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Customer service excellence

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UKSG Workshop: Customer Service Excellence

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There were three main aims to this workshop:

- To discuss the problems in the communication chain between publishers and librarians and what we could do to eliminate them (the problems, rather than the publishers and librarians)
- To introduce the idea of Charter Mark as a way to improve quality
- To report back in a future issue of Serials

Prior to the workshop two anonymous surveys were mailed to librarians and publishers via lis-e-journals, serialst and ALPSP-discuss. Over 120 libraries, and over 30 publishers responded.

The results of these surveys formed the basis of the discussion.

Discussion was broken down in to three separate areas.

From a library perspective the top ten complaints were as follows:

1. Unannounced changes to online access
- =2. Journals moving publisher without announcement
- =2. E-Journals holdings changing suddenly mid-term
- =2. No gracing policy for online editions
5. Journals dropping out of big deals mid-term
6. Online access for new subscriptions
7. Still needing thousands of subscriber numbers to get things done
8. Lack of transparency on titles retained after big deal is done
9. Publisher website "improvements" without notice
10. Lack of information on merges and acquisitions

The issues can be grouped as follows:

- Communication of changes
 - according to our survey, while librarians want to be contacted personally by publishers (84%) over any changes, they do not want visits, phone calls, direct mail or emails. 61% of librarians like direct mail, but from the qualitative responses, most threw it away!
- Clarity in negotiations on big deal
 - What titles will be retained; what happens when titles drop out mid-term
- Publisher systems not adapting to the new online environment
 - No gracing policy, setting up new subscriptions, having to know thousands of subscriber numbers

One of the questions asked in the survey was "What is your primary method of contact with your customers?". It was interesting to note that the views of publishers and librarians differed significantly in some areas such as the utility of listservs, which were the publishers' least favourite method of communication, but 37% of librarians

get their information from the listservs only 19% of publishers used it “very often” to send out changes to their publishing programme.

A further discrepancy was that 64% of publishers ranked listservs as either “useful, knowledgeable or constructive” for discussion on their products. It is clear that while the publishers are reticent about posting or responding to postings on the listservs, and that librarians, from the workshop discussions, could in some cases contact the publisher directly before going to the listserv, services like lis-e-journals are a popular communication tool which could be utilised more widely and to greater effect with more publisher participation.

Finally the workshop covered the relevance and applicability of Charter Mark to the discussions (the UK Government’s national standard for excellence in customer service). The criteria are as follows:

1. Set standards and perform well
2. Actively engage with your customers, partners and staff
3. Be fair and accessible to everyone and promote choice
4. Continuously develop and improve
5. Use your resources effectively and imaginatively
6. Contribute to improving opportunities and quality of life in the communities you serve

Although the workshop did not suggest publishers seek Charter Mark accreditation, it was agreed that many of the principles applied following the results of the two surveys.

- Libraries are learning from the private sector (publishers) about marketing to their customers
- Is it time for publishers to learn from the public sector (libraries) about customer service?

The presenters of the workshop will be undertaking further analysis and research and will hope to make this available in due course.

References

<http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/chartermark/>