going to promote trusted archives, then we must also have trusted access points that will take responsibility for maintaining the interfaces that will drive the use of the archives or repositories."²⁵

Now to When (imagination is a terrible thing to waste)

Where does this leave us? With a lot of work to do on what is probably one of

the biggest collaborative efforts in the information community to date.

Individual organizations or even small groups can't tackle this solo. Information is too cross-related and what one entity does affects others. **Toledano** agrees. "It's going to take serious collaboration amongst publishers, librarians, and other repository bodies to actually develop practical and effective options."

One of the benefits of this upheaval will be the creation of a process to deal with the "new." The history of archiving has seen some challenges. The digital part of that isn't an insurmountable obstacle. But it is a major hurdle in the archiving river of time.

The next occasion on which something completely new presents itself, we'll be able to look at the lessons learned addressing digital archiving issues and be able to apply them to clearing that next hurdle. It's also conceivable that the foundations laid with addressing digital archiving will be able to support all new archiving hurdles.

Part of what's being addressed is not just the specifics of digital archiving, but what should be explored when faced with a completely new archiving dilemma. 🐼

Biz of Acq — Alibris and 21 North Main: Breaking New Ground in the Search for O.P. Books

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by **Dennis K. Lambert** (Head, Collection Development and Management, Villanova University - Falvey Memorial Library, 800 Lancaster Ave., Villanova, PA 19085-1683) <dennis.lambert@villanova.edu>

Column Editor's Note: *In recent years, the out-of-print market has consistently borne happy tidings to acquisitions librarians. Fulfillment rates have leapt with the rise of Web-based mega-catalogs that aggregate thousands of book dealers' inventories. Now innovative vendors have further improved out-of-print acquisitions, by adopting the practices of Internet retailers. In this month's column, **Dennis Lambert**, Head of Collection Development and Management at Villanova University Libraries, profiles two new out-of-print vendors. Lambert finds that these used booksellers raise the bar of customer service standards, and give acquisitions librarians promising choices for out of print purchasing. — RR*

If you had suggested to me a few years ago that I could now use either of two easy-to-search Internet sites for out-of-print (o.p.) books, I would not have believed you. While I was aware of many improvements in o.p. searching, I still felt it was a highly problematic field. Now, with the arrival of **Alibris** and **21 North Main**, I am quite optimistic.

In addition to being able to locate many more academic books for my library, I have been able to solve all three personal requests made to me in the last six months. I was challenged to find a Spanish-language reader authored by a professor from Cleveland, an o.p. library science text, and a 1972 book of teaching materials for kindergartners. Using **21 North Main** and **Alibris**, I found not only all three of these books, but found them at

reasonable prices.

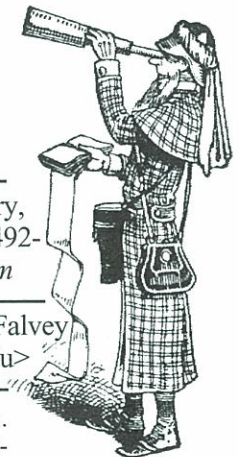
One was astonishingly cheap at \$7.50; the other two were \$24 and \$26, including shipping charges.

John Zubal calls the embracing of the Internet by o.p. dealers "The Revolution," noting that it began in 1994 with **Interloc**.¹ I was not aware until 2000 of the significant improvements in searchability, convenience, and service introduced by new competitors in a market that has known many years of uncertainty, frustration, and high prices.

The Continuing O.P. Problem

In the past, an o.p. report meant a library could entertain only modest expectations of acquiring that title. O.p. searching has been

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an ongoing problem for collection development and acquisitions librarians. The collection development librarian has been wary at times of even suggesting an attempt at getting an o.p. book, and the acquisitions librarian has grudgingly gone through the motions; both have rejoiced at modest success. The library literature contains a small, steady stream of articles describing the problems inherent in o.p. searching that highlight the opportunities, pitfalls, and continuing frustrations. **Christian Boissonnas** correctly asserts that o.p. searching is "an expensive and uncertain business."² Within **ALA**, the **ALCTS Out-of-Print Discussion Group** follows trends, and reports of their activities appear in the literature.³

Want lists used to be the most effective means for a library to communicate its needs to o.p. dealers. Because they require the amassing and rekeying of information over time, and advertising in *AB Bookman's Weekly*, want lists have been expensive to create.⁴ However, once generated, they have often produced good results, in the event they reached a large number of dealers with relevant stocks. Varied subject lists fared better than single-subject lists, because a greater number of dealers searched the former.⁵ Fulfillment rates from lists on average seemed to be about one-third.

