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An Analysis and Survey of Commercial Library Supply Houses

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LIBRARY TRENDS, a quarterly journal of librarianship, provides a medium for evaluative recapitulation of current thought and practice, searching for those ideas and procedures which hold the greatest potentialities for the future.

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An Analysis and Survey of Commercial Library Supply Houses

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Introduction

HAROLD L. ROTH

In 1973, when the publications committee of Library Trends proposed an issue on "An Analysis and Survey of Commercial Library Supply Houses" for publication in the library centennial year of 1976, it became necessary for the editor to look sharply at the commercial contributions to the profession of librarianship to determine what shape an issue on the topic would take. It soon became quite obvious that in the past ten to fifteen years there has been a great change in the availability of commercial library supply houses, the nature of their services, and the type of products they handle.

When Melvil Dewey organized and founded his commercial library supply house as the first to concern itself specifically with library needs (at the same time he was founding ALA and Library Journal), his concern was with the development of library supplies and furniture designed specifically to serve the profession. Beyond that, the suppliers who served libraries sold books, periodicals, binding and some services, thus limiting the extent to which commercial houses served libraries. Also, for a long period of time libraries were a secondary market for producers of commercial products rather than a prime market. While libraries are still not generally a major market, they have become a prime market for commercial library supply houses; there are also specific library sales divisions in many companies, as well as many more companies which exist solely on sales to libraries.

With the onset of inflation, the rapid increase in budget allocations for personnel, and the rapid changes in handling library information, the library supply house has become an entirely different breed. Librarians are now working in the commercial supply field and, because of the flexibility that the search for profit supplies, it has been the commercial supplier rather than the professional practitioner

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who has furthered changes in the field. This makes the topic of the commercial library supplier a most significant one in the rapidly changing arena of library service.

This issue of *Library Trends* is an attempt to study trends in the development of the library supplier, both those aspects in existence and new ones that are emerging. Each contributor was asked to review critically the functions of the suppliers in his specialty area, to identify the types of services being performed, listing some of the elements which must be considered in selecting a supplier, in discussing costs and pricing policies, and in determining ways to evaluate the supplier. The publications committee also requested that the emphasis be placed on profit-making institutions and the services they provide to all types of libraries, rather than on nonprofit institutions which at present may be performing services for a fee. The literature is not formidable in this area. Acceptance of the commercial supplier as a partner in developing improved library service has been slow in coming but those contributors with commercial connections were reminded that the purpose of this issue was to develop an understanding of the supply relationship, to delineate problems of dealing with the supplier, and to speculate on the future of the situation.

Not all commercial library suppliers could be discussed, so selection was based on the editor's own determination of significant areas for consideration in this centennial year of librarianship. Library furniture and furnishings had been the subject of an entire *Library Trends* issue in 1965. Developments are still taking place in this area, but it was felt that the state of the art has not significantly changed, and this topic was omitted for the current issue.

This does not mean that some of the old standards were overlooked, however. Instead, an effort has been made to consider old and new facets of library applications of the commercial library supply houses. Thus, Luker and Runyon discuss the problems of computer involvement, attendant supplies and hardware as libraries might encounter these problems while developing an automated project. Roth follows with an article on the oldest commercial supplier—the book wholesaler—taking note of the services and the changes in those services. Huff presents a significant paper on the serials supplier at a time when that commercial enterprise is undergoing drastic change due to interlibrary cooperation and consolidation as a means of making library service more efficient and less costly. Folcarelli and Ferragamo approach the topic of microform publications, hardware and supplies from the different standpoints of li-
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librarian/library school professor and sales manager supervising installation of large segments of microfilm in libraries. Together they discuss the considerations and concerns in the purchase and use of this growing group of library materials. Also in the computer area, Brownrigg and Bruer draw on their experiences in developing an automated turn-key system at New York University as they analyze this important new development which has its own set of concerns and a special group of commercial suppliers.

Audiovisual materials, particularly films, are increasingly in evidence in libraries. Hingers brings his public library system experience to bear in discussing dealings with suppliers of both software and hardware. He also reviews short-cut approaches to effective decision-making which may be familiar to some, but new to many.

Library binding remains a significant problem in many libraries. Since dealing with a library binder is often considered to be a function of the purchasing department, Matt Roberts of the Library of Congress was asked to examine the problem as a professional. He has done an excellent job of considering the library binder, the price problem, improvements in the art of binding and the concerns with the purchasing agent in buying binding. McConkey, with long experience in writing a column on new development in library supplies and equipment, examines the library supply house in Dewey's terms in its traditional role of providing libraries with the little necessities vital to their operation. He was asked to discuss the sources of supply since so many of the items are now available from the local stationery supplier, campus bookstore, etc. He suggests a basis for decision-making which demonstrates a firm understanding of the problems involved.

Cataloging as a concept has been written about more than any other service practiced and used by libraries. Hines, who has been a leader in many of these writings, reviews the services provided by many suppliers in competition for the library dollar. He offers a definition of commercial cataloging services which gives an indication of what they are and what they do, and relates them to noncommercial services to indicate their effect on libraries. In the final paper, Bonsall discusses the evolution of commercial library supply and service houses. In a very positive way he supports the belief which motivated this issue: by working in concert with knowledgeable vendors it is possible for managing librarians to adopt new systems and improve the services today's library offers to its users.
Computers: Equipment and Services

KENNETH LUKER

and

ROBERT S. RUNYON

The subject of computer equipment and services as applied to libraries is one most often learned by the cold-water method: jump in by making a decision to automate, and by the time the shore is reached one feels like an expert. Of course one need not approach the field in that way, but it is true that as one begins to automate, the jumbled world of computers falls into place piece by piece. For that reason, this paper explores the field of computer equipment and services as libraries might encounter it while developing an automated project.

Most problems that libraries now face have been encountered for generations, and solved in more or less conventional ways by those generations of librarians. Only recently has the computer emerged as a possible tool to help solve those problems. The old solutions still exist, and many remain better choices than computerization. Increasingly, however, librarians are looking to the computer as the key to solving old problems and to providing new services heretofore considered unfeasible.

It should be pointed out in advance that contracting for computer services and systems is very different in its overall effects from purchasing other, less sophisticated library equipment. The computer often effects profound changes in any organization into which it is introduced. Roles and tasks are dramatically altered for those personnel who introduce data into the system, as well as for those who use its products. Information flow, reporting relationships, and accuracy requirements for operational data must be analyzed in detail and thoroughly communicated through frequent meetings and training sessions. Whereas in manual record-handling systems many

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people are usually able to perform or substitute in most jobs on an ad hoc basis to keep the work moving, the complexity of machine systems often precludes more than one or two people understanding the total system. Many computer-support tasks become so specialized that only trained back-up personnel can be brought in to fill the inevitable gaps that occur through absence and termination. All of this is "old hat" to experienced computer system users, but it always comes as a shock to the new user. Beware that "there are problems with owning your computer. If you don't believe this, ask somebody who owns one."

The degree of computer involvement in any particular function or service is likely to vary widely for the alternative solutions or methods for performing the service. Those alternatives may range from completely manual processes to direct involvement of persons with computers through terminal-based communications. In choosing among the alternatives, the librarian juggles many factors and influences before determining the best choice.

The relative advantage of any alternative involving computers depends partly on the expected availability of the computer equipment and computer services required by that alternative. The availability of those commodities depends in turn on several factors. One such factor is the state of the art of the computer hardware design. Although not many library applications are likely to be limited by this factor, it can have some effect. Almost certainly, the librarian newly investigating automation will gain some awareness of this condition. Another factor is the state of the art of software—the programs that tell the hardware what and how to perform. This factor is much more likely to affect the availability of computer systems than is hardware development. However, the factor of greatest significance is the overall state of the marketplace: What equipment and services can be made available, commercially or otherwise, at the time and place and in the form necessary to ensure a successful application in the library setting?

In this article, we are concerned primarily with this last factor. It is assumed that for any alternative procurement decision actually taken, the library will have acquired sufficient expertise to implement and operate the system selected. However, the expertise already available in the library is likely to influence strongly the choice of alternatives. Therefore, the relative expertise required for various kinds of applications will be mentioned in this article, but since the thrust here is to examine the marketplace rather than to give decision criteria, the emphasis will be on other matters.
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INDUSTRY PROFILE

During the past two decades, the computer industry has been one of the most dynamic and rapidly growing business enterprises on record. Technical innovation, followed by commercial and scientific applications, have built one upon the other in successive waves that have brought the computer industry to a powerful and influential position in our national economy. An insight into the nature of this growth and its effects is offered in the dedication to a recent book in the field: "To the student or manager who appreciates that worldwide computer capacity rose thirty-fold in the decade before 1974 and who wishes to shape favorably the 1984 that lies just a decade ahead."

Whereas the majority of the country's largest basic industries were developed near the turn of the century or soon thereafter, the computer industry has experienced its growth since World War II. This skyrocketing expansion, led by a single corporate giant (which now has 75 percent of the total business), has meant that new hardware, software and user applications have been entering the marketplace at an unprecedented rate. Major technological advances in hardware design were signaled by the first, second, third and fourth generations of computers, appearing in 1957, 1960, 1965 and 1970 respectively. Software developments have also been rapid, but have lagged behind hardware changes, partially because of incompatibility among the various computers of different manufacture, and also because of the time required to develop software standards, systems and documentation. The first applications into which computers made rapid inroads were understandably those in which large organizations (such as banks, insurance companies and corporate financial offices) were performing great quantities of repetitive, number-processing operations. The use of computers for sophisticated processing of alphabetic, text, and bibliographic records has been a later and comparatively smaller scaled development.

Since the beginning, the capability of the hardware has exceeded the capacity of people and organizations to apply it productively. The evidence of this is seen in the widespread and inefficient utilization of earlier generation software on later generation hardware, and in the comparative difficulties and delays experienced in the design, production, and implementation of software for new applications.
KENNETH LUKER AND ROBERT S. RUNYON

THE LIBRARY MARKET

In spite of the rapid growth and enormous size of the computer industry, library data processing systems have lagged far behind many business applications. Since the library market is comparatively small and very specialized, one must wait for devices developed primarily for other, larger markets to become available which will meet library needs. Most computers now used by libraries were developed as large-scale, general-purpose systems, or as special-purpose equipment for other application areas. The hardware and software products that we may select generally need to be adapted to the requirements of library record processing, and that often requires special ingenuity and expertise.

The library market for computers and data processing systems has been steadily growing, but at a rate far slower than in other, larger enterprises and service groups. One reason for this has been the lack of available hardware and software system components tailored to suit library requirements. An important obstacle has been this relatively small scale of the library market compared to the larger, industrial applications. In terms of numbers and budgets, libraries simply have not had the visibility that would cause the large manufacturers to invest extensive resources into the development of systems designed specifically for the library market.

Among the most promising of the new computer-industry products for the library market are the minicomputers and the point-of-sale (POS) data collection systems. Minicomputers that can be flexibly paired with other special-purpose, peripheral equipment enable the library to assemble a versatile, low-cost component system suitable to its own needs. The POS system, using optical sensing of standardized item numbers, offers a particularly promising approach to one of the major data-handling problems in the library setting: data collection and input.

COMPUTER PROCESSING WITHIN THE LIBRARY

One of the fundamental decisions made in planning a computer application is the locus of operations: Where will the processing be performed? In the library? At a nearby computer center? The choice depends, of course, on the equipment available. However, even having made the choice of locus of operations, the library still faces other related decisions.
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For example, suppose that the library elects to procure its own equipment. There remains a choice among computers of various sizes, and among various combinations of peripheral equipment, some of which do not necessarily involve a local computer. We will discuss each of these possibilities in turn.

MAIN-FRAME COMPUTERS

As described above, the computer industry is large and growing larger. The chief entries in the marketplace in past years have been the so-called main-frame computers: large-memory, high-speed machines designed as general-purpose data processors that may be connected to an assortment of peripheral devices and intended for a broad range of applications. These main-frame computers are the backbone of the industry. Large computer centers may have one or more such machines, each processing simultaneously many different programs. Not many libraries have chosen to acquire large main-frame computers for in-house operations, although given the finances and expertise required, there is very little that a library might want to do that could not be performed on these workhorses. The machines are expensive, costing in some cases millions of dollars, but they may be leased for long terms for thousands or tens of thousands of dollars each month.

Libraries represent such a small portion of the potential market for main-frame computers that very little special attention has been paid to libraries by the vendors of those machines. A librarian dealing with the sales personnel handling these devices will likely encounter very little familiarity with the unique problems of libraries. The salesman will be very familiar with his product, however, and can probably tap the resources of his company to find persons familiar with problems similar to library problems. One must expect long discussions over this point, however. Two incurable biases are those held by computer application specialists and by librarians: the former hold that there are no problems that they have not seen before; the latter believe that no other situation is quite like that found in the library, and that if someone thinks otherwise, he does not understand the situation.

Main-frame suppliers are as near as the classified section in the phone book. More information about the availability and applicability of these computers may be found in industry-oriented publications such as Datamation, Computer World and Computer Yearbook. It should be remembered that the acquisition of a main-frame computer im-
plies a relatively sophisticated level of expertise for its care and feeding.

MINICOMPUTERS

If main-frame computers form the backbone of the industry, then minicomputers form the rapidly growing flesh. The upsurge in production of minicomputers in the past several years has brought computing to the masses of small users. In typical applications of minicomputers, the computer is dedicated to the performance of a single function rather than a diverse mix of jobs. That function may be complex, involving multiple files and external devices, but still that function is the only task assigned to the computer. While in some instances main-frame computers may be assigned to a single task and minis may perform a mix of functions, the distinction by function is generally accurate. Other differences include size of memory, repertoire of executable instructions, and speed of execution. As might be expected, the minicomputers occupy the lower end of the spectrum in all of these categories.

Minis are not low in versatility, however, and therein lies their appeal. Typical areas of library computerization, such as circulation control and book acquisition, can readily be handled by dedicated minicomputers at costs far lower than those for an in-house main-frame computer. The costs may or may not compare favorably with the costs for operation on a larger computer not maintained by the library, an alternative discussed later.

The rapidly growing mini market has a variety of wares. Minicomputers range from sophisticated devices only arbitrarily distinguishable from the smaller of the main-frame computers, down through devices more commonly called intelligent terminals, because of their characteristic uses as keyboard devices augmented with some memory and computing capability. Supplementing these devices in typical applications is a variety of types of peripheral equipment, such as extra memory, tape and disc drives, printers, card and paper tape readers, punches, etc. The computer requires some peripheral devices for input and output of the data it processes; selection of the proper combination is a major part of the design of the application.

The vendors of the minicomputers are likely to be quite helpful in the task of defining the equipment needed for the library application. Unlike the main-frame computers, minis are marketed primarily for the small user who has a particular problem to solve. The suppliers are likely to be attuned to specialty applications and will see the library
as a “natural” application of the specialty devices they offer. There is probably as slim a chance for agreement with mini vendors as with the main-frame suppliers about the applicability of previous solutions to library problems. However, in the experience of the writers, the vendors of minicomputers are more likely to acknowledge the uniqueness of library problems, since they deal so often with unique applications.

Beyond the selection of the proper equipment based on a rough system design, the library cannot expect much detailed work from the vendor. The supplier is much more likely to offer a training course in how to program and operate its equipment than to provide personnel who might perform the detailed programming of the application. The library must provide for itself the programs and expertise for most applications. While the level of expertise required to operate the component system based on a minicomputer is lower than that for a main-frame, the programming task is likely to be at least as difficult, due to the limited instruction set or vocabulary of the minicomputer and the unavailability of high-level programming languages.

The library may also be faced with the complex technical task of connecting the computer to the peripheral devices needed for the application. While the vendors of the mini and of the peripheral devices will be helpful, it will be the library’s responsibility to make sure the interfaces are proper, especially when devices from different manufacturers are interconnected. Establishing the source of malfunction as being on one side of a plug connection or the other frequently is less a problem of technology than one of politics.

OTHER IN-HOUSE EQUIPMENT

In some cases a library may decide against acquiring a computer, but may still need some equipment in the library to allow processing of data for a computer to manipulate later. In many cases, the vendors of data entry devices and data collection systems are the same ones who supply the computers themselves. Since these devices are used primarily for preparing data for later use by a computer, there is little difference between their application in libraries and elsewhere. Therefore, their acquisition and installation will be fairly straightforward and will not require modification for special library use.

There is a variety of data entry devices on the market, the most abundant of which are the keyboarding machines. Each of these devices has a keyboard at which an operator enters the data for processing on the computer. The devices differ in the ways they store
the data and present them to the computer. The old standby for data entry is the keypunch machine, which punches holes in cards to record the information. Key-to-disc machines record information on the surface of magnetic discs. Some such discs may be read directly by a computer by mounting them on the computer’s disc drive, but much more frequently an intermediate step is required. The disc may be read by a transmitting device that communicates directly with the computer, or information may be transferred from the disc to another medium such as a standard magnetic tape before transmission. Typically handled in the latter case are the popular “floppy disc machines” which stand alone as do keypunches, but which store the information on small, flexible, reusable magnetic discs rather than on the more bulky cards.

Another device available for data entry records directly on magnetic tape. In most cases, the tape will be compatible with some standard computer tape drive, but before making a commitment the user should be certain that the computer to be used will accept the tape produced by the key-to-tape machine.

The typewriter, one of the oldest keyboard devices of all, may also be useful in preparing data for the computer. Optical character recognition devices are now on the market that will read the output of a wide variety of conventional typewriters. The devices are expensive and usually require extreme care in document preparation, but with some applications they may be ideal. Although the typewriters now in the library may be used as the primary data entry devices, the machines that read the typewritten documents are likely to require special, optical paper and precise document layout for proper operation. The computer center the library expects to use may already have a document reader. It could be well worth an inquiry before acquiring other kinds of data entry devices.

Data collection is not limited to keyboard devices. Card readers have been available for many years for taking information from punched cards and either transmitting it directly to a computer or recording it on tape or disc for later processing. Most of the automated circulation systems installed in libraries in the past decade have used some form of card reader at the check-out point. The concept is still very much alive, although inroads are being made by systems that do not require a punched card for every book being circulated. Magnetic label readers are a common sight at department store cash registers and may yet become prevalent in libraries. Currently of high interest is the application of optical code readers to
library circulation systems. All of these methods of data collection are more likely to be used by the library as part of a package system prepared by the vendor or manufacturer than as an adjunct to a locally devised computer system in the library.

**PROCESSING OUTSIDE OF THE LIBRARY**

Having looked at some of the options for equipment to be located in the library, we can now investigate the alternatives for the library which decides not to procure its own equipment. If a library elects to use someone else's equipment, it may choose various types of computer centers and service bureaus with widely varying degrees of accessibility and versatility. Depending on the type of service needed, the library may select a commercial computer service bureau, or may buy some of the slack time on computers owned and/or operated by other institutions not primarily in the business of selling computer services. For purely terminal-oriented applications, the library may go to a wide variety of sources for timesharing services.

**SERVICE BUREAUS**

Commercial service bureaus offer a full range of computer services with customers paying for what they want. Such agencies abound in any large city and usually thrive mainly on contracts with businesses needing data processing, but not desiring to operate a computer center themselves. Because of the nature of their business, the service bureaus are likely to have a staff of programmers and analysts who will help to set up a new application when the computing is to be done at their center.

The nature of the interaction of the library with a service bureau after the system is operating depends both on the kind of application and on the operating procedures of the service bureau. In some cases, the library will send data and programs completely prepared for running on the computer. In other cases, the library may send only the data in appropriate machine-readable format, and the bureau will marshal the appropriate programs from their files and apply them to the data submitted. The library may elect to send the raw data to the bureau in the form of documents, forms, catalog cards, etc., and have the bureau perform the conversion to machine-readable form. In any case, the procedures and costs will be specified in detail through negotiation with the bureau early in the project. Once the procedures have been finalized, they should be followed with little variation. The
service bureau makes its money by processing high volumes of data in standardized procedures, and is likely to balk at frequent exceptions and variations. At a cost, however, the service bureau is willing to attend to almost any special computer request.

In some cases, a library may use a variety of service bureaus to satisfy its computing needs. For example, one service bureau may offer a good service on production of purchase orders and accounting records for an acquisition system, but can produce the in-process listing in a paper format only. The library may have that bureau write the weekly listing on a magnetic tape and then send that tape to another bureau specializing in computer-output microfilm (COM) services for the production of the list on microfiche. These details, as well as such matters as format of input, frequency of operation, expected turnaround time, and cost, should be specified clearly to ensure satisfactory relations with the service bureau.

OTHER COMPUTING CENTERS

Computers operated by other institutions for their own purposes broaden the range of options for the computer user and provide some competition for the commercial service bureaus. Often banks, insurance companies, or other businesses, will have time remaining on their main-frame computers after completing their own processing, and may be willing to sell computer services to outside users. In many ways, these computer centers are like the commercial service bureaus in the facilities they offer, even though they are much less likely to provide programming and analysis services. However, the needs of the parent company will always come first, and when they conflict with those of the outside users, there is no question who will have priority. Unpredictable priorities for the use of the computer may result in unexpected delays in production runs. Users of leftover computer time travel only as standby passengers with excess baggage.

A major noncommercial source of computing service is often available to libraries affiliated with organizations having computer centers of their own. The computing facilities operated by universities for their research or administrative processing, or by municipalities for their governmental computing, may interact with the library exactly as a service bureau would. In such cases, the library would negotiate the system and cost in the same way that it would with the commercial firm. Fortunate indeed is the library having access to an organization-owned computer where no charge is made for comput-
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ing services and supplies. As with other centers where library processing is not first priority, however, the library may have to do most of its own programming, and will likely get squeezed out at high-use periods.

When the computer service required is less of a repetitive production job, and more of a specialized communication task—such as file searching, instruction, or information retrieval—a terminal-oriented service may be desired. Many commercial service bureaus provide access to their main-frame computer via timesharing terminals, giving each user a powerful tool seemingly dedicated to his exclusive use. For applications suited to this type of computing, timesharing provides relatively efficient service.

PROGRAMS AND PROGRAMMING

Obtaining the equipment or otherwise arranging the location for computer processing is a large part, but not necessarily the major part, of implementing a computerized operation in a library. In addition, the operation itself must be completely defined and programs must be written. The software for the chosen computer may be obtained in a variety of ways. The programs may be standard or specially designed packages from commercial software vendors, programs from other libraries or computer users, programs developed in-house for the particular application, or even programs applied as part of a turn-key system for which both hardware and software are supplied and maintained by a vendor.

Standard packages are available in common configurations for commercial and industrial applications, but only to a lesser extent for library applications. However, several companies offer prepackaged "library systems" which are worth investigating. Caveat emptor. In any case, software suppliers may be engaged to design and implement special library programs. If this course is taken, the library must specify in detail exactly what it wants. The specification and negotiation period is critical to the success of the operation. The vendor will want to know exactly what criteria will be used to establish the acceptability of their product, and the exercise of specifying those criteria can be helpful to the librarian in understanding the limitations of the system. There are advantages to getting the software written, tested and approved quickly, but unless provision is made for modifications after experience, the library may be locked into programs that cannot be modified with changing needs.
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A good source for proven library programs is the world of experienced users—other libraries. If another library has successfully automated a function, the programs used there might be directly applicable to a new situation. In cases where the other library procured the programs commercially, there may be strings attached, requiring the receiving library to negotiate directly with the original supplier. Even after stipulated clearances have been obtained, minor adaptations will undoubtedly be required in order to make the programs operate properly on the computer chosen. However, the sources of programming expertise already mentioned may be called on to help in these adjustments. The critical requirement for a smooth application is the availability of documentation for the programs acquired. Many knowledgeable experts would refuse to tackle the adaptation process unless the existing version of the program has extensive documentation to describe what the program is and how it is supposed to work. If the receiving library does not insist on comprehensive documentation from the program supplier, the odds are against a rapid or successful completion of the project.

