

Purdue University
Purdue e-Pubs

Charleston Library Conference

Hosting a Library Vendor Week: A Better Way to Manage Site Visits?

Edward F. Lener
Virginia Tech, lener@vt.edu

Carola Blackwood
De Gruyter, Carola.Blackwood@degruyter.com

Author ORCID Identifier: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6352-5830>

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/charleston>



Part of the [Collection Development and Management Commons](#)

An indexed, print copy of the Proceedings is also available for purchase at:

<http://www.thepress.purdue.edu/series/charleston>.

You may also be interested in the new series, Charleston Insights in Library, Archival, and Information Sciences. Find out more at: <http://www.thepress.purdue.edu/series/charleston-insights-library-archival-and-information-sciences>.

Edward F. Lener and Carola Blackwood, "Hosting a Library Vendor Week: A Better Way to Manage Site Visits?" (2017). *Proceedings of the Charleston Library Conference*.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.5703/1288284316660>

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

Hosting a Library Vendor Week: A Better Way to Manage Site Visits?

Edward F. Lener, Virginia Tech

Carola Blackwood, De Gruyter

Abstract

Scheduling meetings between vendors and the appropriate library staff members is often a challenge, and the number of requests for site visits can quickly overwhelm any library calendar. The University Libraries at Virginia Tech recently held its first library vendor week in an attempt to address such concerns. Nearly two dozen vendors took part in the five-day event. This paper provides key lessons we learned during this experience and shares tips and strategies for libraries that may be interested in hosting their own multivendor event. With one perspective provided by the host library, and another from a vendor who took part, readers will learn from both sides about this uncommon approach to organizing vendor visits.

Background

This paper relates a new approach to library vendor site visits that was first tried in 2017 at the University Libraries at Virginia Tech. A total of 27 vendors took part in a weeklong event hosted by the library. Concentrating a large number of vendor visits into a short time frame like this offered several advantages but also posed logistical challenges. Two perspectives are offered here—one from the host library's point of view and the other from one of the vendors who participated in the event.

Virginia Tech's Perspective

Virginia Tech is a comprehensive research university that was founded in 1872 as a land grant institution. Enrollment is currently just over 33,000 FTE, and the university offers over 250 undergraduate and graduate degree programs. The University Libraries are a member of the Association of Research Libraries and the Center for Research Libraries. Virginia Tech is also a member of the VIVA library consortium within the Commonwealth of Virginia and has several other library-related affiliations and memberships at the regional and national level.

In the past site visits to our campus have often been initiated by library vendors. These could happen at almost any time of the year, and the dates proposed were often based on the vendor's other travel plans. While we tried to accommodate most such requests, the results were often less than ideal. For example, timing of visits often did not correspond to our fiscal year cycle and spending patterns. It could also be difficult to get participation from subject liaisons who had other commitments during busy periods of the academic year. Finally, we found that some vendors put a heavy focus on new sales, with little time or attention devoted to resources we had already acquired.

For 2017 we decided to try a different approach, with vendor visits concentrated during a single week. For this purpose we chose our Spring Break week. This meant that meeting rooms were readily available and that subject liaisons and others would have more free time to participate. Since our fiscal year ended in late June, having the vendors visit campus during early March also fit well with our timeline for expending remaining one-time funds.

The event was organized by the associate director for collection management with the assistance of a part-time staff member. We sought to be systematic in our communication approach with vendors starting with a save the date message several months in advance to alert vendors of our new approach. We used a Google form to collect responses to invitations and set up an informational website with details about the event. The website also had links to information on university initiatives and growth areas. We offered a mix of 50- and 75-minute time slots and tried to schedule around vendor availability and preferences, with longer time slots generally reserved for those vendors with a more complex product mix. For all of their sessions we specifically requested vendors to first review our existing products, second to share any available turnaway/denial statistics, and third to provide information on new products best targeted toward our needs. Vendors

were also asked to provide a digital copy of their presentation and any associated materials.

A total of 27 vendors participated in the weeklong event. We held all sessions in the library's multi-purpose room for the first three days and in the boardroom for the final two. A schedule of all events was widely shared in the library and across campus. Because many sessions were held back-to-back, there was a strict adherence to allotted times. A staff assistant greeted incoming vendors and helped facilitate the transition between sessions. There was also space outside the main meeting room for individual discussions to continue if needed.

While most of the sessions that week went very smoothly, especially for a first-time event, there were still several lessons we learned that will be applied in the future. For example, we learned that it was important to reconfirm key details with vendors, who did not always read the information we had provided in advance. We also found that most vendors wanted the longer time slots and that we often needed more than ten minutes between successive sessions. The larger meeting space used for the first few days of the event proved more conducive to moving people in and out quickly. One surprising and quite unanticipated finding was that we had some offers that were later retracted or repriced higher, so next time we will clearly emphasize the need for firm pricing on any offers presented to us.

Feedback on both sides was very positive during and after the event. Based on this input, we determined that a library doesn't really need a large committee or workgroup for such an event to be successful. We found the review of existing products particularly useful and turnaway statistics helped us to identify gaps in our collection. All vendor data were posted to a shared internal folder for access by the Collection Management unit. We also initiated several purchases afterwards based on what we learned during the vendor week.

Vendor Perspective—De Gruyter

De Gruyter is an independent publisher based in Berlin with offices worldwide. The company was founded in 1749 and publishes books, journals, databases, and other scholarly content. We have eight imprints as well as partnerships with 17 internationally renowned publishers and presses.

Annually we publish 900 journals, 1,300 new book titles, 50 databases, 16,000 articles per year, 500 open access book titles, and have about 40,000 books in archive. We have traditionally published heavily in the humanities, especially in classical and ancient Near Eastern studies, history, linguistics, and philosophy, as well as architecture. In the past five years we have focused more on STEM, with strong collections in chemistry, engineering, materials science, physics, and mathematics.

When we schedule university visits, we generally determine which client needs attention and we ask for a date and time, in the hopes that as many selectors and liaisons as possible are able to attend. The goal of such a meeting is to do an account review, discuss any outstanding technical issues, and put forth any new offers. Often there are conflicts with other activities and we only meet with some of the people we hope to see.

The Virginia Tech Vendor Week was a well-organized approach to seeing the key people at a designated time with a designated agenda and certain expectations for vendors fully outlined. This made preparation for the visit very simple for me and for the attendees.

Effective early December I knew the week the event would take place. In January I learned my specific time slot, which was confirmed in February. I was advised how to structure my presentation and what type of handouts to bring. One-half of the time was reserved for covering usage and product updates to existing resources, with the balance reviewing for new offerings and open discussion.

The day of the meeting was very smooth, as there were no surprises and everything went right on schedule. The meetings were on time, the key decision makers were present, interested subject selectors were in attendance, and all were invested in the information I had to share.

The main takeaway for me was that the planning worked as expected. The negotiations after the meetings went quicker than usual and were more focused. It was a well-thought-out way to handle the demand on selectors' time.

I look forward to Vendor Week 2018 and again participating.