While the arrival of the electronic book seems to offer the future promise of always having a copy available of many current titles, it seems unlikely that all retrospective titles will be offered in electronic format. Preservation librarians will continue to need print copies of books to replace those lost, damaged, or intentionally mutilated. Collection development and acquisitions librarians will continue to select and procure printed books to fill in retrospective gaps to meet the needs of users.

Compounding the contemporary o.p. problem are the shorter print runs of nearly all academic books, plus the taxing of inventories. Publishers consequently declare books out-of-print much faster than formerly.⁶

Clearly the methods we have used to search for o.p. books have improved over the years. Searching dealer catalogs was never very productive, since many items always were reported already sold. In the 1990s, as **Diane Black** has pointed out, acquisitions staff had Internet access to the inventories of hundreds of dealers. But problems such as non-acceptance of library purchase orders and the uncertain security of electronic commerce remained.⁷ In a recent informal survey of about thirty librarians, **Eamon Fennessy** discovered librarians have been using a variety of sites, with several reporting success rates of 50, 75, 80, and "perhaps 90%."⁸ While more systematic study of ful-

fillment rates may establish a new threshold of expectations, clearly the Internet has advanced us to new levels of success in o.p. searching.

Alibris and 21 North Main: A New Level of Service

Alibris (www.Alibris.com/library) and **21 North Main** (www.21northmain.com) offer a significant improvement in searching for o.p. books. What librarians and dealers seem to have needed all along was an intermediary capable of organizing the highly fragmented o.p. market with an easy to search site. But instead of one, we now have two. They clearly provide an efficient means for dealers to list their stock and for librarians to search for their needs. These middlemen have immensely simplified payment; librarians using the services pay **21 North Main** and **Alibris**, and those vendors in turn pay the dealers. While both companies mark up dealer prices to cover their operating costs and provide a return on investment, in general prices seem very reasonable.⁹

My focus here on two sites is not intended to imply that there are not a number of other sites for o.p. searching that may be useful. **Forbes** magazine, for example, likes **abebooks.com**, which allows you to contact dealers and haggle over prices.¹⁰ If high prices are encountered, it may be a good strategy to attempt comparison shopping on a site like **BookFinder** (www.bookfinder.com). Other competing sites include **AddALL** (www.addall.com), **BiblioFind** (www.bibliofind.com), and **half.com** (www.half.com). For foreign titles, there is the **International League of Antiquarian Booksellers** site (www.ilab-lila.com).

Alibris is the direct successor of **Interloc**. **Richard Weatherford** created **Alibris** in June 1998, implementing a business model that seeks to make it as easy to buy an o.p. book as it is to purchase a new one online from **Amazon** or **Barnes & Noble**.¹¹ **Martin Manley**, President and CEO of **Alibris**, provided additional insight into the early development of the company in an *Against the Grain* interview.¹² Substantial information about the company is also available on the homepage. Over 14 million books were listed as of December 2000.

21 North Main opened in April 2000, and now offers 17 million books as of March 2001. According to the extensive background information available on the homepage, company founder **Ken Dzugan's** vision was to create "the perfect used book marketplace." **Joe Mooney** is President and CEO.

Both companies market their services to libraries, recognizing the importance of the library sector of the total market. **Alibris** steers librarians to a separate page from that offered to individual customers. Both sites offer secure transactions, **21 North Main** recently having upgraded to provide total encryption from login

to logout. It is easy to establish an account on either site. Both allow you to search as a guest. Payment is made by credit card, and libraries can use purchase orders.