Of course, a library may choose to hire a systems and programming staff of its own. By doing so, the library is assured of having the application tailored to its own needs. While this was perhaps the most common way to computerize in the past, this trend may be changing. Richard de Gennaro asserts that: “the day of the one-man or small group library systems development effort is past. . . . It is now quite acceptable, even for a large library, to have no in-house automation program and staff. In-house systems librarians are not essential to implement the local interfaces to these centralized networks or to install the turnkey systems.”

TURNKEY SYSTEMS

For a library with more faith than expertise, a turnkey system may in fact be the answer to its automation problems. Increasingly, commercial vendors are offering packaged systems for particular applications, in which the vendor provides all the equipment and programs and teaches the library how to operate them. While in-house expertise may be helpful in getting such a system functioning, it is by no means necessary.

As with commercially obtained software products, the library purchaser of turnkey systems is somewhat at the mercy of the vendor for maintenance and design of programs and hardware. Since it is
unlikely that the vendor will allow the library to tamper with the program without voiding the warranty agreement, the library should be certain either that the system being installed meets the needs of the library, or that the company will agree to modify the system as required. Depending on its performance and the capability of the vendor, the turnkey system is likely to be rather quickly implementable compared to systems designed from scratch. Turnkey systems require relatively little in-house systems expertise, but they are correspondingly inflexible in design and operation. Nevertheless, the library in need of a sophisticated system that performs its function well may find that this is precisely what is wanted.

SYSTEM DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT

Because the library market is a relatively small one, and manufacturers have been slow to provide the special-purpose systems and equipment that it requires, a number of librarians have become interested in conceptually designing new devices themselves, and then working with manufacturers to develop the desired products. This process can provide a special kind of excitement for the librarian with an interest in engineering, but it is also extremely time-consuming and fraught with unforeseen pitfalls.

More typically, librarians wanting to purchase data processing equipment will simply want to search the marketplace for devices that are already available which can either be used directly or adapted with minor modifications. In either case the search for the proper service or device should begin with the preparation of written specifications outlining the needed functions of the system to be obtained.

SPECIFICATIONS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Specifications are widely understood in industry and the military to refer to the advance documentation that is prepared to define the need, purpose, function and operation, as well as environmental characteristics, of a system or piece of equipment. The specifications are needed to translate the requirements of a library application area (such as circulation or acquisitions) into terms that designers and company representatives can understand and work with. A computer programmer must have precise and detailed specifications of functions, processes and parameters in order to write a complicated program for a specific application area. Similarly, an engineer or
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salesman must have specifications in order to design a new device or select an available piece of equipment to meet a given library's needs. Now that more libraries have acquired significant data processing experience, the concept of specification writing is not so new; however, there are still many library managers who will not have had this exposure, and whose first impulse when considering a data processing purchase will be to call in the salesman. The difficulty with consulting the salesman immediately is that this omits the crucial first step of determining the specific needs of a library. As mentioned at the outset, the purchase of data processing services entails complicated decisions which have such fundamental, costly, and long-range implications for the total library that they cannot be entrusted by the library director to anyone other than his own management team. The library systems analyst or consultant and the library's department heads must do the major work in the writing of the specifications, in order to assure that the systems considered are responsive to the total scope of the library's needs. If this process is omitted, the library management will not have clarified its thinking on what it wanted to achieve, the vendor will have an open field to push and promote whatever best suits his interests, and the operations personnel in the library will have no concrete objectives from which to criticize the system once installed.

The exercise of writing specifications requires visionary acumen in order to project future needs, as well as a high degree of patience to describe current operational realities meticulously. The document is a blend between the future and the present, as well as between the general and the specific. If one lacks experience in this area, there is a body of literature which can be helpful:

Specifications can be general or detailed. General specifications should be application-oriented and define what the system is expected to accomplish. Although easier to write, general specifications make evaluation of performance much more difficult. Detailed specifications are more time-consuming to complete and much more difficult to establish. They can also limit the number of computers that can meet your requirements. A practical alternative is a mixture of general and detailed specifications. This provides you with something valid to evaluate and forces you to think through the situation.

The specifications should follow naturally from an overall state-
ment of objectives and service needs that should be prepared early in the project. While the writing of the specifications is necessary, both to clarify the library's specific requirements in the minds of its decision-makers and as a prelude to the examination of vendors' wares, it is by no means sufficient to guarantee success. It does, however, prepare one to begin the next step, which is the selection of the appropriate system or service to meet the library's needs.

**SELECTION AND EVALUATION**

Once a library's need for data processing services of a particular kind has been established, the next step is to examine the available suppliers of services or equipment. The range of potential choices has already been described in detail. Up to this point, the library's interest and attention has been largely internal and directed toward its functional needs. When the manager turns his attention to the marketplace, however, he is struck by a bewildering variety of suppliers and gadgets competing for his interest. Exhibitors at national conferences and advertisers in the library press are the most conspicuous in this regard. Often, salespeople are encountered who know something about their own wares, but little or nothing about the ways in which libraries operate. Few experienced librarians have been hired to market data processing systems to libraries. Furthermore, since many library managers are better characterized as traditional humanists than as businessmen, they often do not make very good purchasing agents. This situation is worsened by the generally low level of useful information available from vendors or their representatives about a given system regarding its library applicability. In spite of this, the librarian must make a choice on the basis of a survey of available vendors; although to a degree one simply proceeds with common sense, it is usually helpful to outline the alternatives. A document summarizing the library's general and detailed specifications is a fitting starting point for this survey. The specifications may be sent to several vendors, and responses (perhaps including bids) may be requested. Once these responses have been received, it is time for evaluation.

**EVALUATION**

There are basically four types of input to a system evaluation:

1. **Vendor's documentation of equipment or service**—This includes
the detailed, technical specifications of system capability. This material should be readily available, and although difficult for the nonspecialist to understand, it must be examined and critiqued by someone familiar with both the system and the application.

2. Testimony of users—Purchasers of data processing services and equipment become very other-directed in the evaluation stage. No sensible manager wants to commit large resources in personnel and finances to dependence on a machine system that has not been extensively field-tested for capability and reliability. As pointed out earlier, the acquisition of a computer system has a profound effect on an organization and how it works. Not infrequently, disillusioned librarians have found themselves serving the needs of the machine, rather than the other way around. The system can be ten times more exacting than the most compulsive cataloger.

The wise purchaser checks early with other users of the candidate system—both those whose names are volunteered by the vendor, and others not given that he is able to uncover on his own. The questions he asks are many and detailed; he wants to know what to expect from the system under all circumstances, so he can make some assessment of how it would work in that most demanding of all situations—his own. Such information is crucial to the evaluation of any system.

Unfortunately, it may not always be possible to acquire all of the optimally desired information, particularly if the system is new. There may be few, if any, experienced users of the system, and the manager’s need for the services may be such that he is willing to risk being one of the first users. This is not a comfortable position for a buyer to find himself in. With qualified staff and adequate definition of systems need, a buyer may feel that it is worth the risk to work with a vendor to develop and apply an untested system in order to acquire the needed service capability. This course of action places a strong requisite upon the library to have an expert systems analyst, either as a staff member or as an ongoing consultant. In the more typical case, in which a library is purchasing a system for which a user clientele has been identified, it is generally quite simple to locate a number of users whose installations can be visited, and whose reports can be compared for accuracy, reliability and relevance to one’s own situation.

3. Vendor’s custom-written proposal and verbal claims—Usually a vendor will submit a comprehensive written proposal with each bid for a computer system or services. These proposals are often
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built up from "boiler plate" (modular elements developed for other proposed applications where the vendor has bid the system) and are very general in nature. Promises and claims made in such documents, or in word-of-mouth reports from company representatives, are apt to exceed operational capabilities for even the most respected computer vendor. Needless to say, the proposal or vendor's claim is simply the first response in a long and elaborate negotiation process, whereby the buyer tries to reduce the risks of failure or disappointment to manageable proportions.

4. Consumer reports—There are a number of published services comparable with *Library Technology Reports*, providing documented descriptions of hardware and software capability for the more standard products. These may be identified by scanning any of the standard trade magazines in the field.

STANDARDS

Various standards organizations, such as the American National Standards Institute (ANSI), have been instrumental in defining some basic standards (usually covering materials or methods) for hardware or software capability, as well as data formats. However, these standards have not been made sufficiently specific at the applications level so that they could be useful in selecting one manufacturer's product over another. For other types of library supplies, we have been able to establish useful industry standards, and it is hoped that some of the professional bodies in the library world will promote these agreements in the complicated area of data processing applications. Heinritz has indicated that: "Product standards have helped push manufacturers in the direction of increased standardization. This has in turn had a salutary effect on the quality of such items as book bindings, and has made the purchasing of equipment much easier."

The Technical Standards for Library Automation (TESLA) Committee of the ALA Information Science and Automation Division has begun to envisage a useful role for itself as a liaison between system users and producers by providing a meeting ground for representatives of both groups. TESLA is now working toward the rationalization of optical coding structures, and methods of physical encoding, that can be useful to libraries in the application of existing codes, such as the International Standard Book Number (ISBN) and the International Standard Serial Number (ISSN), as well as ensuring compatibility with codes developed in other industries, such as the Uni-
versal Product Code (UPC) now being used to mark grocery merchandise. In this way library industry standards may be developed to meet universal library needs, somewhat in the manner in which microform industry standards have been promulgated by the National Microfilm Association.

MODE OF ACQUISITION

Quite often in high-technology equipment areas, where rapid innovation contributes to the obsolescence of existing equipment, consumers will tend to lease rather than purchase. Many, if not most, main-frame computers are acquired on lease because of this factor and because of their high cost. Minicomputers, which are priced at fractions of main-frame computer costs, are more often purchased outright. Frequently, lease/purchase agreements can be arranged for computer-related equipment, whereby lease fees can be converted to partial purchase payments at an established schedule, such as 30 percent/30 percent/40 percent, payable in those proportions in successive years.

A purchase price for a computer system or services is usually submitted in bid form in response to specifications, since each application usually has some unique combination of hardware and software requirements. Sometimes bid prices may be negotiable, based upon a range of variable market and delivery factors. In any case, the conditions of delivery and payment can introduce fundamental and important characteristics into the relationship of vendor to purchaser. These stem from the the long-term nature of the purchase, mentioned earlier. A purchaser of computer equipment must usually plan for a long-term close relationship—almost a kind of marriage. This is generally necessitated by the purchaser’s ongoing need for specialized service and maintenance of the hardware and software components of the system. In fact, the demonstrated competence of the vendor to guarantee rapid, responsive, and reliable service for a computer system is a major factor in any contract negotiation. Once a library acquires a computer, it may not later be able to function without it. It will have become an integral, essential part of its operations.

Often the first tangible commitment to a vendor for computer services or equipment will be a letter of intent requested by the vendor. This document represents a semiformal contract to acquire services or equipment as of a certain date at a specified cost. Because
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of the lead time required for manufacture, sales, delivery, and installation of computer services, a vendor may require this advance letter of intent in order to be able to schedule his pre-installation activities better. The buyer, on the other hand, may wish to commit a vendor to a specified current price for the sale of equipment to be delivered at a later date, when inflationary factors may be expected to have produced a price rise. Letters of intent can be worded so that there is no financial loss if the transaction does not take place.

FACTORS TO BE COVERED IN CONTRACT

The delivery and installation of computer systems and services is usually tightly scheduled in terms of a complex network of interrelated planning, staffing, service and financial factors. Often, operational problems and increased costs may be incurred if there is an unforeseen delay in delivery and successful installation. Sometimes, there may also be cost benefits to the buyer if the system could be made operational before the scheduled deadline. For these types of situations, it may be possible to negotiate penalties for the vendor (perhaps in the form of discounts to the buyer) for delayed delivery, and bonuses for advanced delivery. It is usually desirable for the librarian to check in advance with his institutional legal and purchasing offices to ensure that the contract meets all regulatory requirements and will not later be a source of embarrassment to the institution.

SAFEGUARDS

When purchasing equipment from a large, reputable company, the known service record and integrity of that company often provide some measure of security and assurance to the signing of a contract. If the company’s capability and service record appears good, but the company is small (size and limited capitalization is a factor of concern in terms of their future viability), the buyer may wish to demand a performance bond. This instrument can provide protection and reimbursement to the buyer for damages suffered from noncompliance, or a default in meeting contract obligations. Unfortunately, a small company might not be able to acquire such bonding except at an intolerable cost or dislocation to current operations.

An alternative method of reducing the risk of damages or contract default is the negotiation of an incremental payment contract, which
provides that only partial payments will be made until final delivery and equipment acceptance is assured. In some cases, payment may be made in escrow so that it may not be touched until satisfactory system performance has been demonstrated. Of course, in these cases, it is of crucial importance that there be a clear definition of "satisfactory performance," such that all necessary functions and tasks are precisely specified. The buyer should be aware that this last condition may be easier to fulfill in theory than in practice.

It should be evident from the foregoing observations and warnings that the writers believe that the quality of the decision-making process which leads to the purchase and installation of computer systems is very much an ingredient of whatever success or failure is experienced in the system's operation. Once a computer system has been installed, it is seldom possible simply to unplug it, replace it, or abandon it if its operation proves less than satisfactory. This might easily be done with the electronic equipment, but the total system includes much more than hardware. A computer information system is different from a malfunctioning television set that can be repaired simply by calling in a competent serviceman. The total system includes other subsystems: the software, the data to be input, the procedures and tasks to be executed, and the trained personnel to perform all of these operations. Because of the interlocking effects of change among these subsystems, the need for a fundamental change or replacement of an inadequate computer system may be identified and resolved only after months or years of frustration, characterized by recurring patron discontent and administrative malaise.

For all of these reasons, the buyer is urged to be circumspect about vendors' future claims that are not substantiated by verified experience, and to be exacting in the specification of suitable conditions to define system acceptability.

References


The Book Wholesaler: His Forms and Services

HAROLD L. ROTH

The book wholesaler, sometimes called a jobber, is probably the oldest commercial library supplier in terms of continuous service. One such firm, which claims to be the "oldest and largest," notes a founding date of 1828. For the purpose of this paper in a library centennial issue, we will assume a continuous service to libraries of one hundred years and note that the major function of wholesalers has not changed. The book wholesaler is a significant part of the book distribution process; he buys and stocks quantities of newly published books from publishers, and acts as a middleman selling mainly to libraries and bookstores. The wholesaler's customers deal with that wholesaler as a means of consolidating shipments from as many as 3,000 publishers, reducing the costs of ordering individual titles, speeding up the ordering process, and obtaining a discount as large as possible on all purchased books. The wholesaler acts as a specialist in serving libraries, is usually aware of the problems of the libraries with which he deals, and is concerned with the needs of this specialty customer. The similarity between wholesalers becomes a bit vague at this point.

Literary Market Place 1975-1976 lists seventy-two wholesalers to schools and libraries. It also lists thirty-eight, not all different, who claim specialist status for dealing in special subject areas. There are also wholesalers who specialize in dealing with bookstores, export and import, and remainders. Within each category there are differences in size of stock, areas served, number of branches, number of publishers carried, and other services. Closer study shows other differences. Some have large sales staffs, others have very small staffs. Some firms limit the number of customers they will handle, others handle all types of accounts except the smallest. A library has difficulty in determining the wholesaler's capacity to serve and is encouraged to visit its prospective wholesaler and his competitors to

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determine the nature of the service to be expected and to verify the statements of capacity which might originally have been used to pique an acquisition librarian's interest in the wholesaler's service.

THE WAY A WHOLESALER WORKS

As in any business, the book wholesaler survives by his profitmaking skill. He has chosen service to libraries because he feels that the business of selling books in quantity can be an efficient one which should deliver a solid bottom line at the end of the year. As part of the distribution process, the wholesaler is basically not concerned with any single title or with the titles of any one publisher. He does not sell titles nor a publisher's stock; he sells service based on long experience in dealing with libraries and satisfying their needs.

The wholesaler's key to service is his staff of book buyers. The buyer of new books is frequently a "book man" who deals with a publishing salesman — also a "book man" — and together they play the marketing game of determining the optimum number of copies to be stocked by the wholesaler on the initial order. The decision is based on a subjective evaluation to which is added some knowledge of previous sales records of similar types of books, a general knowledge of the success of the publisher's output with libraries, and a discussion of the type and extent of publicity and promotional money to be allocated to promoting individual titles. If the book receives the proper press and review coverage, the orders are bound to roll in from libraries. If the buyer guessed correctly, the wholesaler should be able to meet the initial requests and develop a base for reorder and regular stocking.

Books already stocked are reordered by other buyers. Reordering of backlist titles, sometimes standard ones, is done by many wholesalers on a basis of computer-scoring of the movement of materials by title over a given period of time. This is a fairly scientific method but is flawed in that it assumes that the publisher retains material in stock or reprints to the same rhythm that motivates the wholesaler's buyer to order. Stocking is a science that is not always scientific; it is subject to economic vagaries and affected by print orders, print schedules, paper prices, availability of printing time, inventory cycles, and the cash-flow situation, to name a few factors. It also assumes a knowledge of the marketable life of a book. In a tight cash market with high costs, the wholesaler who succeeds best with his customers is the one who guesses correctly most often and develops his buying and stocking
cycles most effectively. In large corporate entities the freedom to
make correct decisions on availability of materials is frequently af-
fected negatively by suddenly increasing inventory without concur-
rent increases in the amount of business done.

After the books are ordered from the publisher, the process is
relatively simple. The books are received, stocked on shelves after
noting the receipt of the material, orders for titles in-house are
matched immediately, the books are brought together with other
books for the same customer, the material is checked, invoiced, boxed
and shipped. The customer receives the material, reverses the process
of checking against invoice, passes books to the next phase and the bill
is passed for payment. Any problems not resolved by telephone or
mail are referred to the salesman for the territory, who handles the
complaint on a regular call. It is to the wholesaler's advantage to
handle all orders with a minimum of personnel involvement to keep
his costs down and the customer satisfied. The wholesaler also de-

defies for his cash flexibility on regular payment of bills which can be
held up by unnecessary errors.

It must be remembered that the wholesaler is in a business in which
his profit comes from sharing the difference between the list price and
his cost with the customer. Books range in cost to the wholesaler from
net price to as much as 50 percent. The economics of the business
requires the wholesaler to save some profit for himself; therefore, he
has different prices for books bought at different prices or requiring
different ordering procedures. His prices vary with the quantities and
also with the services the customer requests.

Each action taken adds a cost to the process; thus, the wholesaler
often develops his operation in order to minimize his costs and
increase his efficiency. Small wholesalers do this through personal
service, cutting in-house personnel costs, and limiting their business
to a select number of clients. Larger wholesalers achieve their effi-
ciency by modernizing their activity, increasing the flow of business,
providing additional services at a fee, concentrating more heavily on
scientific marketing strategy, and/or dealing in more profitable
aspects of the business.

WHAT ONE CAN EXPECT FROM A BOOK WHOLESALER

A library doing business with a wholesaler has a right to expect his
orders to be filled expeditiously, a major percentage of his requests to
be filled on the first shipment, and the balance available within a 30-

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or 60-day period. Reports on the state of the order should be made at least once, and an agreement should be reached whereby at a set time it is possible to cancel and reorder, so that the order can remain current and the librarian and wholesaler can develop a better control on the outstanding state of the orders.

One should not expect 100 percent fulfillment on all orders. The nature of the book trade makes that impossible. Even if the library anticipates its needs it is difficult to foretell when a book will be delayed in production, or when a publisher will decide not to publish, to reprint or to remainder the edition the library is seeking.

The library may also expect other services since the wholesaler, in his attempt to provide a more complete service at a price that the library will pay, may make it possible for books to be provided in a shelf-ready state. Commercially produced cataloging kits, plastic jackets, completely cataloged collections sometimes known as “instant libraries,” leased books, order by wire, order by magnetic tape, and on-line ordering using machine-readable language are all possible today. They are services worth considering when the problem of maintaining expensive technical services areas must be reconsidered.

With library personnel costs accounting for as much as 65-80 percent of the overall library operating budget, a search for cost-effectiveness has found commercially provided services becoming more attractive. The use of machine-readable language, the development of standard coding systems such as ISBN, and the development of CIP and the entire concept of on-line interchange of information has made it feasible to order on a more frequent basis, maintain a reasonable ordering cost, and to provide immediate access to uniform bibliographical information on a large scale. This latter development has also caused the demise of several of the most innovative and successful wholesalers in their prime, partly because of continually growing research and development costs and partly because of start-up before fully testing the new procedures. However, some wholesalers have benefitted and have added these additional services to their stock of traditional services.

ACCESS TO WHOLESALER SERVICES

The wholesaler has come a long way from its operation out of a warehouse lined with storage bins. Many wholesalers have modern plants to which they welcome visitors. They frequently employ professionals in all areas of operation so that the customer and the
wholesaler can discuss problems on the same level. The modern wholesaler is willing to travel to investigate problems, to discuss the service on all levels, to handle a demonstration, and to act as a partner in dealing with administrations which must learn the needs rapidly and be approached on purely cost/benefit terms. The modern wholesaler is also ready to consider other solutions to library service problems on a profitability basis.

Many new libraries have been started on an "instant library" basis by some wholesalers who selected and stored material after processing to library specifications in anticipation of library construction completion. This service was solicited by the wholesalers aware of the need. Libraries had asked about the possibility and the dealer decided there was a way of handling the problem within the constraints of profitability.

Bid proposals have frequently been discussed in the literature with proponents and opponents being vociferous in their support and denial of value. In his landmark popular work on acquisitions, Melcher discusses the bid procedure and the problems, ranging from inability to fulfill to restrictions on service from the wholesaler by the resulting overall unprofitability of the contract.3 Bids are frequently required by governments which are accustomed to buying in bulk. Books and other library materials have been considered bulk purchases and thus amenable to fixed-price bid purchase. The bid procedure is usually a restrictive measure and found too inflexible to purchase material of a dated nature. The purchasing agents are strong for the procedure because it seems to effect control on expenditures. The librarians are less sanguine; they know the problems of missing out on books and other materials which disappear from the market or are not provided by the wholesaler because of a later evaluation of the costliness of the process.

There are many governments which, under the blandishments of librarians, have concluded that the purchase of the book is a unique process and worthy of exemption under the bid resolutions. Other governments find that the total figure for purchases requires a bid contract. Frequently, the bid contract is drawn with enough exemptions to maintain flexibility for the library in its ordering procedure.