Both sites have basic and advanced search. In advanced search, you can search by author, title, publisher, date, and price. Search results can be sorted by date or price. If you do not find what you need, **Alibris** allows you to list your wants on "Book Fetch." **21 North Main** has a similar want listing service. I have listed a small number of wants on both sites, but none of these wants have been found to date.

Alibris employs a separate, experienced staff who market services directly to libraries. They have customer service available at a toll free number. Recently, agreements were

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Endnotes

1. John T. Zupal, "Selling Used and Antiquarian Books: Old Vagaries and New Certainties or Old Certainties and New Vagaries . . ." *Against the Grain*, 11:6 (Dec. 1999-Jan. 2000), 26-28.
2. Boissannas, "Out-of-Print Searching and Buying: BookQuest vs. Typed Lists," *Library Acquisitions: Practice & Theory*, 16:2 (Summer 1992), 103.
3. Rosanna M. O'Neill, "They Searched, They Located, They Acquired: Librarians Conquer the Out-of-Print Marketplace: A Report of the ALCTS Out-of-Print Discussion Group," *Library Collections, Acquisitions and Technical Services*, 23:1 (Spring 1999), 106-107; and Barbara K. Nelson, "Searching the Electronic Marketplace for Out-of-Print Books," *Library Acquisitions: Practice & Theory*, 20:2 (Summer 1996), 196-197.
4. Boissannas, op. cit., 103.
5. Mary Eldredge and William Luddington, "Comparison of Out-of-Print Searching Methods," *Library Acquisitions: Practice & Theory*, 17:4 (Winter 1993), 430.
6. Diane Black, "In Search of Out-of-Print Books: The Past, the Present, and the Future," *Georgia Library Quarterly*, 35:1 (Spring 1998), 11.
7. Ibid., 14-15.
8. Eamon T. Fennessy, "On the Street - Out of Print Searching on the World Wide Web," *Against the Grain*, 11:2 (April 1999), 62, 64.
9. For a discussion of why prices have fallen, see Zupal, op. cit., 28.
10. "New Ways to Find Old Books," *Forbes*, 165:12 (May 22, 2000), 164.
11. Weatherford, "Getting Ready: How Alibris is Positioning Itself to Offer Out-of-Print and Rare Books to Libraries," *Library Computing*, 18:2 (1999), 92-97.
12. Katina P. Strauch, "ATG Interviews Martin Manley," *Against the Grain*, 11:6 (Dec. 1999-Jan. 2000), 40, 42.
13. As this article was being finalized, 21 North Main suspended operations due to a breakdown in negotiations with their supplier. This suspension affected the electronic ordering system, while other site functions, like viewing order history, were still active. The March 28 status update indicated a determination to resume operations within three weeks.

Public Prayers — The Reverent Wishes and Desires of a Public Library Collection Development Librarian

by **Rodger Smith** (Collection Development Librarian, Charleston County Public Library) <smithr@ccpl.org>

It's spring and I too have been overtaken by a desire to clean, straighten, and organize. I'm responsible for all materials, all formats, all levels, all branches, at our library which serves 300,000 citizens, stretched along ninety miles of the Atlantic coast. From board books for the infant to large print for the seniors, from learn-to-read book and audio kits to GRE preparation cd-roms, from the World Almanac to the newest online database, it all passes through my door, leaving behind physical debris, confusion, chaos, and occasional despair. My office is a regular stop for staff looking for a good laugh, some comic relief. "Let's go look at Rodger's boxes. Let's go see if any of Rodger's piles have collapsed." Sometimes I can laugh along. Sometimes I just snarl politely. (We Southerners are always polite.)

I have to admit, however, that it's more than just sunshine and the scent of magnolias that has motivated me to get organized. Its time to plan next fiscal year's materials budget. July 1 is fast approaching and our administration expects to see some orderly plans for spending the \$2,000,000 allocated for materials. Most of the budget lines are easy calculations: an adjustment for inflation here, a minor readjustment of priorities there.

Over the past decade



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announced that allow **Blackwells** and **YBP** to provide books from **Alibris** directly to libraries. ISBN searching was recently introduced. Library customers can instruct **Alibris** to ship in batches of at least ten orders, thus saving shipping charges.