The wholesaler likes contract work if it is profitable, and it gives some guarantee of service to the library. It is possible to work with a dealer without a bid in a very profitable fashion. If the library is considering a contract, it is worthwhile to have some discussions beforehand with many wholesalers to see what the possibilities are...
before the contract is drawn. Dealing with suppliers requires everything to be provided with a similar set of specifications if competition is in the offing. Some understanding of the effect of restrictions should be discussed in economic terms. Wholesalers should be approached with the desire to solve a problem effectively rather than to create one. If a purchasing agent must be involved he can be brought in on a pre-qualifying meeting so that he understands what is being discussed and can have input. It is important to remember that the wholesaler will cooperate because it is to his advantage to have agreement on the terms of the bid throughout the entire process. The wholesaler frequently has an opportunity to point out that bids are two-way streets and the effectiveness of the contract is based on the willingness of both parties to abide by the agreement. In this case it usually means that the wholesaler can take this opportunity to work out more simplified and assured payment procedures. Libraries and purchasing departments should expect to find the wholesaler upset by billing practices which take additional discounts from bills which have been past due for as long as six months or one year. If the bid conference does nothing more than set an effective payment agreement, the relationship between the wholesaler and his customer has been advanced tremendously.

APPROVAL PROGRAMS

One of the services that has had a recent history as a general wholesale service is the approval plan. The literature has many articles on the development of this means for libraries to receive on approval (with permission to return) materials in subject areas in which they collect broadly. Originally started to meet the needs for technical material not readily reviewed in the library literature, it has grown to a more general service. Many large wholesalers and some small wholesalers have been involved in this type of business. Refinements in the operation of this type of plan are still being made and it is anticipated that it will continue to be a viable service, although the question of the size of library which can be served most effectively by this plan is still being discussed.6

EVALUATION OF WHOLESALERS

There are many checklists of steps to use in evaluating a wholesaler. They appear in a variety of acquisition texts but are not really current.
Book Wholesaler

It is possible to evaluate the wholesaler by asking him for a list of the publishers whose material he stocks and a list of those customers in the same area that are served by him, by sending through a variety of test orders compared with similar materials ordered at the same time from other suppliers, and finally by visiting his plant to see it in operation.

This writer, having been on both sides of the fence, can attest to the fact that no evaluation can assure service better than closely monitoring the receipt of materials and reporting back to the salesman, marketer or management type in the wholesaler's operation. This is a highly competitive business and each wholesaler tries to keep the customers that make his operation an effective one. Doing so means profitability and relates directly to the effectiveness of service and continuity of business over a long period of time. One does not establish himself with a wholesaler and move to another one immediately. The nature of the business is largely detail, which takes a long time to do correctly. It is based on agreement and interpretation of the meaning of that agreement. Change is costly, which is why it is essential to get everything correct as soon as possible. It is also the reason for trying to lock in the library with its supplier. Change is not impossible, and it is the library that must determine the need for such change. The wholesalers are aware of this, which is the reason for the addition of more professionally trained personnel to their staffs.

If one is looking for professional services beyond the service of materials, it is important to find the wholesaler with staff able to handle the requirements of the library in all its detail. The problem of communication and its resolution is so important that wholesalers are joining with librarians and publishers to make the business of distributing materials more effective. To make the communications possible, marketing specialists from the library field are being brought in, conferences with specialists from the wholesaler's staff and the library staff are held by the wholesaler, presentation exhibits sponsored by the wholesaler are made available to bring new titles to the attention of librarians, and sales presentations involve specialists as well as the salesperson in the territory.

Evaluation of capacity to serve the library field today must be made as much from current input of the wholesaler as from the wholesaler's past history of service to the library. Library needs are different from those in the past, the types of services are expanded, and the basis for evaluation must be changed to consider the satisfaction of the new needs by the new services. Practical considerations of willingness to
meet specification requirements and concern with the librarian’s problem when presented help to guarantee a proper evaluation quotient of the wholesaler’s services.

THE FUTURE OF THE WHOLESALER

The future of the wholesaler is integrated with the future of the library. Management analyses are being made more frequently where personnel costs are overriding the capacity of the library to purchase new and replacement books and other library materials. Libraries are investigating the possibilities of buying many professional services as part of their book supply contract. The libraries are becoming more dependent on the wholesaler and the supplier who lists many services other than the traditional one of book supply.

The president of one large supplier of wholesale services to libraries credits the continuing growth of title output — and the increasing number of small publishers unable to support marketing organizations — with the development of the large single supplier. He sees the wholesaler becoming a service organization with two roles: (1) to gather, select and make available those books and materials which are in demand, and (2) to create and deliver services which librarians deem necessary. Libraries’ needs should be met in the most efficient and economical way, using professional talent in specialty areas — bibliographic, selection, purchasing, sales, warehousing, manufacturing, fulfillment, and systems.

There is a recognition of the need to overcome unnecessary redundancy. The growing support for the Ohio College Library Center (OCLC) as an intermediate step in the progressive battle to overcome redundant handling of the same information is significant for the wholesaler. This may well become the domain of a private agency, possibly the wholesale service agency, which has a vested interest in on-line access to the large-scale-ordering data base. The possibility of making a profit using this technique is a natural for the wholesaler, who can spread the costs of development and continuation over a broader service base than can OCLC.

There is a great need for technical services functions in libraries. There is a vision of the reduction of the number of processes which need to be performed in the library itself. Several wholesalers will be needed in order to perform this function competitively and at a reasonable price in the great general area of supply. A need for specialist wholesalers will persist because the nature of the library
market is such that a general wholesaler cannot operate the specialty portion of the business in conjunction with his regular operation. There are variations in the handling of the requirements of the academic library, the public library, and the school library. Each function requires a different set of specialists in the plant and administration to meet those needs. Import requirements for foreign materials are going to be investigated further, with many domestic wholesalers attempting to bring this activity into the mainstream of their operation. The specialist in this area has the edge and, because of the loyalty of libraries to their efficient suppliers, it is believed that future change in this area will be slow and will be dependent again on the continued effective development of the on-line bibliographic data base from which to select.

Many wholesalers are trying to develop and handle proprietary products as part of their total regular services to libraries. This has not been very satisfactory because of the problems of monopolistic practice inherent in this procedure. The development of special products will continue but will probably operate more effectively under wholly owned subsidiaries rather than in the mainstream of wholesale practice.

More professionals will be employed by wholesalers to serve the library business. The wholesaler will continue to concentrate on the service aspect of the business and will develop effective ways of stocking to meet the library needs as they are expressed. The publications supported by wholesalers will attempt to anticipate the availability of materials, and concentrated efforts to develop approval-ordering plans that are efficient and geared to the availability of bibliographic information will continue and possibly tie in with library system development and group ordering.

The nature of library operations will continue to change and their relationship with the wholesaler will continue to develop. Materials which have not lent themselves to handling by wholesalers will be added to wholesale lines, probably starting in separate divisions and gradually phased into the entire ordering process. Films, microfilms, slides, other audiovisual material, periodicals, and serials will be reconsidered as part of the wholesaler's service practice.

The rationale is based on the fact that reduction of technical services and acquisition staff in favor of public service staff will require more efficient methods of ordering materials to extend the service coverage required by more public service requests. There will always be some people buying from individual publishers and some pub-
lishers may have large enough lines to continue to warrant individual sales and convention coverage. Special collections and rare book collections will require specialized bibliographic service not compatible with the large-scale service of the general wholesaler. Many sets of reference materials will also be sold on a direct basis.

In a market that presently includes at least 60,000 customers in the institutional area, investigation of the possibilities available for service sales shows that the wholesaler has a great potential ahead. With continuing education to be recognized once again as the province of libraries, the potential for continued library support and growth is assured. Now that the wholesaler has proven his willingness to listen to the librarian’s needs, there will be more requests to investigate additional services to libraries.

References


ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

Serial Subscription Agencies

WILLIAM H. HUFF

During the past two decades the dramatic growth in the publication of serials has produced a variety of significant changes in the handling of this form of literature. In addition to modifications in the programs of the serial agencies themselves, there has been the development of specialized supply houses for microform serials, and of reprint sets of back files of journals. The flurry of publication in serial form during this period was a historical first and hopefully will not be repeated. The amount of money allocated for serial services, such as abstracts and indexes, and for the journals themselves has reached the point where many budgets are being ravenously consumed by this form of library material.

There is the very real possibility that certain strains of the scholarly journal which developed over the past decade or so are slated for total extinction or, at the very least, drastic modifications. Microforms may well replace many of the slick and formal "scholarly journals" which are now reproduced in amoeba-like fashion. Some of this activity is an effort to provide an answer to the problems posed by the academic syndrome—"publish or perish." In order to fulfill the need for swift dispensation of information regarding research projects, there is presently an increase in the use of mimeograph papers distributed within the scholarly community among persons interested in a particular discipline. The time elapsed between the date an article is submitted to a journal and the date of its publication is frequently extensive. Bibliographical control through standard index services may, unfortunately, be bypassed and increased reliance placed on expanded nationwide networks of information clearinghouses in various disciplines such as those developed by the Educational Resource Information Center (ERIC). In the event these changes transpire, an entire segment of serials may no longer be viable products for subscription agents to handle in any significant quantity.

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APRIL, 1976
Problems of direct importance to the supplying of periodicals involve short publisher discounts and the resulting service charges, increased operating overhead, and increased rates in mailing. In addition to rising subscription costs, librarians are also vitally concerned about the present efforts to determine fair use in reproducing copyrighted material such as journal articles, entire newsletters, reports, etc., in terms of remuneration to the copyright holder and costs which the library may have to assume.

Articles on the Sisyphean labor involved in acquiring periodicals and other serial publications appear perennially. Each year various facets of this business function of determining the most economical method of handling subscriptions in terms of time and money prove to be items receiving attention by both librarians and vendors alike. They all confirm the fact that the choosing of a subscription agent is not an exact science.

Guide to Magazine and Serial Agents by Bill Katz and Peter Gallatly, published in late 1975, covers in depth the major issues (and a significant number of the minor ones) which are a constant concern among librarians, agents and publishers. Their thorough analyses, resulting from surveying 850 various types of libraries (of which 95 percent employ one or more agents), probe the problems of orders, claims, payments, correspondence, pricing, discounts, service charges, and costs, as well as the relationship of the library to serials in general. It is a volume which brings together a staggering amount of information about serial work, serial agents, and related subjects which until now existed in fragmented form or had not been codified at all.

The heightened attention to these matters is not difficult to understand when one accepts the above-mentioned fact that the proportion of the budget of libraries all across the country being used to purchase new serial titles and to maintain ones already being received has become a threat to overall acquisition policies. In some instances this consumptive factor has reached as high as 70 percent, particularly among large college and university libraries. The economics of having a good agent are difficult to evaluate. Up until about twenty years ago there were agents who also provided very personalized treatment; they tailored their services and facilities to the collection-building programs of the particular libraries they were serving. Some of the things they did are now legendary. Through their resourcefulness giant serial collections were built.

These are the same collections that the industrial entrepreneurs
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and opportunists in the library publications world utilized in the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s to build up fantastic storehouses of reprint volumes and microform products, which are now readily and easily available through such agencies as Kraus Reprint, Abrahams Magazine Service (AMS) and University Microfilms. What once had to be obtained on brittle paper, unbound or in poor binding, can now be acquired attractively cased, neatly embossed, and on paper of Barrow quality, capable of withstanding the acids of time—if you but have the funds.

The large number of serial titles efficiently handled by large agencies, such as EBSCO, Faxon and Stechert-Macmillan, is largely made possible because of technological developments which have appeared in the past two decades. I would be slow to subscribe to the idea of invention and “mother” necessity, but the occurrence of such developments at a time when the serial population was exploding was certainly opportune.

THE PAST

In looking back to the initial appearances of advertisements in the Library Journal, one finds various statements by periodical agents. Among them was Lemcke & Buechner (London, Leipzig, Paris), a firm bringing its services to the attention of the United States. Although citing an office at 812 Broadway, New York, this new location was not included in the letterhead. The firm offered foreign periodicals at the lowest rates and had as its most important competitor Gustav E. Stechert. Stechert had indicated his office in the United States at Nine East Sixteenth Street, New York, and emphasized that he was “the only importer in America, who employs no Agents, but has his own offices at: London, Paris [and] Leipzig . . . where experienced clerks and assistants attend carefully to the orders from New York.”

Stechert established his serial operation in 1872, four years before the American Library Association was formed. His advertisements provided the following information:

1.—The receipt of every order is acknowledged at once;
2.—Orders are sent to my European offices twice a week;
3.—Shipments from London, Paris and Leipzig are received every week, hence I can import: from London in 3 to 4 weeks; from Paris in 4 weeks; from Leipzig in 4 to 5 weeks;
4.—Orders which could not be filled at once are reported;
5.—Out of print and scarce items are hunted up. Of such works a list in form of a card catalogue is made up and is constantly before the eyes of the clerks;
6.—A list of continuations is kept of works being published in consecutive volumes. Such volumes are supplied as soon as published without a reminder from the customer;
7.—Patterns of bindings are taken from all specially bound first volumes;
8.—Periodicals are imported flat in bales by fastest steamers and delivered to my customers cheaper, quicker, and in better condition than by mail from abroad.

Stechert also pointed out that he was in direct communication and had accounts with all European publishers and dealers. Therefore, he emphasized that he did not pay any commission to agents, "but always got the bottom price and often an extra discount." He emphasized that the librarian saved the cost and labor of correspondence to various European firms and thus had to keep only one account. Another saving resulted from reduced mail costs, since:

As shipments are received Weekly: "Mondays from England and France and Thursday from Germany," no order, large or small, needs to wait for accumulation of material. If books from England, France, and Germany are ordered, these books will congregate at New York from where they will be sent in one shipment, thereby saving the expense of packing, freight, consular fees, Custom House charges, cartage, etc.

There were other dealers in serials; A.S. Clark, "Bookseller and Newsdealer," who was also operating from New York, constantly ran an ad stating: "I WISH TO REPEAT, that if you have tried in vain to secure a missing number or volume of a magazine, if your list has come back repeatedly, marked "O.P.," "can't find," etc, etc., then the time has arrived when my services may avail." Elsewhere he claimed: "I offer to supply with reasonable promptness and cost, articles from magazines and reviews, upon any topic. If lists are made by the aid of 'Poole's Index,' please observe method therein contained." In regard to supplying magazines he stated:

I will undertake to supply any magazine or review published, at a price per copy depending upon its market value, or the cost of finding same, if not on hand. I have considerably over 500,000 magazines in stock, and the assortment is as varied as the produc-
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tion of the periodical press for the last one hundred years. A Business-like query with list of wants will be met by a prompt and business-like reply.7

The problems of today's costs for serial subscriptions, and the variety of pricing policies among subscription agents involving service charges, itemized and buried, provide an opportunity for interesting and at times dismaying comparisons when one examines all the good things promised and the end result.

The simplicities of the early years regarding invoicing, discounts, service charges, etc. are unidentifiable today, as are the modes for acquiring serials. A few years ago, before the money streams dried up, it was not at all unusual for a new state-supported satellite university library to be supplied with funding from a variety of sources, grants, and special allocations, in addition to the significant base sum from the state with which to begin the new collection. Complete files of sets of reprinted serial publications and/or full files of serial titles in various types of microform were readily available for a fee.

This was not always so and it was with great diligence that the serial collections were built which were to provide today's offhand, non-bookman approach to collection building. For instance, advertisements published by the Boston Book Company in 1896 point out the sudden recognition of the importance of complete back runs of serials:

The use of Poole's Index has made sets of periodicals an essential part of every library. Such sets ought to be absolutely perfect—text, titles, plates, and indexes. An imperfect set is a constant irritation to the reader and to the librarian.

In buying, it is wiser to get from a responsible source sets guaranteed to be complete, than to run the risk of getting an imperfect set because it appears to be cheaper. Time, worry, and money are usually saved—in the long run—by buying perfect and solidly-bound sets. But it is difficult to find perfect sets. Until recently, the only way to get them was to seize whatever partial sets turned up at sales, or in second-hand lists, and then spend years in filling gaps.

Realizing that the increased use of periodicals was thus adding to the worries of library work, we have undertaken the hunting, collecting, perfecting, collating, and (if desired) the binding of long sets of periodicals, in order to save librarians all this detail, and to
furnish them with sound and complete sets at reasonable prices." Mr. Frederick W. Faxon . . . goes to London to manage our foreign agency until November next. He is so familiar with the needs of American libraries that he will be able to serve them efficiently, while abroad, in procuring or perfecting foreign sets.10

Even prior to this, the supplying of journals to libraries and individuals in the early nineteenth century had begun to pose problems for book agents which they had not encountered in the less complex matter of marketing monographs. In 1872, Frederic Leypoldt began publishing the official organ of the Publishers' Board of Trade and the Book Trade Association of Philadelphia, The Publishers' and Stationers' Weekly Trade Circular; A Journal Devoted to the Interests of the Publishing, Printing, Book, Stationery, News, Music, Art, and Fancy Trades, and Associated Branches (now Publishers' Weekly). It appeared every Thursday and carried a section entitled "Journalistic," which cited new journal publications and various changes in old ones as well as a section, "Contents of Periodicals," which listed articles in current issues of selected periodicals. Leypoldt's publication incorporated the American Literary Gazette and Publishers' Circular, established in 1852 and one of the first commercially distributed publications to provide booksellers with up-to-date information about new serial titles; as a counterpart, the Publishers' Circular, published in London, began in 1837 and provided limited information on magazines and reviews.

GROWTH OF SERIALS

The growth of serial agencies has been a gradual one. The beginnings may be found in the development of specialization in handling reviews and journals by certain booksellers early in the nineteenth century. Frequent references made by companies such as F.W. Faxon and Stechert-Macmillan to their historic roots as serial agencies can be found by tracing their genealogical ancestry to early bookseller ads. Such relationships include that of Gustav Stechert to the present Stechert-Macmillan Company, or Frederick W. Faxon's years with the Boston Book Company. Periodical agencies are among the earliest of library supply houses and probably have only one type of agency that predates them—suppliers of library furniture and equipment. Although the twentieth century is regarded as the age of serials (as the eighteenth century was one of pamphlets and the nineteenth of
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books), it is only within the past two decades that periodicals and their suppliers have really found their way into the limelight.

One gauge of this influx may be obtained by examining several editions of The Faxon Librarians’ Guide to Periodicals and American Subscription Catalog. In the 1932-33 season it listed 1,150 titles “American and English”; the 1942-43 edition carried 2,000 titles “American and Foreign”; the 1952-53 edition listed “over 2,500 American and Foreign” titles; the 1963 edition, 3,000; and the 1973 edition provided an alphabetical listing of over 50,000 “American and International Periodicals.” The 1976 guide contains listings referring to their file of more than 70,000 titles. Comparable growth statistics may be profiled for other agencies, but this example will serve to illustrate the exponential explosion in serials which has developed in recent years, and its impact on subscription agencies.

In determining the size of the “serial population” there are always variables. It depends largely on who is supplying the statistics and how the word “serial” is defined. The introduction to the two-volume set of New Serial Titles; 1950-1970 Subject Guide, published by R.R. Bowker Company (1975), provides a reasonably reliable analysis:

The total number of current serial publications in the major files in the United States is estimated at 360,000. The New Serial Titles 1950-1970, which includes all the titles reported by the 800 collaborating U.S. and Canadian libraries during this period, contains 220,000 titles. Between 1971 and 1975 another 50,000 titles are expected to be added. One third of these titles are in Science and Technology. The Bowker Serials Bibliography, an international, selective list of current serials including titles which are abstracted and indexed, subscribed to by major libraries, handled by major subscription agencies, etc., contains 80,000 titles. There are 30,000 titles overlapping between the two files. The Standard Periodical Directory carries 60,000 U.S. and Canadian titles. Tens of thousands of titles of local importance are not centrally listed. In addition to the current titles, there is a large number of ceased serials. The retrospective files of ceased serial titles at the New York Public Library and Library of Congress have more than a million entries.

A survey showed that the 80,000 current titles in the Bowker Serials Bibliography file covers approximately 90 percent of the needs of any major library in the U.S. in every subject field, except the subject area of the special library. To try to cover the remaining 10
percent, four times more titles should be added. The maintenance of such a file could not be economically justified.11

The American Council of Learned Societies is presently supporting a two-year study under the direction of Edward E. Booher. The study, which has federal and foundation financing, will examine the need and value of the continuing proliferation of scholarly and scientific journals which presently results in the publication of trivia by young scholars who are faced with the “publish or perish” syndrome mentioned earlier. The investigation will consider such factors as duplication among the journals, bibliographic methods, and technological innovations in publishing. It is estimated that 10,000 scholarly and scientific journals are published in the United States alone, and there is much concern about the quality and cost of this material at a time when budget problems are striking a majority of libraries of all types.

A VIEW OF SUBSCRIPTION AGENCY FUNCTIONS

The subscription agency functions primarily as a single source through which library orders are channeled to the publisher. It is also an organization which provides an expedient method of handling and standardizing the invoicing of hundreds or thousands of publications, eliminating the inundation of the serials librarian through the receipt of invoices in various sizes, shapes and informational complexities. The major ingredient sold by subscription agencies, therefore, is service and, as pointed out from time to time, librarians and purchasing officers misunderstand the subscription agencies’ mission by wrongly assuming that since payment was sent to them, the agency has a contract to provide the periodicals. In fact, once the agent has placed the orders with the publisher, the agent’s major function has been completed and the basic contractual agreement fulfilled.

The following concise statement presents the basics:

A subscription agency has as its goals three fundamental functions:

1. Accurate, prompt placement of new orders.
2. Speedy and vigorous attention to claims and adjustments.
3. Timely renewal of expiring subscriptions.12

Agencies also provide various levels of bibliographic assistance such as catalogs, some of them quite sophisticated and filled with otherwise difficult-to-locate information. In general, all state that they are willing to stand behind the services advertised.

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Agents are usually prepared to offer whatever “bonds” are required to comply with individual library procedures and/or the various local regulations, as well as to submit references upon request. Established magazine agencies encourage prospective customers to make inquiries to the leading publishers relative to the agency’s soundness, and some encourage checking Dun & Bradstreet for the agency’s rating.

However, there are always unforeseen events which bring about the downfall of the mightiest in all fields of endeavor. Thus, we have the dissolving of the Richard Abel Company, the reorganization of Stechert-Hafner, now Stechert-Macmillan, and the merging of the Mayfair Agency with Franklin Square Agency, all of which merged into EBSCO Subscription Services, as did Universal Periodical Services.

Domestic and foreign agencies are evaluated among librarians in a variety of ways, usually with subjective overtones. Consideration is given to the promptness with which subscriptions are entered and service started, clarity in invoicing and ease in making reductions or other adjustments, response time to claims and general correspondence, flexibility relative to subscription adjustment, reliability in handling standing orders, and supplementary invoicing or “bill backs.”

In the case of foreign agents such as Blackwell, Harrassowitz, or Nijhoff, special consideration is given relative to the communication problem and also relative to their manner of supplying journals in separate shipments, such as Nijhoff does. Unless there is specific pressure to try to speed up delivery by ordering directly, it certainly is easier to handle foreign serials with an agent.

Katz and Gellatly, in the book cited above, have covered this matter of agent evaluation more thoroughly than has ever been done before. Anyone interested in this subject could do no better than to consult it. In their introduction they state:

This guide is an effort to indicate the best type of subscription agent for a particular library. Librarians accepting two premises—that most agents are reliable and that most librarians should employ agents—need not withhold criticism of the individual agent or agents. . . . For a library with more than one hundred periodical titles on order, it is generally a good idea to employ an agent. This is so even in the case of an agent whose service charge is from 5 to 20 percent. A section is given over to charges, but from the beginning one point should be made clear to all readers: agents are not in business for their health; they have to charge the library for services. . . . Given the charges, hidden or apparent, it still is more
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economic and efficient to employ a subscription agent for periodicals and other types of serials. Not all librarians agree, and their arguments are summarized later on.