Alibris is distinct in that it has a company-owned inventory and directly ensures quality. **Alibris** stock is listed in the database as "usually ships in one business day." Books owned by dealers are first shipped to **Alibris**, where quality is checked, and then they are reshipped to the customer.

21 North Main relies on its dealers to heed their quality instructions. All books are

our materials budget has seen significant growth. Almost all budget lines have seen increases, even after adjustments for inflation. And while the percentage of our overall budget devoted to print materials has decreased to 77% this last year, even those lines have seen healthy increases. The lines for juvenile, young adult, and adult non-fiction have all received substantial increases.

The budget lines for audio-visual materials present more challenges. In the past year we have added both circulating DVD's and books on compact discs. I have bad dreams, not quite nightmares, about the future of all our a-v formats. Currently we have video users complaining about new feature films being available in DVD but not VHS. I worry that all our current format a-v collections will be made obsolete by Internet developments. Until then, I worry about the money! Where will we get the funds to support comprehensive spoken word collections in both audio-cassette and compact disc?

But it's the electronic resources line that causes me to turn to prayer. Last year we spent 8% of our total materials budget on online products and CD-ROMs. Next year it will be no more than 10%. How can budgeting and spending only \$160,000 to \$200,000 be so difficult? The process leaves me feeling as if I'm trapped in a game of blind man's bluff. I'm blindfolded and being taunted by our administration, the reference librarians, assorted vendors, and the occasional irate patron who finds her way to my door. Our administration wants a well-defined array of electronic resources that will demonstrate to the community our commitment to the future. They also want a fixed budget with no surprises. Our reference librarians want products that are easy to use and won't add to their sense of electronic overload and Internet fa-

shipped directly from dealers to customers. Their system seems to work well, and I have not encountered any poor quality books.

The Future

This has been a quick overview of the new possibilities in o.p. searching offered by two new competitors, **Alibris** and **21 North Main**.¹³ Part of the secret to their future success will be getting even more dealers' stocks listed. Most dealers currently list only part of their stocks online. Both companies are aware of the need to list more foreign language books, and are currently addressing that problem. We should wish both **21 North Main** and **Alibris** well. It would be good for libraries for these vendors to succeed. 🌱

figure. Vendors not only our money, but our precious TIME: time to listen when they call, time to set-up trials, time to communicate URLs, usernames and passwords, time to try to explain why I don't have the time to do it all. And our diverse patrons want to know why we can't offer ready access to the specific electronic products they want NOW.

So, as I organize my office, eliminate some debris, re-organize my piles, and draw up a product specific electronic resource budget, these are my prayers:

1 Vendors, please be consistent and upfront about your pricing. If you're offering introductory pricing, we need to know what the renewal cost will be. Please don't cut prices just to get us to sign up. An unexpected substantial price increase can result in a cancellation no matter how valuable the product.

2 Vendors, please make online trials as easy as possible. Please use short, simple, reliable URLs. Please use simple username and password access as often as possible. I have sixteen facilities with sixteen managers and lots of interested reference librarians to inform for every trial.

3 **Baker & Taylor, Ingram, Brodart,** and other vendors, please consider offering electronic products, as you do print and other media, in a convenient one-stop selection environment. I simply do not have the time to deal with so many separate vendors and publishers.

4 Administration, please realize that the electronic resource market is incredibly dynamic, with new technologies and products appearing every day. Committing every cent of our electronic budget the first of the fiscal year leaves us unable to respond to developments as the year progresses.

5 Reference librarians, please look beyond the homeless person demanding another 30 minutes of Internet chat and the irate entrepreneur desiring to print address labels for every business in the county. Help us develop an information strategy that effectively bridges traditional print sources and these new electronic sources.

6 Patrons, please be patient. This is all so new to us. And we simply do not have the resources to offer you every electronic resource available.

7 South Carolina State Legislature, please find the money to continue to fund **DISCUS**, which provides every citizen of the state with access to key **Gale, Grolier,** and **SIRS** databases through state college, school and public libraries. 🌱