Subscription agencies vary in the manner in which they assess service charges. Some dealers make a flat charge for processing every new subscription, and across-the-board service charges ranging from 5 percent to 20 percent for maintaining existing ones. Librarians should exercise caution in accepting across-the-board service charges, or at least examine their subscription list carefully to see if it contains expensive items for which a standard unit charge per title could add greatly to the total cost. In such cases it may prove financially advantageous to handle these items through the publishers.

Lists comprised largely of popular titles may well provide a significant discount to the agent and eliminate the need for a service charge. Universal Periodical Subscription Agency points out what is also applicable to others: that their organization does not receive a commission from all publishers, which is their primary source of profit. Moreover, there is generally no set profit margin extended to an agent for a periodical. As a result, a list of periodicals from one library may provide a discount to cover handling costs and provide a margin of profit for the agent, whereas another library’s list may include titles with short discounts or none at all. The result is that a service charge must be made. Experience has shown that lists with titles heavy in the area of science/technology or business items frequently require a handling charge. These matters of periodical costs, library costs for processing serials, agency charges, and estimating added charges and other related expenditures are examined in detail both from the points of view of the subscription agent and of the librarian in Katz and Gellatly.

The majority of subscription agents make an effort to provide “extras” in terms of considerations for late payments, the handling of sticky bid problems, and maintenance of complex payments files and data to expedite claiming. However, there are occasional exceptions to any rule. Katz and Gellatly report that the Federal Trade Commission early in the 1970s found it necessary to investigate charges of deceptive tactics among some field agents relative to selling long-term magazine subscriptions.

Although one may subscribe to the idea that there exists no overwhelming problem with subscription agencies regarding pricing, placing of subscriptions, and general service charges, a gray area
remains which requires brief attention. Some of the promises cited above, although probably made in good faith, are most difficult to keep—if not impossible. The promises are sometimes the product of an overly enthusiastic ad writer’s pen, and are always optimistic.

Agents and regional managers have been known to agree with serial librarians that some of the claims made in boldface type in advertisements and brochures do not spell out the basic fact, which is that these claims are presented with the assumption that you have read the fine print or asked a representative the proper questions. To illustrate this point, the following are brief excerpts from some publishers’ brochures: Popular Subscription Service claims that it “can satisfactorily supply any periodical published anywhere in the world” and assures the subscriber the “‘BEST POSSIBLE SERVICE AND RATES’ for any and all magazine subscriptions available on the subscription market.” Regarding the clientele it serves, Popular Subscription Service, in its 1976 Directory of Periodical Listings, makes the following statement: “We herewith invite your interest to the most up to date subscription service available with complete satisfaction guaranteed.” Its directory contains about 4,000 titles which schools and libraries most frequently order, although it does claim to service some 50,000 titles.

Universal Periodical Services (now an EBSCO affiliate) regards itself as a part of the library’s staff, stating:

Universal is a full-service subscription agency—an extension of the library’s periodical acquisitions department—ready to expedite orders for periodicals, serials, newspapers, newsletters, back-issues, continuations, irregulars, annuals, transactions, proceedings, standing orders, by-volume orders, memberships, and government publications—all titles that can be ordered through an agency.

The process of making thousands of current journals available when needed has become a highly specialized task. Ultimately, however, there is still only one need: the proper delivery, on time, to the subscriber.

Another dimension of the matter of good business relationships with subscription agencies involves their working with the publishers, which is reflected in the following statement from Popular Subscription Service:

We pay for all subscriptions in advance. We cannot guarantee the
solvent of publisher the continued publication of any periodical.

We act as your agent and hold ourselves fully responsible for promptly processing your order with the publisher.

Occasionally a periodical is discontinued and the publisher does not make an adjustment on a subscription in force. Since we have already paid for your subscription in advance, we cannot hold ourselves responsible. However, in most cases the publishers do make an adjustment and the same is then turned over to you.¹⁶

For the most part, subscription agencies spell out what they regard as their responsibilities and make clear the areas in which they disclaim liability:

EBSCO’s obligation is to order subscriptions and service delivery or, if obtainable, substitution or refund. We guarantee entry and service of your order excepting publisher bankruptcy and other non-agent responsibilities. We cannot accept responsibility for government mails or final delivery. Our service after entry is prompt and exhaustive in securing timely delivery.¹⁷

And in another EBSCO advertisement regarding services:

We gladly research any title ordered and do not expect the customer to provide publisher name and address. Our research cycle is thorough and provides a quick answer if we are unable to identify the publisher. We service titles from all nations of the world. The only titles we cannot (normally) service for you are order-direct by the publisher’s requirement. (However, if you are a librarian who desires to place 100 percent of all serials with a single agency, we can handle even the order-direct publishers for you.)

The parentheses in that last sentence are interesting afterthoughts and, with any imagination at all, give one the idea that special considerations regarding personal requirements are to be had at various levels depending on his gambling instinct. This is only good business and, if special considerations can be had from any agent having a proven track record, the amount of library staff time saved by not having to track down “directs only” will more than compensate for any cost. However, this may well be another example of an ad writer’s enthusiastic optimism.

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COST AND MARKETING FACTORS

Librarians can rarely supply figures on the amount of money involved in staff salaries, materials, and basic overhead in placing an order. An order in a large operation is frequently handled by many people whose salaries range from the high of the professional librarian to the low represented by a student's hourly wage.

The cost of handling a subscription in a library varies with the size of the unit and the complexity of the material, e.g., whether an academic publication in a foreign language or a popular title in English is being acquired. However, various studies have shown that professional, clerical and related overhead costs hover around an average figure of $25-$30 minimum with the figure escalating rapidly depending on the uniqueness of the situation. In their Librarians' Handbook, EBSCO suggests the wide range of $6-$25 to issue and process a single serial order.

There is a trend toward fewer subscription agencies of larger size, the major ones in the United States being EBSCO Subscription Services and F.W. Faxon Company, which together handle nearly two-thirds of the subscriptions sold by agents to the library world. Both handle U.S. and foreign serials. Katz and Gellatly state that there are eight medium-sized domestic agents: Stechert-Macmillan (formerly Stechert-Hafner), Moore-Cottrell Subscription Agencies (absorbed the magazine function of Maxwell International Subscription Agency in 1974), Maxwell Group (Maxwell Scientific International and Microforms International), Universal Periodical Services, McGregor Magazine Agency, Read-More Publications, Instructor Subscription Agency, and Turner Subscription Agency. There are smaller agencies and some for which the demarcation line between medium-sized and small is thin. In addition, there are field agents working as subsidiaries of the large catalog agencies mentioned above, as well as numerous independent agencies.

In a paper delivered at a conference on serials management, Philip Greene referred to a 1972 report published by the Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABC) which indicated that there were about 153 U.S. subscription agencies. These were full-service agencies, of which fewer than a dozen handled accounts with academic libraries. The emphasis in this segment of his paper was on academic libraries (college and university); school libraries and very small public libraries were excluded. The following figures were presented to
provide some reference point as to the magnitude of the symbiotic relationship between the library and the subscription agency. Including junior colleges, it was estimated that there were 2,107 college and university libraries in the United States; approximately 5,000 research and special libraries; 2,546 health science libraries, excluding those with university affiliations; 4,000 public libraries with book budgets in excess of $10,000—bringing the total number of libraries considered to 13,653.

It was found that the 2,107 college and university libraries spent approximately $43 million per year for 2,150,000 periodicals. Serials other than periodicals (i.e., annuals, yearbooks, transactions) involve an estimated 1,353,000 items and account for the expenditure of an additional $40 million, or a total outlay of approximately $83 million annually. As to foreign agencies, it was estimated that there were one or two full-service agencies in each European, Asian and South American country; foreign sales totaled somewhere in the neighborhood of $100 million per year. These figures are rising in view of the continuing increase in the quantity of published material; somewhat alarming is the continued increase in book and periodical prices when compared with general commodity costs. Serials in general (foreign and domestic) have been subjected to startling subscription price increases.

During the past sixteen years a number of serial cost indexes have developed. According to Library Journal, the average price in 1975 of an American periodical was $19.94—an increase of 13 percent over 1974. Table 1 provides additional comparisons. The price increases in commercial serials, particularly in the science/technology area, continue to provide the usual spectaculars with the cost of Chemical Abstracts rising from $2,400 in 1975 to $3,500 for 1976, and that of Mathematical Reviews from $280 in 1975 to $450 in 1976. In general, the journals published by the American Chemical Society and those published by the American Institute of Physics have had increases of more than 30 percent from 1975 to 1976 subscription rates.

Along with the high subscription prices in certain disciplines are built-in expenses in the form of double and triple rates for subscriptions to libraries as compared with those for personal subscriptions. A variety of journals in several subject areas published by several firms (for example, those published by Gordon and Breach) fall into this esoteric and expensive category.

There are also other groups of serials—such as those issued by Pergamon Press, Academic Press, McGraw-Hill, and others—which
TABLE 1
AVERAGE COST OF LIBRARY MATERIALS BY TYPE

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>U.S. Periodicals</td>
<td>$11.66</td>
<td>$13.23</td>
<td>$16.20</td>
<td>$17.71</td>
<td>$19.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. Serial Services*</td>
<td>90.05</td>
<td>95.38</td>
<td>103.45</td>
<td>109.31</td>
<td>118.03</td>
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*Excluding "Wilson Index."


require careful shepherding and even more careful thought before introducing a third party—the subscription agency—to the rather regimented routines established by such publishers. This problem is aggravated by a new concern over the postal rate options these publishers are beginning to offer to libraries. This latter item is one which is rapidly becoming a major worry for both the library and the subscription agency. Subscription agencies are being faced with the need to increase prices further in view of new postal rates. Moreover, cost factors will mushroom in this area—and possibly compel a revamping of marketing procedures—if second class mailing privileges are revoked for newspapers and periodicals. A charge of this nature will almost guarantee higher subscription rates by publishers, as well as the possibility of new surcharges by agents. Librarians wince at the very thought of a continuing escalation in postal charges. The cost of first class postage for newspapers and journals seems prohibitive in view of the recent 30 percent rate increase.

An alternative, of course, is to send these materials third class bulk mail. However, one major supplier of serial services, Commerce Clearing House, recently did a survey and found that third class bulk mailing of their reports showed 1.6 percent reached their destination in four to six days; 82.1 percent took seven to fifteen days; 14.9 percent required sixteen to twenty-four days; and 1.4 percent spent a staggering twenty-five to thirty-four days in transit. It would appear that an answer must be found somewhere between these extremes if the general dissemination of printed material and our free flow of information are not to receive a terrific setback. It is well known that certain types of publications lose their value unless received promptly. Such items include update services, advance sheets, weeklies, and indexes and abstracts, to mention only a few. For example, an invoice just received for the May 1976-April 1977 issues of the Journal of...
Current Laser Abstracts advises that a $15.00 charge will be made for the option of first class mail delivery. The Economist Intelligence Unit Limited also has recently advised its subscribers that while postage was never charged before, new subscriptions beginning in 1976 will be assessed full postage charges which involve additional costs ranging from $6.00 to $25.00 for air mail, and from $2.00 to $5.00 for surface mail for each title.

Serial agencies are not "serial supply houses" and their operations should not be thought of in the same sense that the activities of suppliers of various physical commodities are examined in other papers in this volume. There are publishers who run a "closed shop," and through their circulation manager or fulfillment department handle all orders for their titles without the middleman—the agency. In her fine volume, Serials: Acquisition & Maintenance, Clara Brown cites eight types of serials in which the option of a subscription agent is not usually valid: (1) memberships (publications received through an institutional membership), (2) expensive items, such as Chemical Abstracts or translations, (3) services such as those provided by Commerce Clearing House or Prentice-Hall, (4) special items, such as the Polk Directories or city directories, (5) publications of societies and institutions, (6) little magazines or avant-garde serials in general, (7) university publications, and (8) serial microforms. Documents in general and U.S. documents in particular are also best handled directly. Periodicals and other serials make up the major portion of the output of the U.S. Government Printing Office (U.S.G.P.O.) and in recent years have increased drastically in subscription price.

U.S.G.P.O. publications are handled through the Office of the Superintendent of Documents. It is a clearinghouse (with the problems of both a publisher and a subscription agency) for the many thousands of monographs, periodicals and other series published by the U.S.G.P.O. and originating from hundreds of federal government offices, agencies, bureaus, etc. U.S.G.P.O. serial subscriptions are usually accepted by the Superintendent of Documents' office for a one-year period only unless otherwise specified. Exclusive of mailing time, a new subscription to U.S.G.P.O. journals requires from two to eight weeks processing time and once submitted it is virtually impossible to locate it until fed into the computer.

The Office of the Superintendent of Documents is saturated with acquisition requests. In November 1975 the plea was made: "PLEASE BE PATIENT. Frankly—we're swamped with orders in the Washington, D.C. Central Office." The Assistant Public Printer, Carl A.
Serial Subscription Agencies

LaBarre, went on to explain that the Superintendent of Documents' office had over 170,000 orders on hand and received an additional 15,000-20,000 daily. He added that everything possible was being done to improve service and reduce processing time. Modern warehousing and order processing space is being obtained and "components of a computerized order-fulfillment system are being developed."

Problems involved in handling U.S.G.P.O. subscriptions expeditiously are further complicated because of the Superintendent of Documents discount policy, which makes it almost impossible for a subscription agency to handle U.S.G.P.O. periodicals without a surcharge. As of January 1, 1974, the following strict policy went into force:

A discount of 25 percent will be allowed to bookdealers when the publications, pamphlets, periodicals or subscription services are mailed, delivered or forwarded to the dealer's normal place of business.

No discounts will be allowed when the publication, pamphlet, periodical, or subscription service is mailed to a third party (unless in quantities of 100 or more), or on those periodicals or subscription services which fall into a special pricing category as noted in this Price List.

The fact that the volume of orders handled by U.S.G.P.O. is so huge and that U.S.G.P.O. is obligated to handle requests from the most diverse sources imaginable does not permit subscription agencies to receive special or favored treatment. Moreover, as a noncommercial venture in the broad profit-making sense, U.S.G.P.O. is neutral when it comes to handling an order from the J. Does of the United States or one from a subscription agency. Problems of correspondence, claims, and communications are procedurally limiting and allow little, if any, solution to the custom-made requirements of libraries.

U.S.G.P.O. serials have high birth and death rates. Although no actuarial tables are available, the general vital statistics are such that for every 100 that die, the likelihood is strong that another 100 will be born to take their places.

In addition to the restricted manner in which library U.S.G.P.O. subscriptions are handled, there is the matter of subscription costs. The cost of subscription prices for U.S. document serials, which for
years have been regarded as moderately priced, has risen substan-
tially (see Table 2).

There are very few subscription agencies who will handle
U.S.G.P.O. periodicals because of the distastefully high service
charges they must assess. In addition, the logistics of this form of
order in accordance with the Superintendent of Documents regula-
tions cited above produce a situation making this category of serials
one in which the use of a subscription agency may provide an
additional problem.

BIDDING

The grim specter of bids remains a continuing problem. It is
difficult to find serialists or subscription agents who do not find this
practice restricting and generally negative in terms of cost-effective-
ness and certainly in terms of service. In addition, the matter of
subscription continuity is jeopardized each time there is a vendor
change. Furthermore, the opportunity to take advantage of the
combination two- or three-year subscription rates possible with “til
forbid” orders is also lost if the library and agency are yoked to
regulations requiring annual bids.

High school libraries are frequently involved in bid system obliga-
tions as a result of municipal legislation or school board rulings.
However, many libraries (if not the majority) include in their bid
request statements which provide them with enough discretionary
leeway to offset the disaster of fly-by-night agents, although the
practice of not paying the agent until the subscription begins does
provide an element of guaranteed performance. If bid procedures
prevail, there is always the arduous task of preparing lists. With little
fear of contradiction, one can say that the amount of money saved in
actual cash payments will not offset the hidden overhead involved in
record changes throughout the system. One school contacted uses the
phrase: “The school district has the right to accept the bid which is in
the best interest of the district.” In talking with purchasing agents for
various public school units where bid systems are in force, they
occasionally take a chance on an “unknown” because of a low bid;
through conversations with other school administrators in charge of
purchasing, however, they most often receive advice on past per-
formance of agents which reduces the potential risk substantially.

The practice of requesting bids does not appear as strong in
medium-sized public libraries, although the use of this procedure
TABLE 2  
SUBSCRIPTION PRICES FOR U.S. DOCUMENT SERIALS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Serial</th>
<th>1972</th>
<th>1974</th>
<th>1975</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American Education</td>
<td>$4.50</td>
<td>$9.95</td>
<td>$13.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Conditions Digest</td>
<td>15.00</td>
<td>45.80</td>
<td>55.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code of Federal Regulations</td>
<td>195.00</td>
<td>350.00</td>
<td>350.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commerce Business Daily</td>
<td>25.00</td>
<td>63.50</td>
<td>75.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department of State Bulletin</td>
<td>16.00</td>
<td>29.00</td>
<td>42.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Index Medicus</td>
<td>63.00</td>
<td>155.00</td>
<td>173.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuclear Science Abstracts</td>
<td>42.00</td>
<td>75.50</td>
<td>121.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey of Current Business</td>
<td>9.00</td>
<td>34.45</td>
<td>48.50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Documents Division of the Serials Department, University of Illinois Library.

varies greatly and is largely determined by local legislation; libraries which are units in governmental agencies are probably most often those faced with the bidding process. Large public libraries face other problems in this area, and in some cases the attempt by the larger municipality to avoid the slightest tinge of corrupt practice results in bids made not only on the major portion of the serial collection but with subordinate bids made to handle journals in specific subject areas. In academic libraries the practice of dealing with serial acquisitions in terms of bids is most reprehensible, particularly in large libraries.

The practice of bidding on services from a subscription agency is not equivalent to that of bidding on static items such as tables, electrical equipment, and stationery. Subscriptions to serials are dynamic things. The titles change, merge, die, and undergo amoebic generations that cannot be foreseen. Therefore, reliance must be placed on the ability of the subscription agency to handle these changes, which generate mountains of paperwork. Each purchase of a serial title is certainly a separate business transaction, but what is being bid upon is the ability of the subscription agency to handle through a single invoice the hundreds of invoices from hundreds of publishers which would swamp most library staffs. The value of an agency is in its efficient management of these business matters and its provision of additional service through handling claims for missing issues, correspondence regarding billing and credit adjustments, bibliographical problems, cancellations, and a vast variety of situations.
stemming from various types of orders to the need for common expiration dates. EBSCO sums up its feeling on the matter of bids in a succinct manner which might well receive the endorsement of other agents and librarians alike:

Service is our foremost goal, and our established service capability sometimes makes it possible for us to offer you the lowest price obtainable. However, seasoned buyers know of the necessity of good service on periodicals and that strict competitive bid buying most often makes award to an organization with lowest operating costs and least ability to provide good service. Competitive bid acquisition of physically definable commodities sometimes makes sense, the procedure works poorly when applied to the acquisition of continuing services.\(^2\)

The phrase “lowest responsible bidder” carries both buried meaning and broad legal overtones. The federal government has provided its procurement agencies with some guidelines in this respect, which are severely condensed here but covered fully by Miles Price.\(^3\) The supplier should: (1) have adequate financial resources or ability to secure same; (2) have necessary experience, organization, technical qualification, and facilities to handle the contract; (3) have ability to comply with delivery schedule; and (4) have satisfactory record for performance, integrity, judgment, and skills.

Thus, when a library gets into the matter of using a bid system to obtain a subscription agency capable of handling all types of serials for all types of libraries, it is tantamount to a search for the Holy Grail; this has provoked many frustrations and limited success from its less-than-perfect seekers.

CONSOLIDATION, COORDINATION, AND COOPERATION: SOME OBSERVATIONS

The significant changes which have taken place in subscription agencies within the past decade have been primarily computer-oriented. Such phrases as “on-line retrieval of customer accounts” and “on-line retrieval of publisher’s records” have become commonplace. The whole concept of tailoring a customer’s account through machine programming to take care of special invoicing or other unique requirements for a particular institution, combined with the use of a cathode-ray tube and related computer facilities, have become standard business practices in many companies. A growing
Serial Subscription Agencies

The number of subscription agents are handling their operations through the use of computer technology. What was experimental ten years ago has become standard operating procedure today, and EBSCO, Faxon, and Stechert-Macmillan, among others, have provided many libraries with their first introduction into the world of computerization. However, a world flanked by computers has a long way to go before such service can be bought without premonitions—some of which have become all too harshly real. Subscription agencies compete keenly with each other and the profit motive stands in the way of voluntary cooperation. The large continue to engulf the small—or at least make it impossible for them to compete. As mentioned earlier, the trend is toward a few large subscription agencies with many regional subsidiaries.

Coordination and cooperation are words which trip readily off the tongues of personnel both inside and outside the library world. However, even the grim realities of severely reduced budgets have yet to make these concepts totally functional. The development of the Center for Research Libraries and its Journal Access Program, bolstered heavily through a liaison with the British Lending Library, has enjoyed only limited success. The effect of such joint efforts by libraries on subscription agencies is reduced orders. The matter of serving many libraries through a single subscription does pose new financial problems for them and, in turn, for the libraries. If some form of differential pricing of subscriptions evolves, serial budgets and serial acquisition policies will have to be reworked with the new philosophy in mind.

The continuing high cost of serials and the increasing number of titles being published is compelling the library community to cooperate and share resources. The idea is excellent but does have logistical problems which, coupled with the “territorial imperative” syndrome, sometimes make things run less than smoothly.

One approach emphasizes geographical compact units such as the Research Libraries Group (RLG), a consortium comprised of the New York Public Library and the libraries of Harvard, Yale, and Columbia. The RLG offers access to a total of 30 million volumes through the use of the telephone, tie-lines, and the United Parcel Service delivery. However, as with any such complex arrangement, there are many problems that do not appear on the surface, such as the development of common procedures, ongoing funding, and handling the growing copyright problems.

Cooperation on a broader scale is to be found in policies being
developed at the Center for Research Libraries (CRL) in Chicago. At the present time CRL, with funds received from the Carnegie Corporation and supported by dues from CRL member libraries, provides access to a large number of periodical titles. These shared resources reduce the need for CRL members to subscribe to thousands of titles made available through the Journal Access Program. This program is amplified by arrangements with the British Library Lending Division (BLLD) to obtain photocopies of articles from journals held by BLLD. Investigations into cooperative measures to handle the problems of reducing the number of serial subscriptions, which directly affects the financial structure of the subscription agency, are being pursued at the national level in the United States.

The National Commission on Libraries and Information Science (NCLIS) has organized a task force to examine the possibilities of establishing a national periodicals system. This task force is to review an early study done by the Association of Research Libraries, Access to Periodical Resources: A National Plan. The alternatives brought up by this study—such as regional centers backed up by resources of research libraries of a center patterned after the British Lending Library—will be studied. In its 1974/75 Annual Report the NCLIS made the following statement regarding the development of a national serials center:

The serials group also recognized the pragmatic necessity of a separate program for serials, and because there is already a serious problem in providing access to serials, recommended that priority be given this effort; a recommendation that the full conference endorsed. Here also, an immediate beginning with existing resources as a base was urged. Since access to a relatively small number of currently published "core" journals would meet the needs of most user groups, early attention was recommended to developing an accessible collection of this heavily-used core as the beginning of a National Serials Center or Centers.

Depending on the number of centers established, subscription services would be variously affected as far as reducing the number of copies of periodicals required by network libraries throughout the country.

Networks have become increasingly important in the new, economy-motivated efforts to consolidate resources and share serial subscriptions. The expansive possibilities of network cooperation have been singularly evidenced by the pragmatic success of the Ohio
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College Library Center (OCLC) from which have emanated many "nets." OCLC has now begun training librarians in the use of the OCLC Serials Check-in Component. This is the first of the three components in the OCLC Serials Control Subsystem; the claiming and binding controls have no definite date for implementation. As a result of the Conversion of Serials (CONSER) Project there are presently over 90,000 serial records in the on-line union catalog at OCLC.50

Many other changes are afoot in the handling of serials which will have both major and minor influences on the relations between subscription agencies and libraries. These changes in process range from the development of the MARC (machine-readable cataloging) format for serials, the National Serials Data Program (NSDP), the International Standard Serials Number (ISSN), International Serials Data System (ISDS), to the International Standard Bibliographic Description for Serials (ISBD-S). The cataloging of these selected activities is not to imply that all will have equal and grave importance to the transactions between subscription agencies and all libraries in the immediate future, although some are presently quite viable factors relative to MARC, NSDP and ISSN. However, all are elements in the developing programs involving the acquisition and bibliographical control of serials. Incorporation of other factors will depend on the outcome of the present copyright controversy relative to photocopying journals and parts of journals in terms of "fair use" for libraries and "fair compensation" for publishers, hopefully without developing into bookkeeping complexities. The development and implementation of divergent pricing policies by agents and/or publishers for subscriptions slated for regional or national periodical centers may well be expected. The multiple usage and expanded volume of photocopying in these centers for a single subscription to a scholarly journal will be measurable only by the membership roster of such centers which will come largely from college, university, and special libraries.

There is the strong possibility that an increasing number of serials will appear in microform only. Technological developments also indicate that large-scale expansion is continuing in the use of remote computer terminals, the development of which has made significant strides during the past several years—but in relatively limited situations. There is a strong need to continue in-depth investigation of the promises of the minicomputer and the capabilities of developing
library programs which are flexible enough to interface with programs written by subscription agencies. At present, there is still too much "blue-skying" (although greatly reduced from the 1960s), which contributes to a sense of instability and frustrates the expectation of easily shared serial bibliographic data on machine-readable records.

These continuing independent actions produce many islands of selective computer knowledge which are expensive and serve a limited, local need. At times they appear as archipelagos of expertise so hopelessly separated as never to be linked into a single working unit. As a result, library networks continue to develop on a primarily region-oriented basis, the centrum being a computer, a staff of system experts including a librarian or two, and a limited clientele to serve.

The development of the relationships between librarians and subscription agents and dealers in back-files of serials—either in original hard copy, reprints, or some aspect of microform—has been one which evolved simply from the handling of serials as a speciality of certain book dealers in the nineteenth century to the modern complex, computer-oriented subscription agency. The services offered reflect the advanced technology, and some provide free (or reasonably priced) elaborate catalogs with highly sophisticated and detailed information, supplying complete bibliographical profiles for thousands of serial titles which aid greatly in ordering and claiming on these materials. Back-file dealers put out equally elaborate catalogs which are bibliographically beautiful and provide in-depth information regarding hundreds of titles for which they can supply a complete file in hard copy or in microform. All in all, serial dealers, both in terms of service and in the acquiring of retrospective files, do a basically creditable job.

Katz and Gellatly found that 60-70 percent of the librarians they surveyed rated the majority of the subscription agents in a range from generally good to excellent. Their survey indicated that certain agents received their highest rating from certain types of libraries; i.e., one agent was most highly regarded by academic and special libraries, while the other received most plaudits from public and school libraries. As might be expected, any effort to assign ratings can run into trouble depending on the size of the sample, the source of the response, and the complexity of the operation. These are only a few of the variables, and any one could skew such evaluations. All five international agencies involved—Blackwell's Harrassowitz, Martinus
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Nijhoff, Stevens & Brown, and Swets & Zeitlinger—received ratings ranging from good to excellent.92

International agent extraordinaire, Gustav E. Stechert, and his contemporary continental operator, Fredrick W. Faxon, could in no way, it seems, have envisioned even with their special business acumen the seismographic effect serial publications would one day have on the economics of library book budget or the degree of technological sophistication that the future would require for the operating of a serial subscription agency or supply house for files of retrospective journals. Stechert's assurances mentioned earlier (that periodicals ordered through him would arrive cheaply, quickly and in the best of condition because they were “imported flat in bales by fastest steamers”) refers to a time when things in general moved more slowly and anxieties were not so multitudinous or pronounced. However, several ingredients which they possessed (as do most successful agencies)—confidence, resourcefulness, imagination, and flexibility—were apparent then as now.

The need for more space and general changes in collecting policies as a result of “use studies” have made the once all-important search for complete sets of journals passé. An increasing number of libraries maintain more retrospective runs in microform serials, with backfiles of hard copy offered for auction, such as those sales conducted by Maxwell Scientific International/Microforms International Marketing Company.

The formerly grand idea of self reliance has, as a result of economics, space, and research use of journals, been transformed into resource sharing through network programs and the potential of a national serial program. The challenge of this computer generation continues to tease us with unclear visions of what someday “may be.” The most important thing is that reasonably good rapport has been established between librarians and agents through joint participation in American Library Association programs, discussion groups, and the presentation of meaningful papers to library literature. This new dialog is not merely useful; its continuation is a necessity if librarians and subscription agencies are going to be able to act positively in solving mutually complex problems which are rapidly moving from the local to the national level.

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ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

Microform Publications: Hardware and Suppliers

RALPH J. FOLCARELLI
and
RALPH C. FERRAGAMO

It is the purpose of this article to review the importance of microforms as library media, to discuss the current status of the micropublishing industry as it relates to libraries, and to describe developments in micropublishing and micrographics which have strong implications for future library services. Emphasis will be on a discussion of the problem of selection of microform software and a delineation of the major sources. A cursory review of hardware problems will also be presented.

DEFINITIONS AND DELIMITATIONS

As used in this article, microform is a generic word used to describe a large variety of photographically reduced printed sources which must be mechanically enlarged for satisfactory use. Included are microforms of various sizes and types—16mm and 35mm roll film, microfiche (from the French word fiche meaning card), and micro-opaque (sometimes referred to as microprint).

This article will deal primarily with the microforms commonly used in libraries today. Except for some mention under a discussion of trends and developments, it will therefore not deal with the still-limited use of computer output microfilm (COM); nor will it deal with ultrafiche (where approximately 3200 pages at a reduction ratio of 150:1 are placed on one 4" x 6" fiche), since several major projects have not been widely accepted on the marketplace, and "it appears that ultrafiche will have no significant impact upon library microforms," at least in the immediate future.1

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APRIL, 1976

[711]
Microfiche, a relative newcomer to the microfilm arena, went through a period of uncertainty regarding a suitable reduction ratio. The Committee on Scientific and Technical Information (COSATI) developed a fiche with a 20:1 reduction ratio with about sixty pages on a 4” x 6” card, which was commonly used until about 1971. Since a large retrospective collection is still available today, it must continue to receive some consideration. However, the most commonly produced microfiche today contains approximately ninety-eight pages on 4” x 6” fiche, with a reduction ratio of 24:1; the microimages are arranged in seven rows and fourteen columns. “This American National Standard has been approved by the National Microfilm Association (a national association of individuals interested in the microform field, now called the National Micrographics Association (NMA)) and has been adopted by most micropublishers for many of their publications.”

THE CURRENT STATE OF THE MICROPUBLISHING ART

Whether micropublishing is really publishing by the purist’s definition is a moot point. The fact remains that the production of microforms of all types, including retrospective and original publishing, accounts for a phenomenal output of printed sources. If an accurate count could be made it might well reveal that literally millions of titles are currently available, including research reports, journal titles, monographs, dissertations and government publications. Several major micropublishers, such as the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), Xerox University Microfilms (XUM), and Readex Microprint Corporation, have in-print lists easily accounting for more than 3 million available titles. There are over 400,000 dissertations listed in XUM’s Comprehensive Dissertation Index; approximately 35,000 titles are added each year.

Furthermore, despite a current lull and the financial squeeze in the publishing industry as a whole, microform production is at an all-time high and there appears to be no limit to either the number of titles being filmed and remaining in print or the number of new micropublishing firms being established. Reichmann and Tharpe indicated in 1972 that: “the microform industry estimated that production would increase by 10 percent annually. The current prediction is 20 percent yearly.”
ADVANTAGES OF MICROFORMS AND REFLECTED LIBRARY USE

A quick review of the advantages of microforms as legitimate library media would cast some light on the reasons for the tremendous growth in the micropublishing industry. The generally accepted advantages, several of which can serve as criteria in selecting a microform source, include:

1. **Security.** Generally, the microdocument never leaves the library; it is thus not subject to the common problems of theft and mutilation faced with paper print. If stolen, there is a very low replacement cost. Micropublishers do three things to protect security: (1) they register a copy with the Library of Congress, (2) they keep a master of their own, and (3) they usually take another copy and file it in a security vault under controlled conditions.

2. **Integrity and preservation.** If the microdocument is properly filmed, and if the micropublishing house has good quality control, every page of that document remains intact as originally printed. In some cases, the filming of old documents beginning to deteriorate makes a better copy than the original; technology now permits print that has become suppressed or virtually erased to be raised and a sharper copy than the original to be produced.

3. **Reproducibility and convertibility.** Beginning with the founding of modern micropublishing in 1938 with the establishment of XUM, the evolution of printed document reproduction has gone from paper to film to paper; from paper to film to film; and then from film to film. Present capabilities of going directly from film to film or to other formats such as color slides, overhead transparencies, or even videotapes enable microforms to be used literally as hard copy. Nevertheless, even in the smallest libraries, such as many school media centers: “microforms can be converted into paper copy with the use of a simple printing device. The process per page is inexpensive and takes only a few seconds.”

4. **Accessibility.** There is general recognition that acquiring information is no longer an insurmountable task; the major problems lie in the area of recovery and use. This is particularly true in the large multistoried or decentralized university libraries. By establishing a separate microform area in its library, Boston University created the capacity to house and make readily accessible the equivalent of 500,000 bound volumes in an area of only 3,599
square feet with space for fifty reader stations. Figure 1 represents the potential use of the 3,599 square feet in the microform area at Boston University; however, not all of the reading equipment has yet been installed.

5. Density and space. “Because of miniaturization microforms have the highest storage density of any media.” Considering the possibilities of ultrafiche, a whole library “can now literally be stored in a few drawers of a card file.” Even considering 35mm roll film

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**Fig. 1** Potential Use of Space in the Microform Area.
Microform Publications

with approximately 3,000 pages on a 100-foot reel, or standard microfiche with 98 pages on a 4" × 6" fiche, microform publications "save more than 90% of the shelf space occupied by the same publications in paper form."

6. Economy. Because of the costs of composition, printing, paper, and binding, there is only a nominal difference between the cost of paper publications and micropublications where the traditional publishers are printing in both formats. Similarly, the cost factor by those publishers who are solely producing in microform, such as Princeton Microfilm Corporation, is determined by a cost per page; therefore, the price for both specialized and popular publications is about the same. However, a savings is derived by libraries in their purchase of large collections, series, or periodical sets in microform. It should also be noted that the average cost per volume of a journal from XUM collections is $8.50, while the average reprint in paper costs at least $25.00 per volume. In addition, the real economy must be interpreted in terms of the space savings described above.

7. Compatibility. Newer microform equipment makes it possible to handle a variety of microform formats through a simple lens change or use of an adapter; for example, Kodak's reader/printer, selling for approximately $4,000, can handle either 16mm or 35mm roll film and either positive or negative microfilm. It will also print paper copy of various sizes. Other manufacturers, such as the 3M Corporation and Xerox University Microfilms, are also producing comparable compatible units.

The growth of the micrographics industry in general (which includes the filming of documents by libraries for internal use and limited distribution) and the micropublishing field in particular (the latest edition of the Microform Market Place list about 400 micropublishers) is reflected in an increased interest in microforms by libraries of all types. Guided by the aforementioned advantages, the response by the library world has been one of general acceptance, if not enthusiasm. Libraries of every conceivable type are building microfilm collections, ranging from elementary school and children's libraries with Xedia children's books programs to the large university library with its scholarly and esoteric micropublications offered by the American Philosophical Society Library. A large part of the holdings of American libraries consists of microforms. In a study conducted by the Association of Research Libraries in 1970, it was found that the median library included in the study had 1,268,159 books and 355,
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490 units on microform. Thus, for every 100 printed books, the library had 28 microforms, a ratio of less than four to one.

In addition to trying to resolve the never-ending storage problem, libraries of all types are acquiring microforms in increasingly large numbers for the following reasons: (1) to obtain rare books and other materials unavailable or prohibitively expensive in their original form, (2) to replace items printed on badly deteriorating paper, (3) to produce a working copy of rare and fragile material, (4) to replace bulky materials such as newspapers, periodicals, and government documents with a more compact form, and (5) to replace printed sources with microforms in order to conserve shelf space. Among the emerging and future justifications for the use of microforms are the replacement of book or card catalogs (for example, the National Union Catalog), and their loan or sale to other libraries in lieu of interlibrary loans of printed volumes.

While it is not the intended purpose of this article to point out the disadvantages or limitations of microforms and their resultant limited use by some libraries, it should be stated that user resistance and the problems of lack of standardization are fast disappearing as legitimate reasons for poor acceptance. As microforms become 'naturalized' members of the book community, conditions will improve. The passive attitude of librarians will be more difficult to change. Their apathy is due neither to lack of education, nor to unfamiliarity with the new forms but to the inadequacy of the bibliographical apparatus.

This situation is changing, as will be indicated by the remaining sections of this article.

CRITERIA AND OTHER CONSIDERATIONS FOR SELECTION

In addition to criteria generally applied in the selection of print materials, such as scope, authority, authenticity, and treatment, a set of special criteria for microforms should be considered. Most of these criteria relate to the technical quality of the image reproduction itself in such areas as resolution, density and contrast. We are generally dependent on the reputation of the micropublisher for meeting these criteria.

When libraries have a choice of micropublishers publishing identical titles (as is true of many government documents), various criteria must be considered, including type and capabilities of existing reader/printer equipment, user needs and policies, film size and
Microform Publications
image legibility, archival permanence, and even packaging. All of these points and others, such as film stock and film coatings, are also considered when libraries are themselves involved in reprography (filming for preservation) or in choosing a commercial reprographer. Allen Veaner deals with these problems extensively in The Evaluation of Micropublications.\textsuperscript{17} His handbook would also prove useful in establishing an overall microform selection policy. In many instances, however, a particular micropublisher may be the sole source for a specific microform title or project. In this case, the voices of librarians must be heeded to ensure consistently high quality and standards.

The points considered by reviewers of microforms, which may be interpreted as additional criteria, also deserve attention. Microform Review, a leading reviewing source, includes the following criteria in their regular microform evaluations: microformat, film type, reduction ratio, film polarity, external and internal finding aids, sequence, hard copy availability, replacement policy and payment considerations.

Other than Microform Review, there is a virtual void of critical reviewing sources of current microform projects. However, there are several other journals which either announce new microform projects or offer occasional critical reviews (and thus may be considered as current selection aids): Advanced Technology Libraries, Journal of Documentation, Library Resources & Technical Services, Microdoc, Microfilm Newsletter, Microfilm Techniques, Microinfo, Micrographics Today (formerly Micro-News Bulletin), Publishers' Weekly, and Special Libraries.

When choices are possible, the problem of choosing a format (microfilm, microfiche, or microprint), size of film, or negative or positive reproduction are all dependent on individual library policies and user needs. The advantages and disadvantages of each of three major formats are outlined in an account by Veaner,\textsuperscript{18} and are discussed in greater detail by Bernhardt.\textsuperscript{19} While no definite conclusions are reached, the many points considered will aid most librarians, particularly those whose libraries are just beginning to develop microform collections.

SOURCES

Fortunately, there exist today three basic annual directories covering the micropublishing/micrographics industry: Buyer's Guide to Micrographic Equipment, Products and Services, Microfilm Source Book, and Microform Market Place. Together, they offer an extensive and com-
prehensive listing of micropublishers, sources of hardware and products, bibliographies of journals and books in the field, addresses of major organizations, dealers, and reprographic services. They are indispensable tools which help one to keep abreast of developments in the rapidly expanding micropublishing world.

Another important work is Reichman and Tharpe’s volume, *Bibliographic Control of Microforms*,²⁹ published in 1972; despite the date, it remains a very useful and timely account. It contains a descriptive listing of 482 sources, including catalogs and lists, collections and series, and manuscripts and archival collections. It further includes a detailed description of approximately a dozen major reference books in the micropublishing field.

The reader is also referred to a recent, lengthy article by Albert Diaz which appeared in *Microform Review*. This excellent work “lists and describes articles, books, and services that provide information about publications available in microforms and about microform hardware.”²⁷ No attempt will be made to rehash this very detailed and timely source. Instead, only the major retrospective sources of microforms are listed below. Important evaluation tools and specification guides to equipment are also listed. A selected list of important micropublishers is also included here, which may serve as a source directory for acquiring current catalogs.

**MICROFORM GUIDES**

*Guide to Microforms in Print*—An annual cumulative guide, in alphabetic order, to books, journals and newspapers available in microfilm, microfiche, and microprint from U.S. micropublishers. Dissertations are not included. Each entry contains the price, publisher, and method of microreproduction. (Englewood, Colo., Microcard Editions.)

*Subject Guide to Microforms in Print*—A companion volume to the *Guide* listed above which appears annually and lists the same publications under the Library of Congress subject headings. (Englewood Colo., Microcard Editions.)

*International Microforms in Print: A Guide to Microforms of Non-United States Micropublishers*—A cumulative list, in alphabetic order, of books, journals, newspapers, and selected government documents published in microform. The first issue, 1974, lists more than 8,000 titles. (Weston, Conn., Microform Review, Inc.)

*National Register of Microform Masters*—The Register (or NRMM) is a comprehensive listing of microform titles for which a master exists,
indicating its location. Also indicated are those titles from which copies can be made at a reasonable price. The 1972 edition has 53,000 entries; volumes are not cumulated. (Washington, D.C., Library of Congress.)

International File of Microfilm Publications and Equipment—A comprehensive guide to about 200 suppliers of equipment and 120 micropublishers issued on 126 fiche. (Bucks, England, University Microfilms, Ltd.)

The Micropublishers' Trade List Annual—An issuance on 83 microfiche of the catalogs of almost 200 micropublishers; includes a printed index. (Weston, Conn., Microform Review, Inc.)


Dissertation Abstracts—A listing of more than 300,000 abstracts of dissertations from major U.S. universities which are available on roll film. Over 30,000 new entries are added each year. (Ann Arbor, Mich., Xerox University Microfilms.)

Microform Reference Volume 2—A guide to more than 3500 selected microforms of about thirty-five micropublishers available through Updata Publications (a major jobber in the field of microforms). (Santa Monica, Calif., Updata Publications.)

MICROFORM EQUIPMENT GUIDES

Library Technology Reports—Periodic evaluative reports on microform hardware including readers and reader/printers based on impartial testing. In its 1972 survey, they examined twenty-three models representing fourteen companies. Evaluations and specifications are very extensive and aid in making comparisons before purchase. (Chicago, Library Technology Program, ALA.)

Guide to Micrographic Equipment—Now in its sixth edition, this source, edited by Hubbard Ballou, has become a basic reference for information on specifications of all types of micrographic equipment including cameras, readers, reader/printers, and specialized retrieval systems. More descriptive than evaluative, it is still very useful for making comparisons of equipment capabilities. (Silver Springs, Md., National Micrographics Assoc.)

The reader is also referred to the Buyer's Guide and to Library Literature for many more specific sources on microform equipment and supplies.
Catalogs and promotional brochures issued by micropublishers are a primary information source because “they are likely to contain titles not yet appearing in any of the combined lists and entries will often include a great deal of bibliographic detail not found elsewhere.” Rather than list the titles of actual catalogs here, the principal micropublishers with major microform programs or subject specialties are listed below. It is suggested that libraries get on the mailing lists of those meeting their particular needs.


American Chemical Society, 1155 16th St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036. Accounts of chemical research; all ACS primary publications; many journals and other information in the field of chemistry.

American Institute of Physics, 335 East 45th St., New York, N.Y. 10017. Current Physics Microform (Sections I and II); archival microfilm editions of forty-four physics journals; AIP conference proceedings and published journals.

Bell & Howell Co., Micro Photo Division, Old Mansfield Road, Wooster, Ohio 44691. Black culture collection; underground press collection; Herstory; newspapers; periodicals; and special educational collections.

Center for Research Libraries, 5721 S. Cottage Grove, Chicago, Ill. 60637. Africana; Asian studies; newspapers.


General Microfilm Company, 100 Inman Street, Cambridge, Mass. 02139. Agents for Erasmus Press and Falls City Microform Programs; extensive bibliographic collection by subscription.

Greenwood Press, 51 Riverside Avenue, Westport, Conn. 06880. Large number of programs in government documents; manuscript and other original source documents; American history; British history; law.

Information Handling Services, Denver Technological Center, P.O.
Microform Publications

Box 1154, Englewood, Colo., 80110. Indexes; business; engineering; library scientific publications.

Lost Cause Press, 750-56 Starks Building, Louisville, Ky. 40202. Afro-American studies; American fiction; slavery; American and British literature; American history.

Microcard Editions (a division of Information Handling Services), 5500 S. Valenta Way, Englewood, Colo. 80110. Books for College Libraries; U.S. Supreme Court records; National Union Catalog; American history; French history.

Microfilming Corporation of America, 21 Harristown Road, Glen Rock, N.J. 07452. Newspapers (including The New York Times and The Times (London); periodicals; curriculum materials; research materials.

Microforms International Marketing Corporation, 380 Saw Mill River Road, Elmsford, N.Y. 10523. Pergamon Press journals; NTIS library files; rare collections; government publications.


National Technical Information Services, 5285 Port Royal Road, Springfield, Va. 22151. Scientific and technical reports based on U.S. government reports; abstracts; several programs involving government documents.

Newsbank, Inc., P.O. Box 645, Greenwich, Conn. 06830. Condensed urban affairs topics from 130 cities in 50 states.

Princeton Microfilm Corporation, Alexander Road, Princeton, N.J. 08540. NTIS reference file; government documents; scholarly journals.

Readex Microprint Corporation, 101 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10003. Early American works in literature, drama, newspapers; government documents (published on 6" x 9" micro-opaques).

Redgrave Information Resources Corporation, 53 Wilton Road, Westport, Conn. 06880. Research materials in collections; government documents; law.

Research Publications, Inc., 12 Lunar Drive, New Haven, Conn. 06525. Scholarly collections; history; economics; political science; U.S. patents.

Trans-Media Publishing Co., Inc., 75 Main Street, Dobbs Ferry, N.Y. 10522. Law; medicine; English and Irish history.

Williams & Wilkins Co., 428 E. Preston Street, Baltimore, Md. 21202. Extensive journal publications in the field of medicine.

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Throughout this article there have been allusions to the fact that the micrographics industry is changing rapidly and that we are at the threshold of heretofore unimagined library services. In a recent account of the state of the art of microforms, Frances Spigai identifies thirteen technological developments and responses from the library community which have a direct bearing on library service of the future. A reaction to some of these developments and the citing of several others are highlighted below:

1. **Simultaneous or combination publishing**—A number of major publishers are now printing microform editions at the same time as the printed (paper) version and making these available at a slightly reduced cost if both are purchased. This offers many possibilities for the duplication of copies as well as for the establishment of satellite libraries. Another related development is the publishing of microform projects with printed aids, such as indexes and study guides.

2. **Computer Output Microfilm (COM)**—The implications are staggering as more and more publishers use the computer for their printing, changing from hot type to cold type. This is becoming common in the newspaper industry, where newspaper can be run directly from a paper or magnetic tape. The magnetic tape can be used to bypass the filming application and can print directly on film. Theoretically, it means that when publishers convert to computer printing, anything that is in print can be put on a microform almost instantaneously. Costs are still rather prohibitive for most libraries to consider COM micropublishing unless they have access to a computer for other services (acquisitions, circulation control, etc.). However, libraries of the future may well be banks of magnetic tape, and patrons may request information in any one of a variety of formats, even from remote stations.

3. **Ulrafiche**—Future development in the ulrafiche area (with a reduction ratio of 150:1 or greater) is perhaps directly related to developments in COM, which may well supersede its storage...
advantages. However, the importance of ultrafiche, particularly for the storage of archival materials (rather than for the general library user), cannot be overlooked.

4. **Government publications**—The movement toward the publication of all U.S. Government Depository items (and other federal documents) is currently underway, evidenced by a test project with twenty-six institutions. Since current thinking indicates that the production will be contracted to commercial micropublishers, such business will give rise to many more micropublishers as well as to growth in existing ones. Very possibly, many libraries (even some relatively small ones) will function as depositories.

5. **Subscription to large microform projects**—This is generally not a future development, but a practice that is becoming rather common, and offers tremendous savings in money and space. Several examples include the ERIC services of the Congressional Information Service (which produces complete sets of congressional documents), and the production of such monumental works as the *National Union Catalog* and the *National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*.

6. **Portable readers**—Several companies now market “cuddly” or “lap” fiche readers for under $150, and even inexpensive roll film readers are now available. The exciting possibility of libraries loaning both microforms and the necessary hardware is not too remote—this would also eliminate the cost and extra procedural step of using reader/printers. The possibility of university or public libraries establishing satellites with entire collections of microforms (and with students carrying portable microform readers as commonly as they now carry hand calculators) is no longer remote and is an exciting prospect. A basic reference collection, a collection of 100,000 monographs, and hundreds of journals could easily be housed in an area as small as a typical dormitory room.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

In order for libraries of all types to take full advantage of the many possibilities of microforms for total library services—and not to be bypassed by rapid developments in the micropublishing industry and elsewhere in the realm of the commercial supplier—librarians must be committed and involved. Growing out of this premise are the following recommendations:
1. Library schools must recognize the importance of microforms and must demonstrate this recognition through the initiation of new courses, workshops or institutes involving microforms, which could be open to practicing librarians.

2. Libraries should institute training sessions for all staff members in order to create a greater understanding of the advantages (and problems) of microformats, leading to more effective use.

3. Libraries, particularly the very large ones, should consider the establishment of a position of microform librarian who would be responsible for many aspects of microform services, including selection, acquisition, and utilization.

4. Librarians should become actively involved in the National Micrographics Association (which is presently dominated by industry) so that their needs can be heard. There are many local chapters scattered throughout the country; the address of the national headquarters is: 8728 Colesville Rd., Suite 1101, Silver Springs, Md. 20910.

References

6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
10. Xerox University Microfilms, Ann Arbor, Michigan.
Microform Publications

20. Reichmann and Tharpe, *op. cit.*
Automated Turn-Key Systems in the Library: Prospects and Perils

EDWIN BLAKE BROWNRIEG

and

J. MICHAEL BRUER

DURING THE LAST decade, we have witnessed an upsurge of interest and capital investment in the installation of automated systems in libraries. Functions normally handled by sluggish and error-prone, paper-based systems were seen as prime targets for computerization in the 1960s—particularly serials control, acquisitions, interlibrary loan communications, public service, and circulation control. Presently, we are cautiously feeling our way around the various options made available by computerized systems; by the 1980s, libraries should be able to take full advantage of more than twenty years of systems development and experiences with available equipment.

The trend toward automation follows two main routes: (1) the minicomputer-based, stand-alone system, brought into the library to handle only problems involving local materials and variables; (2) monolithic library information utilities, such as the Ohio College Library Center (OCLC) and Bibliographic Automation of Large Library Operations Using Time Sharing (BALLOTS), that rapidly distribute both local and global data, and distribute costs among participating libraries as well.

One of the most problematic difficulties involving the expanded use of monolithic networks such as OCLC and BALLOTS is that they must be integrated into individually developed systems for each library. This integration has so far been slow, haphazard, and at times only partially successful.

This article will therefore attempt to familiarize the reader with some of the problems, issues, and alternatives in designing individual,

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stand-alone systems for servicing selected library operations—and to analyze potential problems when these minisystems are later connected with a larger network at some future time. Particular emphasis will be on a new mode of operation called coupling, and also on various strategies that should be considered when masses of data must be fed into a system retrospectively.

ADVANTAGES OF AUTOMATION: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

Libraries have been turning to automation for the same general reasons as have other organizations: their existing systems cannot keep pace with organizational growth, and previously acceptable inefficiencies turn suddenly into unacceptable impediments to future growth.

From a broad perspective, pre-automation problems take on either or both of these forms: (1) they are “input/output-bound,” or (2) they are “compute-bound.”

A system is said to be “input/output-bound” when its overall efficiency and capacity to handle growth is hindered by the limited capabilities of its input/output devices, such as keyboarding, storage capabilities, or graphic display devices. Typical examples include needs for repetitive keyboarding of the same data, problems in updating overlapping data bases, generally cumbersome data management routines, and massive amounts of paper printouts that require too much checking or editing. The ultimate result is financial waste for the library.

A system is “compute-bound” when batches of data require additional reformatting and manipulation, but the system simply doesn’t have the storage and memory capabilities to do the job. Typical outcomes of this problem are duplication of effort by different library departments; inability of library management to retrieve useful information on various aspects of library operations; and general inflexibility of the entire system to adapt to changing needs or demands. The “compute-bound” system is often a result of poor system design or of simply a previous lack of foresight or resources when the system was originally installed.

THE TURN-KEY SOLUTION

Stated simply, a “turn-key” system can be thought of as a little black box which is purchased for a specific application. Appliances and
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systems such as dishwashers and automobiles are thus "turn-key" in nature. Their greatest advantage is that with a bit of alteration, they can be used to do many different tasks.

The idea of purchasing a turn-key automation module to perform various library functions has many advantages. Perhaps the greatest is that most of the costs of research, development, programming, service, and maintenance are born by the supplier or vendor. The library (or local computer center) is thus relieved of a great deal of trial-and-error in the implementation and tuning of the system, as well as of the associated costs of revamping the system when needs are not being satisfied. The prime disadvantage of the turn-key approach is that only the supplier has control of the programs by which the behavior of the system can be modified.

ASSESSING THE NEED FOR A TURN-KEY SYSTEM

Consider a large academic, public, or special library with a history of large and regular growth. Increasing labor costs have disproportionately increased the costs of circulation control, interlibrary loan, cataloging, serials and reference work, and so forth. At some time, library administrators responsible for the cost-effectiveness of operations will seriously tout the benefits of computerization. They will undoubtedly begin by suggesting that the computerized system is necessary because: (1) the increasing workload demands the speed and efficiency of a computerized system; (2) the new system will achieve better cost-effectiveness; or (3) the existing system is obsolete.

SPEED AND EFFICIENCY

Generally, this is a point of view that is most convincing. For example, in a library handling 3,000 book loans and returns each day, the manual circulation system must cope with renewals, overdues, holds, fines, and so on. The total amount of paperwork is overwhelming. Acquisitions for libraries with budgets over $1 million a year can suffer from serious backlogs and delays in ordering, checking-in, claiming, searching, and payments.

COST-EFFECTIVENESS

This argument is often accompanied by plausible cost/operations audits of one kind or another. Most probably, the computer is shown to allow a reduced or at least steady-state labor situation—with one person at a computer doing the work of five or more staff members.
It is true that computers can help people perform basic bread-and-butter operations faster and more efficiently. However, they can also allow people to commit bigger mistakes faster. A simple cataloging error can feasibly be replaced by a "failsafe"-type computerized disaster.

Assuming there are no bibliographic Dr. Strangeloves in the department, such catastrophes can be avoided by extremely careful planning and monitoring of the system's design and start-up procedures. Since the turn-key vendor is doing most of the installation work, library personnel are free to engage in continual evaluation and checking. The advantage of this "division of labor" is not to be underestimated—a total in-house operation is comparatively difficult and expensive. Further, one should always assume it is easier to check up on someone else's work than his own.

There is a common misconception that increased cost-effectiveness means immediate savings. This is an unfair expectation of a new system that represents extensive capital investment. Generally, if there are to be any savings with a turn-key system, they will be long-term. Then too, they will not be increasingly beneficial unless the system is designed to handle a significantly greater workload later without major alterations.

In addition, large project cost figures (supplied by in-house talent and the turn-key supplier) are usually incomplete. Some costs may be hidden, but in library situations this should be understandable. Conversion to a sophisticated turn-key system can bring about new demands for services or principles of operations that could have been only approximately predicted. Also, one should not expect complete efficiency from the start—the system will no doubt be upgraded in time, and upgraded again to handle emerging needs and problems.

Finally, optimal cost-effectiveness will result only if as much equipment as possible is purchased in increments, as needs dictate. Disk storage, for example, should be purchased on a slow, continual basis, as the growth of the library warrants; there is no need to have all two hundred megabytes on the first day. Terminals should be bought in quantities that reflect the library's increased ability to provide training, input the data, and afford the total operation.

THE EXISTING SYSTEM IS OBSOLETE

This is a traditional horse-and-buggy argument, inspired perhaps by the notion that anything so fast as the computer must render all previous operations obsolete. While this is a reasonable contention, it
is also true that any system may be superseded by another next year. In fact, the fear of obsolescence can have the opposite effect, by encouraging library administrators to adopt a "wait-and-see" attitude. After all, won't next year's model be even better?

The important point here is that the possibilities of updating hardware and software must be part of the contractual arrangement between the library and the turn-key vendor. The library must be satisfied that the supplier is making the best possible equipment offer at the moment, but that the system should be reasonably compatible later on with improved modules, and even with radical changes in computer systems design and philosophy.

In short, the turn-key system must have the capacity to grow not only in the number of units it contains, but technologically as well.

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM A TURN-KEY SYSTEM

The turn-key systems supplier will undoubtedly impress upon you that he is taking advantage of the latest in hardware/software. He will emphasize that his product is specifically tailored to library needs, that he used to spend hours in the library as a youth, and that a good professional rapport will be forthcoming between his people and library personnel.

Caveat emptor? No; turn-key systems are sophisticated items, and there is no extraordinary need to suspect the salesman and vendor as one would a used-car dealer. However, it is perfectly reasonable to expect the very best from the turn-key system, and there are good and bad ways of making demands upon the dealer.

The supplier, of course, should be kept on his toes and communicated with on a regular basis. One should not assume he will solve all the problems on his own; however, a constructively critical attitude may be occasionally useful. Perhaps most importantly, the same control and attention must be applied to the vendor as to any other library operation. One should not make the common mistake of believing that computer operations are unique and mystical. If given an elite status, the vendor may take advantage by developing what is most beneficial for his system, instead of for the library.

RESPONSIBILITY, PREDICTABILITY AND LIABILITY

In practical terms, who is responsible for the eventual success of the turn-key system? Since the turn-key supplier is responsible for almost
all of the installation, maintenance, and operations aspects of his wares, the responsibility for success clearly lies with him. The turn-key system is subject to review and control, as is any other item in the library budget.

What are the odds of success of the computerized turn-key system? The chances of success can be said to be enormously positive, because these systems have accrued a long history of acceptable performance in many institutions. Some libraries, of course, may wish to experiment with variations of the equipment and systems, and should be prepared to accept the headaches and risks that accompany the pioneer role.

What if something in the system goes wrong? To avoid problems in liability, library managers should let their legal counsel and purchasing agents examine contractual arrangements carefully. If the library reasonably follows the supplier's recommendations for usage, and something does go wrong, then at the very worst liability is well distributed.

All in all, the turn-key approach to library automation allows management to proceed with courage and confidence. Lately, however, a topic of concern has been the possibility of financial default on the part of the supplier. In this case, the library is simply in the "buyer's market" and will have to try to salvage what it can. The seasoned purchaser knows that it is the horizontally developed (i.e., diverse-product-oriented) companies that will run the least risk of default, all other factors being equal.

**MISSED OPPORTUNITIES IN LIBRARY TURN-KEY APPLICATIONS**

Surprisingly enough, some libraries continue old habits despite new flexibilities made possible by the installation of turn-key systems. For example, the circulation librarian might be able to discontinue fines because of new ways of rigorous control made possible by the new system, but not do so. Similarly, the acquisitions department may be able to order books directly from publishers instead of from a number of dealers, but not do so, despite the savings possible. Old habits die hard, of course, but a possible reason for missed opportunities is that the computer can offer the appearance of progress without the substance. The possibilities of new operating procedures created by the turn-key system should be explored at every opportunity. Old procedures that required a great deal of paperwork (e.g.,
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direct ordering from publishers) may no longer present the same obstacles.

MONOLITHIC TURN-KEY SYSTEMS

So far, turn-key systems have been discussed in a way that gives the impression that they only take the form of individualized, "plug-in" modules, relatively small in size and self-contained in the library they serve.

In fact, systems like OCLC and BALLOTS are also “turn-key” in nature. Despite their size, they also function as “black boxes” which a library can “plug into” for the execution of specific functions.

Inasmuch as turn-key users do not have direct programming control over their systems, OCLC and other networks further operate in a “turn-key” fashion. In fact, OCLC recently announced tentative plans to begin programming applications for serials control, acquisitions, interlibrary loan communications, public service, and circulation control. All five of these operations are also prime “turn-key” prospects, and the possibility of utilizing OCLC or other network programs to aid in these library automation functions looks particularly attractive. The situation would almost mimic a public utility such as the telephone company, where various functions may be purchased just by dialing a certain number, and agreeing to pay for a certain amount of message units for services rendered. In this respect, networks like OCLC can be considered potential library “utilities,” with many library departments replaced by a monthly utility bill.

However, there are no handbooks or guidelines to aid individual libraries in utilizing the capabilities of OCLC-type networks. Certainly, a library can decide to invest a certain amount of time, effort, and money for this purpose—but how much of this “research and development” will actually pay off, and how much will be wasted effort? Remembering that computerized mistakes can be like flicking the first in a row of dominoes, the library manager must keep a careful balance between creative exploration and applied (or inapplicable) research. The safest route is to pick out areas of operations which represent the least risk in case something goes wrong.

CHOOSING AREAS FOR UTILIZATION OF MONOLITHIC TURN-KEY APPLICATIONS

On the surface, it would seem that the “safer” areas are those operations that rely only on internal variables. For example, circula-
tion control and the acquisitions system rely mainly on factors involving the library collection itself and the budget. If OCLC headquarters were bombed, the impact of the blast would seemingly be minimal compared to the effect on cataloging and serials control, where a great deal of data was obtained from the OCLC data-base.

However, the deciding factor is really whether or not the operation will be under pressure from patron use. Cataloging and serials control are not under public pressure to be continually operating. They can afford to interconnect with the monolithic system, with relatively little risk in case of external disruption of services. Circulation control, on the other hand, must be continuously running to satisfy the everyday needs of the library. This system should be comparatively independent of outside needs, and should also be run on the smallest, simplest, and most self-contained system possible. The acquisitions system similarly does not have to be running continuously for daily library use. Its future with monolithic external turn-key systems, however, is limited by the simple fact that many library philosophies will not allow for the external management of book acquisition.

**COUPLING**

*Coupling* is a term used to describe information-sharing among separate computerized functions. For example, bibliographic coupling occurs when an acquisitions system operator searches the cataloging data base to retrieve bibliographic information necessary for ordering a certain item from a book dealer. After a purchase order is created, information from the book dealer (via his invoice to the library accounting department) will create information that can be tapped for either checking-in or claiming operations. After receipt of materials, cataloging information not previously available can be fed into the cataloging system after a simple check of what the system currently holds. Meanwhile, the circulation system (also coupled into the system) can even be programmed so that high demand of a special title alerts the acquisitions department that insufficient copies had been ordered, or that replacements are necessary. Low demand in other areas can alert library management that funds are being spent for little-used material, and perhaps even that weeding of certain sections of the library may be in order.

The net effect of coupling is the elimination of duplication in the input and output of the total system. Data is constantly updated, and
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its accuracy monitored. Coupling allows two or more computers to share workloads, resources, and backup capabilities. Aside from saving labor costs in terms of eliminating duplicate keyboarding of data already entered elsewhere, coupling can ensure interaction of different library departments in the way that library management wishes them to interact, i.e., on a continual basis.

RETROFIT COUPLING, OTHER PROBLEMS, AND THE ROLE OF THE SYSTEMS OFFICE

Obviously, there are many libraries which would jump at the chance to automate their entire operation by way of a turn-key system, but are deterred because of the massiveness of their collection. The enormous amount of keyboarding necessary is, to non-computer-oriented administrators, akin to digging a hole to China. Particularly awesome is the fact that the data must be provided in a format that is acceptable to the software of the system for which it is intended.

Two practical matters often come to the forefront when retrospective inclusion of data into a turn-key system is considered. First, the library may wish to modify one or more of its operations which the turn-key system will be controlling. In such a case, the vendor of the system will be the first to remind the library that this is the library's responsibility, and not his; fair enough. However, the situation is not as clear when the supplier "upgrades" his turn-key software to such an extent that portions of the library's existing data are rendered unusable. Here the library must take responsibility in re-massaging data that can be fed automatically into the turn-key system.

In this case, the library systems office must exert creative authority by preparing a coupling program that will refit the available data into the turn-key system. This assumes, of course, that there will be: (1) another computer available, (2) a programmer, and (3) capability on the part of the turn-key system to be coupled in this way.

Suppose, for example, the library knows that approximately 5,000 of its book users have already dropped out (or perhaps graduated) from the university, but are still listed on the circulation file. This data is available at the school's registration office in machine-readable form, but is not usable in its present form for the library's turn-key system. Here, the systems office must create a coupling program between the school's registration system and the library's circulation system to bring the library's data base up to date. Truancy notices
need not be sent to vacant dormitory rooms, and massive rekey-
boarding of data is not necessary.

In essence, the role of the systems office for the creation of
temporary or permanent coupling systems is very important because
the systems vendor will simply not know ahead of time which of the
library’s data may become obsolete, incorrect, or unusable. Collec-
tions can be merged or split; entire libraries can be physically moved;
new weeding programs can be initiated. In all these conditions, the
library systems office is an essential element in creating coupling
programs that reflect continual changes in institutional goals and
operations.
The Audiovisual Supplier: Dealing with Dealers and Distributors

EDWARD J. HINGER

"Yea, they are greedy dogs which can never have enough." (Isaiah 56:11)

The audiovisual supplier—the dealer or distributor of audiovisual goods and services—comes in many shapes and sizes. Fortunately for us all, the majority of suppliers do not fall into the “greedy dog” category. For the audiovisual librarian, faced with new and ever-changing technologies and public demands, the establishment and maintenance of good relationships with suppliers is of prime importance.

When a reliable dealer is found, he is to be cherished. His role should continue before, during, and after the sale. Sound advice and guidance are needed before a transaction to help make a wise choice which may not necessarily be the cheapest in the short run. During the sale, especially if it is a large one requiring many separate components (such as a video installation), the dealer may suggest substitutes and other changes within the allotted budget. It is after the sale, however, that may be the most critical time. Especially when dealing with expensive equipment (and to a lesser extent software items), the service follow-up is the most important aspect of all.

HARDWARE DISTRIBUTORS

Any piece of mechanical/electronic hardware will need tender loving care sooner or (preferably) later. This is one of the main reasons for not automatically accepting the lowest bid. One reason that a company may be able to offer the lowest price is precisely because it has no intention or capability of offering vital services to its customers after delivery.

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After a few mistakes have been made and a certain period of time has passed, anyone can separate the honest and reliable dealers in his vicinity from the "greedy dogs." The first time around, however, is the most difficult. How does one find the reliable dealer? Aside from the obvious method of looking in the local Yellow Pages, one can talk to other audiovisual users in the community. This might be another library, another school, or even an advanced hobbyist.

It is difficult, and frequently impossible, to obtain reliable, objective reports about hardware items. Library Technology Report\(^1\) can be of some help, but it does not cover every item. Although it does not evaluate equipment, an annual publication, The Audio-Visual Equipment Directory,\(^2\) is a good place to start when looking for just about any item of hardware. This directory should be on every standing-order list. The sheer variety of items offered is bewildering and, unless one has special training and knowledge, the technical specifications can be virtually unintelligible. This is yet another situation where a knowledgeable dealer is an invaluable reference tool. He is usually prepared and eager to aid in the selection of equipment that is within the budget and will satisfy (and continue to satisfy) a library's needs.

Beyond the dealer who will actually sell to you is the manufacturer. Despite the wealth of information found in The Audio-Visual Equipment Directory and available from whatever dealer or dealers one has chosen, the manufacturer can often supply additional information to help make an intelligent choice.

For an expensive investment such as videotape equipment, the manufacturer or importer will frequently be willing to send a representative to discuss your needs and problems without obligation. This ploy, of course, would be most valuable after deciding upon a particular brand. The manufacturer will have advance knowledge of any imminent model changes, and can provide more detailed information about his product than any individual dealer is likely to have. While the manufacturer's representative will not really feel free to recommend a particular dealer, he will, if pressed, offer information about his largest clients. This information might be important if you are concerned with minimum delivery time.

The terms of a warranty or guarantee must be complied with in order to meet the manufacturer's conditions for keeping it in force. For example, if any modification of equipment is done, it may void the manufacturer's warranty. Both the manufacturer and the dealer can give advice about this.

Trade shows are regularly held in many major cities. The local
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Educational Communications Council or the equivalent (often associated with schools) may have exhibitions at these shows which are valuable to attend. On the national level, Business Screen is a good publication in which announcements will be listed; Variety and Billboard are other informative publications. Once again, the dealer would be a likely source of information, even if he is not exhibiting. Surely, some of the manufacturers he represents will be there. Even if one has no immediate intention of buying it is good to know what is new. Such exhibitions are also a good opportunity to get on desired mailing lists.

An informed dealer can often steer his customers into new paths of thought. The most expensive solution to any given problem is not necessarily the best. If there is the possibility of acquiring videotape capability for a particular project, a good dealer might suggest the less expensive alternative: audiotape. If what is to be shown is truly visual (such as a dance demonstration), videotape is a logical choice. If, however, material to be prepared for the archives is chiefly speech (perhaps a book-talk), audiotape would be the proper choice.

As examples of the types of questions to ask a dealer, consider the following:

1. When is audiotape better than videotape?
2. When is forward projection of slides better than small-screen rear-projection?
3. When is open-reel format to be preferred to the audio-cassette?
4. Should one produce a filmstrip or a set of slides?

A good dealer should be able to outline the advantages and disadvantages of almost any situation based on his experience.

Concerning relative cost of equipment, there are two basic philosophies to consider. One philosophy opts for the most elaborate and expensive hardware it is possible to obtain with any given budget. The theory behind this is that good equipment will last much longer and is cheaper in the long run. The opposite philosophy contends that the cheapest equipment should be bought and disposed of or replaced whenever necessary.

Once again, the dealer’s advice should be sought. Unless the model in question has recently come on the market, he will know, in general terms and for average use, how long it will probably last. The dealer should play a role with respect to his clients that is more than that of an order-taker. Taking time to give the salesman a tour of the facilities
and to explain in detail what is being accomplished puts the dealer in a much better position to serve his customer. Conditions and needs can vary so widely that only a custom-tailored answer will do.

There is truly no "best" 16mm projector or other piece of equipment. The "best" is whatever is best for a unique set of circumstances. What might be a perfectly suitable piece of equipment for permanent installation might not be at all suitable if it has to be transported to a variety of locations. When buying a piece of fairly delicate electronic equipment such as a television set, the dealer might not be able to make the best suggestion if he assumes that the set will be installed in a corner and never moved. If the customer does not explain that the television is to be moved around, the dealer will probably not suggest buying a sturdy, wheeled case lined with foam rubber to transport it. It should be remembered, however, that even the best dealer sometimes does not think to suggest an item he does not regularly stock.

Essentially, we have been talking about the wholesale rather than the retail dealer. In the context of audiovisual hardware, the wholesaler is one who is in business primarily to serve the industrial and educational markets. Most of his stock-in-trade will be illustrated in a catalog. Not every item will always be in stock and ready for immediate delivery. Usually the catalog will contain the list price as recommended by the manufacturer. The specifications and copy will probably come directly from the manufacturer and be printed up with no changes. (This accounts for the similarity of most company catalogs.) The marked price is seldom the selling price, however. To begin negotiations, it is good to ask if there is a state contract price—if indeed the state in question negotiates such prices. Dealers will seldom volunteer this information, but invariably will answer directly if asked.

Some items, such as still cameras, lights, and turntables, might be purchased from a local retail dealer. Long before there is any need for such a person, it is wise to foster at least a nodding acquaintance with local retail dealers. If it is a camera shop, for example, requests for projector rental, etc., can be referred to him. If you publish a catalog of films available to the public, it might benefit circulation to leave a complimentary copy with the local retail dealer. When the time comes to buy smaller items, he will probably give you a substantial discount.
Software comes in a variety of guises, each with its own merits and potential uses. The most familiar to librarians and teachers remains the 16mm film; other formats are rapidly gaining ground, however, particularly videotape in the one-half inch and three-quarter inch formats. An important trend just over the horizon is the videodisc. If, as reported, the discs will sell in the general price range of phonodiscs, the implications for libraries, schools and home users will be tremendous. Among the envisioned products is a player priced in the $400 range, in price competition with a moderately priced stereo system.

It should be noted in regard to 16mm film that, in addition to the usual pattern of outright purchase, the possibilities of leasing and short-term rental also exist as a growing trend. While a familiar favorite such as *The Red Balloon* is available by lease exclusively, the opportunity does exist to negotiate with distributors about many titles, particularly feature films. Films Inc. has long had a number of excellent titles for lease, including the classic film that belongs in every collection: *Citizen Kane*. Very recently, United Artists has also entered the leasing picture. Many other distributors have a list of titles available for leasing.

Because the situation is constantly changing, one could profit from asking about the availability of any film one might want. More companies are considering leasing films as time, the economy, and competition bring new pressures to the distribution business.

There are many times when commitment to a five-year or life-of-print lease is not desirable. The long-term leasing of features is most conveniently handled on a library-system level as a part of its regular service. However, an often-overlooked possibility is joining with several other local libraries or schools on a cost-sharing basis. The object is to bring an expensive feature film or series of films to a number of local institutions. Such cooperative effort can result in considerable dollar savings.

Most of the major distributors are willing to offer much help in planning a program. If, for example, a film normally rents for $100 per showing, many libraries would find it impossible to fit it into their limited budget. However, if four libraries decide to band together and schedule the film during a two-week period, the distributor might offer the film for that period for $150. For $37.50, therefore, each
library would be able to show the title that would normally cost it $100. This is the type of deal that can be worked out through individual negotiation. If a distributor's business relies on mail-order (and most frequently it does), a turn-around of two circulations a month is about average. Using the example given above, the distributor comes out ahead (he has received $150 instead of $100 for a film during a two-week period) and each of the renting institutions comes out ahead by $62.50.

While each case, each title, and each distributor will add a new factor to the equation, a rule of thumb based on several years' experimentation with precisely this type of program emerges. For any given film, double the lowest basic rental fee and multiply that figure by the number of months you intend to lease a title. The final sum should be a rough figure around which you can work with the distributor. If there is daily truck delivery, or if the libraries are willing to carry the print from library to library themselves, the number of libraries which can be served is much greater than the number of circulations the distributor can expect to handle with a mail-order business.

Once a rough figure has been determined and negotiations for the actual price have begun, the distributor may offer a much lower price than anticipated. This is particularly true with certain older films that may not have become major "cult" titles. Sometimes, however, a price larger than the estimate has to be paid for some of the great foreign classics or popular recent titles.

Sometimes the distributor will not be able to release a particular title for an extended period. He may have an insufficient number of prints to handle both special orders and his regular trade, or his distributor (the legal owner of the copyright) may not be willing to allow the sort of deal we are considering.

Occasionally, it will be necessary to negotiate on the basis of the number of showings rather than of the time period the film will be in your possession. In this case, the distributor might want the full regular fee for the first showing and a percentage of the full fee for each subsequent screening. In almost every case, however, the price turns out to be a bargain.

A word of advice: much time can be lost by indecisive planning. If, for example, five libraries decide to work out a shared-cost program of feature films, considerable discussion will inevitably arise about which titles are to be chosen. The distributors must then be contacted to check on prices and the shared-cost arithmetic done. If there are
too many conferences, disagreements, disappointments, etc., the planning could drag out forever and cost more in staff time than the savings such cooperation could bring. What is needed is a group of program planners who have the authority to say "yes" or "no" immediately without needing to check back with a director about budgets, meeting room availability that week, and so forth.

Each person involved with the planning should be prepared to suggest titles, accept reasonable compromises based on availability from the distributor and the needs of his colleagues, judge when the programs can be realistically scheduled and make switches when the need arises, and commit money up to some previously set limit.

Once a good relationship has been established with a distributor, it is often possible to get quotes by telephone. Of course, the distributor might prefer to think about it for a longer time—if you have the time. However, as more and more library systems and individual libraries are making these arrangements, distributors are quickening the pace because they are getting accustomed to dealing with such needs. Especially in times of tight money, such deals are important both to the libraries and to the distributors.

On the subject of buying films outright, the story is a shorter one. Purchase is usually a matter of critical previewing and, if the decision is made to buy, of looking up the current price in the distributor’s catalog. However, it does pay to reserve some funds for special sales or closeouts.

There are a few “rules” to consider and apply to the situation in question:

1. Be sure that you get on a lot of mailing lists and that your files are kept up to date.
2. Whenever a salesman calls (in person or on the telephone) ask for the latest catalog or list of his recent releases.
3. Since no one can possibly preview all the films released in any given year, ask the salesman which films have been good sellers to other libraries. This is a valuable checkpoint and not a substitute for regular previewing; the bandwagon approach is not always valid.

An invaluable organization to belong to is the Educational Film Library Association (EFLA). For a modest annual fee, the association will keep its members up to date with film evaluations and news of interest to the audiovisual field. A list of their charges and their many
helpful publications is worth requesting, also. Once a year, the American Film Festival in New York City is held under the aegis of EFLA. The festival provides an opportunity to catch up on the latest releases in almost any category, such as fine arts, social studies, history and archaeology, teacher education, labor and management, religion and society, and feature-length documentaries.

Such materials as slides, filmstrips, and audiotapes are frequently not offered on a preview basis. This will vary depending on the distributor and his policy. Slides, particularly if they are of well-known works of art, are no problem. All that the buyer can ask is that they be technically acceptable with proper exposure, framing, and correct color balance. Filmstrips and audiotapes will require a more critical evaluation. Is the content interesting and accurate? Is the technical quality adequate? An additional test of audiotapes (if you plan to copy them) is to make a trial run. Is the quality of reproduction good? Music can be especially difficult and demands a high-quality tape and top-notch copying equipment.

Many excellent programs that turn up on television continue to be available through distributors long after the original airdate is past. The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman, Brian's Song, Civilisation, The Louvre, and The Mystery of Stonehenge are just a few of the varied titles still playing at regular intervals in libraries and schools around the country. While programs from the commercial networks are divided up among many distributors, it should be noted that productions seen on the educational television stations are available from the Indiana University Audio-Visual Center (Bloomington, Indiana 47401). A catalog listing both purchase and rental prices is available. Volume discounts are available if the order totals $2,500 or more; quantity discounts are also available if two or more prints of a single title are ordered.

The National Information Center for Educational Media at the University of Southern California publishes an Index to 16mm Educational Films, an Index to 35mm Filmstrips, an Index to Educational Overhead Transparencies. All of these are multivolume works. Other individual indices cover producers and distributors, videotapes, audiotapes, 8mm motion picture cartridges, educational records, and slides. Microfiche copies are also available.

The Educators Progress Service, Inc., supplies Educators Guide to Free Films, and companion volumes for filmstrips, tapes, scripts and transcriptions. Most of this material is available with only return postage charged to the borrower.
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The *Landers Film Reviews* is published monthly except in June, July and August. Obviously, this service is geared to use by schools, but libraries, too, find it to be a useful tool. Subscriptions are available through the publisher.

Occasionally, a used 16mm print can be picked up inexpensively. If the savings are considerable, the risk may be worthwhile, but it is better to determine beforehand whether there are return privileges.

Unfortunately, there is a negative side to film distributorship: the filmlegger. This is very dangerous territory, and it is best to avoid it totally. If someone can offer a brand-new print of a title at one-half price, he probably has some connection at a film lab. A legitimate distributor has sent in his negative to have some new prints made up, but a few extra were run off illegitimately. The temptation may be great, but such films are actually stolen goods.

The cost of films is constantly rising. Producers and distributors are faced with rising production costs and skyrocketing lab prices. For every print a filmlegger sells (and for every videotape illegally copied), the distributor is losing a sale. This, too, must be reflected in a general rise in price.

Fortunately, there is something buyers can do to help stop this trend. Distributors are usually willing to take legal action when they hear about violations from legitimate sources.

A major problem with distributors is the scheduling of prints for preview. Prints are increasingly expensive to have made up and to schedule. The ideal customer for the distributor is the one who schedules a preview date for a specific title and manages to return it on or before the due date. It is inexcusable for an organization to keep a print for any extended period, yet this practice is all too common. Indeed, why would anyone hold for six months a print he simply wanted to preview? The thoughtless handling of prints by the potential customer is yet another reason why the price of prints continues to go up.

One possible way of cutting costs, offered by an increasing number of distributors, is to bypass the preview print altogether. If you are dealing with an established classic, the distributor can afford to cut the price if preview is not requested. Sometimes it is also possible to request a new print which you can preview and then keep if you decide to purchase the title. In this case, too, the price can sometimes be discounted. While distributors do not always publicize these facts, it is a trend. Thus it is a good idea to ask when in doubt or when seeking a bargain, because both parties can benefit.

April, 1976
From time to time it may be necessary to make use of special services or facilities designed for the audiovisual user, including such places as motion picture laboratories, recording studios, or radio and television stations. Up-to-date rate cards should be in the files for ready reference.

Labs are a necessity if you have special identifying leaders, silent or sound, printed up. The option exists to leave the negative in the lab for quick accessibility when more footage is needed. If the negative is kept on file, the small strip with punched holes, probably in the can, should be saved. It is a timing strip used by the lab to control the light intensity of their film printer.

If someone can be convinced to donate the money for a major film or series wanted for the collection but unaffordable on the regular budget, an additional incentive may be to offer them an on-screen credit. To do this, a suitable visual must be prepared. This can then be shot on an optical bench and processed before being returned for splicing at the head of each reel involved. The film department of a local university might be a good place to contact for such services, or you may want to contact a film distributor to find out what lab or labs they use.

A similar situation might exist with recording studios. A radio spot might provide ideal publicity for National Library Week, for example. Under the terms of its FCC license, each radio and television station must provide a number of public service spots at no cost to the sponsoring agency. If friendly relations with the stations have already been established they may even record the advertisement for you free-of-charge, particularly if you provide the voice or talent. The important thing is to provide them with a tape (audio or video) of broadcast quality. Average equipment will not be adequate. In such a case, rental of equipment or facilities meeting broadcast standards is necessary, and your local station should be willing to make recommendations. The groundwork for that advice should be laid long before there is any need for such services, however.

Film rejuvenation is a special service that is especially important to established film collections. Even if a film is out of date or of poor quality, it might have its uses as an example of an out-of-date or poor quality film for those who like to study such things. Most of the time, however, a film whose usefulness is acknowledged may become
scratched, harming its very usefulness. In such cases, the rejuvenation house is a genuine blessing.

In most major cities, there are labs which specialize in the rejuvenation of film. A veritable curtain of scratches can be removed by a special process for only pennies a foot. It is true that there are scratches which cannot be removed: those which form a wide green or yellow line on colored film, or appear as an ugly white line on black and white film, when projected. It is difficult but important to catch a film before it deteriorates to a point beyond which it is impossible to rejuvenate; this skill can be learned with practice.

In order to be certain, however, the rejuvenation lab will usually be willing to examine a film free of charge, and report what can or cannot be done to it. If rejuvenation is possible, it can be done for far less than the cost of replacing the film—if you still want to keep it in the collection. If you are embarking on this procedure for the first time, ask for a free sample of the lab's work. The results (and the dollars saved) can be amazing.

This sort of work is best done on a fairly regular schedule and not haphazardly. As any collection grows older, it is inevitable that more money must be spent on rejuvenation. If the library is within a reasonable distance of the lab, pickup and delivery are usually free.

A companion subject to rejuvenation is the problem of replacement footage. Most distributors have a minimum number of feet that must be ordered. Check the company’s catalog to determine this minimum as well as the price per foot. If a film can be salvaged in this way, money can be saved. Some distributors will put in replacement footage free if you send them the film; others will charge for this service, and still others will sell you the footage, but will offer no further service.

When footage is being ordered, find out how the distributor measures it, or tell him your method. If the distributor knows your method, he can adjust his calculation. Accuracy is crucial; a footage-counter (often built in on an inspection machine) is a must. If a film has many splices, footage lost must be estimated or the count will be entirely incorrect. It is always best to round off the figures, allowing extra footage to be safe. If, for example, the damage is measured as running from 297 feet (from the start of picture) to 440 feet, it would be best to order from 285 feet from start of picture through 450 feet. The lab, in turn, will also probably print a few extra feet.

It is a good practice to enclose a short sample of the film clipped from the damaged footage. The emulsion on a particular print might
be on one side or the other of the base in relation to the sprocket holes. The sample will permit the lab to identify whether, for example, an A or B wind is needed.

If it is color film, and if the lab is really a good one, they will also try to color-match the new replacement footage to the old sample. For a variety of reasons, color matches are not always possible to achieve. If the new footage is obviously different from the original color, the lab may be able to modify the difference, so that when the film is projected, it will not be obvious that there is a dramatic shift in color.

Although most of this article has been written from the viewpoint of the public library and library systems, exactly the same principles apply to schools and other institutions responsible for audiovisual materials. The trend of greatest value for all to consider is closer cooperation among libraries, among schools or districts, between libraries and schools, and among all institutions.

It has not been possible to mention all the problems that may develop between the audiovisual user and the audiovisual dealers and distributors. To everyone’s advantage, the “greedy dogs” are few and far between, and tend to go out of business very quickly. Asking questions and gathering information is important, but the two-way street of mutual cooperation between a reliable dealer and a knowledgeable consumer is paramount.

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The Library Binder

MATT T. ROBERTS

Library binding is the business of supplying specialized binding services to institutional, private, public, and other libraries. The Library Binding Institute (which may be defined as a trade association of commercial library bookbinders in the United States and Canada, suppliers to the bookbinding industry, and institutional bookbinders) further defines certified library binding as bookbinding meeting the minimum specifications necessary to produce a volume which will achieve two objectives: (1) to meet the requirements of libraries for an end product capable of withstanding the rigors of normal library circulation or use, and (2) to provide maximum reader usability. The Library Binding Institute (LBI) goes on to say that “only binding, including rebinding, prebinding and periodical binding, in accordance with the standard is LIBRARY BINDING, but nothing in this standard excludes other types of binding, whether superior or inferior to LIBRARY BINDING, for library use, as determined by a librarian and his Certified Library Binder for any specific purposes.”

The qualification offered by LBI gives its definition a degree of plausibility which it otherwise would not have, because the definition without that qualification would not serve the total library community. One would have to ask which library and what user is intended. Insofar as this writer is aware, no one has ever adequately defined “rigors of normal circulation or use,” or “maximum reader usability.” Unless qualified, the definition fails to take into consideration the obvious fact that there are many different libraries serving widely differing clienteles, and the binding which serves the needs of one library may well be completely unsatisfactory when applied to those of another. A children’s librarian, for example, may require a bright, attractive binding that can withstand the efforts of a user to tear it

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apart, whereas the reference librarian of a research library may require a plain, unadorned flexible binding, yet one sturdy enough to be photocopied without splitting the spine.

Perhaps it is not possible to provide only one definition of library binding that will adequately serve all types of libraries. It would be just as logical, for example, to define library binding as binding which will produce a product that will endure as long as the paper on which the book is printed, or as long as the library chooses to retain the book, whichever comes first. If all libraries pursued the same acquisition and weeding policies, and if all books were printed on the same quality of paper, such a definition might serve. Obviously it cannot, except possibly to the extent that some of the very largest research libraries retain all of their books until they literally turn to dust.

However one chooses to define it, library binding, regardless of cost, should provide a book that will: (1) open easily and lie reasonably flat at any place in the text to which it is opened; (2) retain its solidity and shape after repeated openings, including the extreme opening required for photocopying; and (3) be bound in such a manner that, should rebinding become necessary, the basic structure of the first binding will not make rebinding unduly expensive or impossible.

SERVICES OFFERED BY THE LIBRARY BINDER

The services offered by the library binder include: class "A" library binding, prebinding (also called prelibrary or reconstructed binding), textbook binding, edition binding, storage binding (also called LUMSPECS, and warehouse work), adhesive binding (also called perfect or unsewn binding), blank-book binding, pamphlet binding, binding of Bibles, fine binding (i.e., rare book binding, not artistic binding), binding of music materials, law book binding, theses binding, general repair work, and mounting of maps and works of art on paper.

Class A binding is the very heart of library binding. It is the library binder's bread and butter, and the foundation on which the LBI stands. By definition, it applies to the binding of serials and monographs; in practice, however, it applies principally to the binding of serial publications (the most expensive style of regular library binding, accounting for about 60 percent of the typical library binder's business). Class A binding includes the binding of:

(a) Any ordinary-sized graphic material consisting of an appreciable number of leaves or folded sheets produced originally as a unit
Library Binder

and submitted for binding, rebinding, prebinding, or sold pre-bound as such a unit, and not requiring special handling; (b) A series of multileaved, like-constituted, serially numbered graphic units submitted for binding or rebinding into a scheduled multi-unit volume and not requiring special handling; and (c) Any underdized, oversized or odd-sized volume, or any volume that requires special handling.9

Prebinding is the rebinding of edition, or publishers', bindings before they are received by the library (or before they are put into circulation), and is designed to provide a strong binding capable of withstanding the rigors of use made of books by the clientele of a circulating library. Prebinding may also include binding from gatherings or (rarely) sheets. The LBI also has a standard for this style of binding.10

Textbook binding is actually the rebinding of worn books for educational institutions. It is an economical style of binding, since the binder generally receives dozens (or even hundreds) of copies of the same title and is able to realize economies, such as precutting boards and cloth, that he cannot realize with most other styles. Textbook binding, for the most part, is also carried out during the summer months, when other binding activities are at a relatively low level.

Edition binding is the binding of numerous copies of a single title from sheets. Large edition binderies generally do not like to accept orders for a relatively small number of copies, because the equipment setup time is lengthy and therefore expensive; consequently, library binders having the necessary basic machinery (or access to that machinery)—notably folding machines, three-knife trimmers, etc.—will edition-bind small runs (e.g., 1,500 copies) of a title.

Storage binding is the binding of infrequently used materials according to the Specifications for Binding Lesser Used Materials, the so-called LUMSPECs.11

Adhesive binding is a form of library binding which does not utilize sewing. The leaves are secured by means of a hot-melt or cold (resinous) adhesive. Adhesive binding can be done by hand; however, it is better done by means of an adhesive-binding machine, such as the Sulby (hot-melt) or Ehlerman (resinous). This is a very economical style of binding.

Blank-book binding generally refers to the binding (or rebinding) of such materials as county or court record books, i.e., books meant to be written in, and which must, therefore, lie almost perfectly flat.
when open. This is a very specialized style of binding, calling for special sewing to webbings, and sometimes for split boards, a springback, round corners, and so on. Blank-book binding is undertaken by relatively few library binders and is expensive. This style of binding, insofar as library binders are concerned, does not include mass-production work, such as padding or checkbook binding, which is the work of the job binder.

Pamphlet binding is the binding of very thin monographs, i.e., those consisting of one signature or a relatively small number of leaves. The term pamphlet binding, which derives from the time when the writing of discourses on political, moral and social issues was popular, is unfortunate in that it is confused with the work of the pamphlet binder, whose activities include such diverse items as periodical issues and telephone books.

The binding of Bibles—which is almost invariably rebinding—is rather specialized work, but is nonetheless done by many library binders. It is specialized in that the Bibles are often bound in limp leather covers which have extending squares (Yapp style), sometimes with zippers, and have round corners. If the binder must trim in the course of rebinding, he may spray or otherwise color the edges.

Fine binding usually refers to the rebinding (or restoration) of valuable books, usually in leather, but it would also include the binding of keepsakes, presentation books, table books, diaries, signature books, and the like. The term is something of a misnomer in that most, if not all, such binding is case work and not “in-board” binding.

The binding of music materials is accorded a separate category because it is often necessary to sew music materials through the folds so that the publications may, if necessary, stand open and flat on stands. Music books also frequently require pockets and compensation guards.

Law-book binding is distinctive largely because law books are commonly covered in so-called law (tan) buckram in imitation of the fawn-colored calfskin they once were bound in. They frequently have red and black (paper) labels in lieu of the title skivers used when they were bound in leather.

Newspaper binding is somewhat different because of the size of the publications, and because some require whip-stitching. The margins of newspapers are usually so narrow that they cannot be sidesewn or oversewn.

Thesis binding—a highly lucrative business for those library
binders fortunate enough to get it—might actually be considered job binding, or even a form of edition binding, except that it is done almost exclusively by library binders.

The mounting of maps, works of art on paper, etc., is a very specialized type of work better left to those who are experts in the field. General repair work includes tipping-in of loose leaves, maps, charts, etc.; refolding maps; repair of hinges; and the like. Some library binders will even attempt to salvage smoke- and/or water-damaged books.

Few library binders undertake to offer all of the services outlined above. Indeed, it is the unusual library binder who does edition binding, fine binding, blank-book binding, and extensive repair and/or restoration work.

THE LIBRARY BINDER AND THE GRAPHIC ARTS INDUSTRY

The library binder, while representing only a tiny part of the graphic arts industry, is almost unique. Library binding differs from edition, pamphlet and paperback binding in one important respect: unlike those forms of binding, it relies heavily on handwork, supplemented by the use of specialized machinery such as nippers, smashing machines, rounding and backing machines, guillotines, and hydro-presses—all of which are also to be found in the edition bindery, but usually in larger and more sophisticated forms. Since it does involve so much handwork, it is inherently a style of bookbinding which is more expensive than most other kinds of commercial binding. Library binding is not, and probably never will be, highly mechanized, mainly because the library binder does not bind large runs, e.g., 10,000, 50,000, or 200,000 identical copies of a single title. The library binder must treat each book as a separate item, although he can rough-sort by size.

The 200 or so library binders in the United States and Canada gross roughly $40 million per year, of which approximately $30 million is taken in by the fifty or so certified library binders. The industry has expanded rapidly in the past twenty years, as evidenced by the fact that it grossed approximately $3 million in 1955. All types of libraries utilize in some way the services of the library binder (see Table 1).
### TABLE 1

**DISTRIBUTION OF SERVICES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Library</th>
<th>Percent Industry Average of Sales</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public Libraries</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools (Elementary, junior and high)</td>
<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior colleges</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colleges and universities</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal government</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospital</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


### SELECTING A LIBRARY BINDER

The selection of a library binder can be a difficult and uncertain process, unless the only criterion is low price, in which case the official can simply accept the lowest bid or cheapest price list. On the other hand, if the librarian is interested in the highest quality regardless of cost (and surprisingly, there are libraries that can afford this luxury), the problem possibly becomes even more complicated because the highest bid or the binder with the highest price list may not offer the highest quality. Somewhere between these two extremes the librarian should be able to locate a binder who offers good quality at a fair price. The problem is finding him.

In order to be successful, a library binding program must be built on mutual understanding and cooperation between the librarian and the binder. Library binding does not represent the sale of a commodity, but of a service. In a sense, the library binder is actually an extension of the library. The really good library binder knows something about the library he binds for—the use to which the books will be put, the purpose of the library, the clientele it serves, and the like. He must know, in other words, which kind of binding the library needs. On the other side, the librarian should become informed about bookbinding in general, and good binding in particular, in order to be able to communicate his needs intelligently and accurately. If the binder does not know what the library expects in the way of binding,
obviously he cannot supply it. Conversely, if the librarian does not know what the binder is capable of offering—the state of his technology, the experience of his staff, the quality of his materials, new materials he may have developed or identified, the degree of training and abilities of his supervisory personnel (an all important consideration because the quality of work produced by any library binder is directly related to the quality of his supervisory personnel)—he may demand too much of the binder or, what is worse, too little.

It is essential for the library to find a competent library binder and retain his services permanently, assuming he continues to do a good job. This is important because it takes several years for both parties to work out the many details involved in a successful binding program. It is very difficult to maintain a mutually satisfactory binding program if the library changes binders every year, or even every few years.

There are several possible approaches the library can pursue in its search for a competent library binder. The librarian may simply write to the LBI and ask for the names of several member binderies. Such an approach, however, excludes binders who may be highly qualified but are not members of the institute. As a second approach, the librarian can visit several binderies, inspect their facilities, look at their work, and judge for himself whether or not they are qualified to bind for his library. This method can be expensive and time-consuming, since there are not many library binders and the nearest one may be several hundred miles away. In addition, it can be difficult to assess the quality of binding unless one has time to inspect thoroughly the work he is shown. The third possibility, and one which several libraries (or groups of libraries) have found worthwhile, is to request interested binderies to submit samples of their work for inspection and evaluation.

The purpose of such samples is to eliminate from further consideration those binders who cannot produce binding meeting the library's needs or specifications. It is important, therefore, for the library to have some statement of specifications, even if they are purely eclectic in nature and draw heavily on the LBI's own minimum specifications, which cover class A binding reasonably well. The library's own specifications can cover binding other than class A binding, as well as fold-sewing, trimming, margins, procedures for handling special format materials, brittle paper, adhesives, chemicals, and even when not to bind.

Sets of samples should be as uniform as possible, so that all binderies work with the same problems. The samples should also
consist of books representing the normal work the library expects to have done during the course of the contract. It is pointless, for example, for the library to ask for an example of binding a Braille book if the library does not acquire books in Braille. The same may be said for newspapers, portfolios, slipcases, etc.

THE SAMPLE

A typical set of samples might include:

1. A *periodical volume* made up of thick issues with relatively narrow margins or even center spreads. This will pose a special problem, since such a publication must be sewn through the folds. The thick issues will also make it difficult to round and back the book properly. It is a fair test, however, because the binder who can bind such a serial properly will also be able to bind ordinary serials equally well or better. It is an unfortunate fact that some library binders cannot (or will not) cope with unusual binding problems.

2. A *monograph* one and one-half to two inches thick, with an inner margin adequate for oversewing (at least three-fourths of an inch and preferably more). This type of sample will indicate whether the binder is capable of binding a book according to the LBI's minimum specifications.

3. A *monograph* one or more inches thick having an inner margin of less than three-fourths inch, which the binder has been instructed to tape-sew. This will indicate whether the binders have the personnel to sew a book by hand on tapes. (Some binders cannot or will not do this.)

4. A *monograph* approximately one-half inch thick, which is to be adhesive-bound using a hot-melt adhesive. The binder should be instructed not to round and back this book, and to cover it in a cloth lighter than buckram, such as “C” cloth. Some library binders do not have the equipment for this style of binding, and adhesive-binding can be expensive when done by hand.

5. A *very thin publication*, e.g., a single periodical issue, to be covered in a light cloth, as above, and without rounding and backing. Casing-in a thin book can be a troublesome operation, especially in obtaining a proper joint.

6. A *monograph* of any thickness more than one-half inch, containing fold-outs, maps, etc., as well as pocket material. This will indicate how well the binder can make both a pocket and a compensation
guard. It will also determine whether he checks for fold-outs, etc., before trimming the fore edge.

7. A publisher's binding with instructions to rebind. The original sewing should be weak in all samples, or strong in all, so that each binder will have to decide whether to resew or retain the original sewing.

Each prospective binder is sent a sample package, a copy of the library's specifications, a list of instructions, and a deadline beyond which the sample will not be accepted.

The logic of using a sample to determine which binders are qualified is simple. If a library binder cannot do a good job on a sample of seven volumes, especially when he knows he will not be considered for the contract if his sample fails, then he is certainly not going to be able to do even a satisfactory job on the library's yearly work, be it 700 or 70,000 volumes. A sample is an effective means of permitting a library binder to demonstrate that he is capable of meeting the standards the industry has established for itself, as well as satisfying the individual library's specifications. It can be of use in eliminating the incompetent binder, which in itself will be of benefit both to the industry and libraries.

Judging of the sample should be rigorous and the passing score should be high, i.e., 85-90 percent. The prospective binders should be informed of the passing score, and warned that no work may be subcontracted. They should also be informed that failure to follow instructions (a not uncommon shortcoming among library binders) or excessive trimming will result in loss of all points for that particular book.

EVALUATING THE SAMPLE

The most convenient manner in which to evaluate the sample is to prepare a chart listing the pertinent aspects of a binding. A 100-point score for each book is convenient; however, the pamphlet and adhesive binding should be scored below 100, because they are not rounded and backed. It should be noted that those persons judging the samples should not know the source of any sample, in order to eliminate any accusation of bias. An evaluation sheet should consist of the following elements.

1. Failure to follow instructions and/or excessive trimming—loss of all points for that book.
2. Followed instructions and did not overtrim:
   a. Sewing or adhesive structure (one of the following)
      Sewing through the folds
      good “openability”
      tapes properly spaced
      sewing thread of proper weight
      tapes extended onto boards
      Oversewing
      good “openability”
      minimum back margin taken by sanding and sewing
      sewing uniform and not ragged
      sewing does not extend all the way to head and tail
      Adhesive structure
      leaves firmly secured
      depth of penetration of adhesive onto leaves adequate
   b. Endpapers
      construction suitable to book
      width of tipping not too great
      absence of drag on first and last leaves
      correct weight of paper
      grain direction of paper parallel to spine
   c. Trimming
      square
      smooth
   d. Rounding and backing
      shape of round
      shoulders even along length of book
      depth of shoulders equal to thickness of boards
      signatures or leaves properly folded over to form round and
      backing
   e. Spine lining
      well attached
      proper material and of proper weight
      second (kraft paper) lining over first lining on books sewn
      through the folds or books more than two inches thick
      lining extended onto boards
   f. Case-making
      covering material well secured to boards
      properly pressed (absence of wrinkles or other defects in
      covering; no adhesive on covers)
Library Binder

turn-ins proper extent and adhering well
corners neatly done and adhering well
squares of proper extent (1/8" maximum)
inlay
cord (covering material turned over cord at head and tail, except for books with headbands)
g. Casing-in
proper adhesion in joint and of board papers to boards
French joint even and of adequate depth
spine solid and properly shaped
boards even at head and fore edge
h. Lettering
accurate
properly positioned
clean and legible

Principal Qualities of a Well-Bound Book

Several writers have described the principal qualities of a well-bound book, including Bailey, Clough, Cockerell, Coutts and Stephen, and the Library Binding Institute. Basically, the qualities are:

1. The signatures or leaves are solidly secured, with no starts or unevenness at the fore edge and no splitting in the spine.
2. The book opens easily and lies reasonably flat at any place in the text.
3. The spine is thoroughly glued up and appropriately lined, so that repeated opening does not cause the book to lose its shape.
4. Tapes and/or spine lining extend well onto boards (one to one and one-half inches).
5. The endpapers do not pull at the first and last leaves, i.e., there should be no drag due to excessive width of tipping.
6. The spine is rounded to an arc of approximately one-third of a circle and the shoulders created by backing are of an extent equal to the thickness of the boards.
7. Trimming is minimal (no more than one-eighth inch) and is straight and smooth.
8. The boards and covering material are of a weight (thickness) appropriate to the size of the book.
9. The covering material and board papers adhere firmly in the joints and to the boards.
10. Squares are appropriate to the size of the book.
11. A reasonably thick book (one-half inch or more) stands vertically with no support.
12. When the book is lying flat the upper cover remains flat, and when the book stands by itself the covers remain closed.
13. The lettering is accurate, properly positioned, and legible.
14. The binding is clean, neat, and shows evidence of good workmanship.

TRENDS IN LIBRARY BINDING

Before 1900, binders who did work for libraries did so entirely by hand and as more or less a sideline, their principal source of income being work done for private collectors. There was no distinctive style of library binding as such, nor was there any library binding industry. Frank Barnard, one of the earliest library binders, was able to say as late as 1929 that “binderies devoted exclusively to rebinding [that is, library binding] are of quite recent origin; most of them are less than fifteen years old and few go back twenty-five years.” The library binding industry emerged as a separate sector of the book-binding industry “because of the increase in the circulation of books by public and semipublic libraries, and because of the general use of free text-books in the public schools.”

Prior to the rise of library binding as we know it today, library books were always sewn on tapes. The use of four tapes was traditional, but the number varied with the size of the book. The tapes were secured between split boards and the book was covered in full or half leather. This was the economy binding of that day. The increasing number of books in public and school libraries, however, called for an even more economical style of binding.

The concept of oversewing is not new. It was in common use at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century, although not in its present form. Various forms of whip-stitching, overcasting, etc., went through periods of experimentation, enjoying varying degrees of success. It was not until 1904, when Sir Cedric Chivers patented his method of oversewing, that library binding as we know it had its start. This early form of modern oversewing was, of course, done by hand, and it was not until the period 1916-22 that Elmo Reavis and his associates were able to design and put into operation a machine that oversewed. Machine oversewing began a relatively rapid growth in the early 1920s and became the dominant form of library sewing by the early 1930s.
Library Binder

Oversewing is the principal method of securing the leaves of books in the library bindery, at least in the United States; however, in the opinion of this writer, it is currently being challenged, and will be challenged to an even greater extent in the immediate future by one or more of the methods of adhesive-binding in use today. There are two reasons why this will take place. One reason is that publishers are issuing more and more books that are adhesive-bound rather than sewn and, although this in itself does not preclude oversewing, the adhesive binding seems to go hand in hand with diminishing binding margins, which in turn frequently precludes oversewing. Other publications, notably periodicals, are also being published with narrower margins.

If the cost of paper continues to rise (and there is no indication that it will not), the margins will continue to diminish. While as recently as ten years ago the average journal issue had a binding margin of about three-fourths of an inch (which is about the minimum margin needed for oversewing that is to have any openability whatsoever), the average journal today has a binding margin closer to one-half inch.

The second reason relates to the economics of library binding. Just as oversewing is considerably less expensive than hand sewing, so is adhesive-binding considerably less expensive than class A binding. Adhesive binding is faster, and speed is the economy. In addition, more skill is required to operate an oversewing machine than to operate an adhesive-binding machine.

The rising costs of materials and labor, particularly the latter, will force library binders to seek more ways in which to reduce costs, and adhesive-binding is a most appealing way. A given library binder may not like adhesive binding, but if the alternative to adhesive binding is bankruptcy, he has little choice.

One can see other trends, also. Many, if not most, of the early American library bookbinders were craftsmen, and some were highly skilled in the craft of bookbinding. That day is coming to an end. Many of today's library bookbinders, and probably all of tomorrow's, are economy-motivated individuals who may well be competent businessmen, but they are not bookbinders. They will continue to seek (and undoubtedly find) faster and more economical ways to bind a library book. It can only be hoped that what they find will prove to be in the best interest of the library and its book collection.

There is also the trend, at least in college and university libraries, toward taking the responsibility for library binding away from the professional librarian (where it belongs) and giving it to the business
manager of the institution. All too often this individual is interested solely in obtaining the lowest-cost binding possible, regardless of quality. If this trend continues, it can only have a deleterious effect on library binding.

References

Library Supplies—The Library Supply House or the Local Stationery Store

THOMAS W. McCONKEY

Library supplies are usually obtained from two major sources: library supply houses and stationery stores. This article will describe the kind of purchases—regular, petty cash and emergency—that libraries make, and which supply source is best equipped to handle each. The services of each and the advantages and disadvantages of purchasing through them will also be explored.

TYPES OF PURCHASES AND SOURCES

The decision whether to purchase through a library supplier or a local office supply store depends on the type of purchase the library wishes to make. Regular, petty cash, and emergency purchases can be made through either the supplier or the local store. Factors affecting the choice of outlet are described below.

REGULAR PURCHASES

Regular purchases are routine orders for basic supplies which may be obtained either by direct purchase or by competitive bid. Such orders are usually made up of specialized library supply items such as catalog cards, book pockets, book supports, periodical binders, library forms, etc. Regular purchases may also include typical office supply items such as typewriter ribbons, bond paper, paper clips and pencils. Such orders are usually placed for a six-month supply and, if the library has the storage capacity, even for a one-year supply.

Most libraries make their regular purchases through library supply houses, and for good reason. Most orders are for specialized library supplies. These items are consumed in quantity and the rate of their use can be predicted with reasonable accuracy, even as much as one year in advance. The local stationer will probably not carry most of
such items, or if he does, the quantities on hand will be limited. He
may be able to place a special order for a library specialty, especially if
the quantity is large, but he usually knows very little about the
product and its potential suppliers, so he is handicapped in placing
the order.

The library supply house is the basic source for library specialties. It
is in a unique position to provide the library with what it needs. The
manufacturer from whom it obtains the product tailors the product to
the supply house’s requirements—which are usually the same as those
of the library. The supply house offers choices in quality, appearance,
size and price. Supply budgets can be based on the printed prices in
the catalog, as they are likely to change less often than those of the
local stationery store. Finally, since regular supply requirements can
be anticipated well in advance of need, speed of delivery is not likely
to be a problem. Even though it must do its business by mail or
freight, the library house is not at a disadvantage in handling regular
supply orders because there is adequate lead time.

When general office supplies are purchased in quantity, the library
supply house may remain competitive, but this is an area where the
local stationery store may have the advantage. Because it supplies the
needs of local businesses and institutions whose clerical operations are
similar to those of libraries and who buy in quantity, the local
stationery store’s stock may be quite adequate to meet most of the
library’s needs.

PETTY CASH PURCHASES

A petty cash purchase is a transaction involving a small amount
(usually under $50 and even as little as $1) for the purchase of a small
quantity of merchandise. Characteristically, petty cash is used to
supply: (1) a small quantity which is impractical to stock because of the
work and recordkeeping involved—for example, graph paper
needed at the end of the year to plot circulation; (2) a need that could
not be predicted—for example, the purchase of a dozen binders for
an unexpected report requested by the trustees; (3) a need so infre-
quent that it is uneconomical or otherwise impractical to stock the
item—for example, crepe paper decorations for the Christmas party;
and (4) for the small crises that inevitably occur—for example, to
replace a broken gear in a microfilm viewer.

Supplies purchased by petty cash are, in the great majority of cases,
relatively much more expensive. (Second-hand items or merchandise

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offered for immediate sale are exceptions to this principle. Because of the limited time usually available, and in some instances the requirement of cash on delivery, a petty cash purchase is often the only practical way of making such a purchase. There is the premium that must be paid for the small quantities involved and there may be a substantial loss in staff time in making the purchase (the telephone call to order the item, and the trip to the local store to select and/or pick it up). There is the additional bookkeeping involved in recording small transactions and in replenishing the petty cash funds. In addition, there is a security problem. The cash kept on hand for petty cash purposes, even when carefully controlled, may present a temptation to otherwise honest employees.

Petty cash purchases are clearly the province of the local stationery store, unless the purchase involves a library specialty which they do not stock. Speed of procurement is usually important; this is a need that a local store can meet and is the principal reason why it is used.

Library supply houses also provide small quantities of merchandise. However, they much prefer that they be combined with other purchases in an order of reasonable size. Increasingly, library supply houses are being forced to specify minimum orders. Increased postage, freight, packaging and personnel costs have combined to make it unprofitable to handle small quantities.

EMERGENCY PURCHASES

An emergency purchase is the need to procure immediately a fairly large quantity of a library specialty usually obtained through the regular ordering processes. (Although some petty cash purchases also have to be made quickly, they are still considered petty because of the small quantity and limited cost involved). Inadequate supply records or unrealistic reorder points, or any of a host of other reasons can create an operating crisis. Employees may be idled because they lack the supplies required for their work, and patrons may be unhappy because they are denied library material which cannot be processed.

Emergency purchases, in contrast to regular ones, usually have a high unit cost and are also wasteful of staff time. While usually only limited quantities are purchased—just enough to tide the operation over until a regular shipment can be received—the cost is likely to be higher. There is no time to shop around for the lowest price; competitive bidding, always time-consuming, has to be waived. Buy-
ing under pressure can also result in poor quality: you settle for what you can get because you have to have it. Staff time also may be lost in seeking alternate sources of supply, and a special trip to pick up the merchandise may be required.

The library supplier is usually the best source for library specialties in an emergency. Not only does he nearly always have a supply on hand, but he knows where they can be obtained if he does not. Although their distance from the user might seem to limit their effectiveness, library suppliers are usually able to fill such orders expeditiously. With a telephone call and shipment via special delivery or air freight, such an order can usually be received in time. Library suppliers do not encourage emergency orders because they are disruptive of routine and often require extra effort. However, it is in such crises that the value of a continuing relationship with a particular library supplier becomes important. For a good customer, most suppliers will make an extra effort to supply the needed merchandise.

For shortages of general office supplies, the local stationer is the logical source. He will usually have enough of the item on hand; if he does not, he probably knows where it can be obtained quickly. While the extra effort of a library supply house can scarcely be expected from the stationer—the library, is, after all, only one of his customers—he is nevertheless a source to be considered in time of need.

**WHAT IS A LIBRARY SUPPLY HOUSE?**

Characterized by their ubiquitous catalogs, found on the office reference shelf of most librarians, library supply houses account for the bulk of library supply and equipment purchases. The *Library Journal*’s “Annual Buyers Guide” for 1975 lists ten such firms under the heading “Library Suppliers”: American Instructional, A.S.A.P. Products, Bro-Dart, Demco, Fordham, Gaylord, Highsmith, Josten’s, Talas, and University Products. Reference to the Buyers’ Guide Directory of Suppliers indicates that there is considerable variation in the number of different products handled by these houses. Basically, however, their stock consists of a core of specialized library products supplemented by a selection of office supply items.

Library supply houses make money because they buy in bulk (often in carload lots) for less and sell in small quantities for more. Most libraries are small, so their supply needs, and therefore the quantities they require, are limited. Compared to other types of institutions, there are few libraries and they are widely dispersed geographically.
Library Supplies

As the retail mail-order house (Sears Roebuck and Montgomery Ward are surviving examples) got its start catering to farmers in the nineteenth century, so the library supply house serves the specialized needs of relatively small consuming units all over the nation. Because it is virtually the only convenient source of specialized library products, if the library supply house did not exist it would be necessary to create it. (This has been done in Sweden where a library supply cooperative has been organized.)

In addition to meeting the need for specialized library products, the library supply house also stocks general office supplies. There are towns that boast libraries but are too small to have office supply stores. Libraries in such communities depend upon library suppliers for most of their supplies, both specialized and general. Furthermore, the convenience of single-service ordering, by which both general and specialized supplies can be received from one vendor on one order, appeals to many librarians.

Library supply houses are essentially mail-order retail outlets. Most of their products are obtained from manufacturers and wholesalers. Some of them, such as Bro-Dart, which manufactures library furniture, or Gaylord, which prints many of the forms it sells, do carry on a limited amount of manufacturing. In general, however, manufacturing is a secondary concern of the library supplier—their business is mail-order retailing.

The library supply houses exist because they offer libraries: (1) specialty items, such as book pockets, binding tape, microfilm readers, etc.; (2) a selection of general office supplies and equipment, such as nameplates, pencil sharpeners, etc; and (3) a catalog listing the above, supplemented in most cases by information from the sales representatives who regularly visit the libraries.

These library department stores have paralleled the growth of American libraries primarily because they offer specialized products which are difficult or impossible to obtain locally at a reasonable price. Such items as book-carrying bags, circulation control systems, electric marking pens, etc., are not handled by local stationery stores because demand is too small to justify stocking them. In most communities the few libraries create only a limited market, so it is uneconomical to stock the specialized products they need. While local stationers can obtain most specialized library products from manufacturers or wholesalers, they must buy in quantity. However, their capital is limited; they can not afford to stock merchandise which does not have a reasonably fast turnover.
When libraries buy specialty items in quantity, however, some local office supply stores may be interested. Some large libraries (or co-operating groups of small ones) sometimes make bulk purchases through local stationers.

THE LIBRARY SUPPLIER'S CATALOG

The library supply house reaches its market through its catalog, which is distributed free of charge. Typically consisting of 100-150 pages, they have grown as more items, more and larger illustrations, and more detailed descriptions of products have been added. Expansion of the library market has also made possible better paper and more color illustrations. Separate catalogs or inserts devoted to such fields as library furniture and audiovisual equipment have also been added.

As a mail-order house, the library supplier's catalog is his principal sales medium. It is a silent but omnipresent representative of the company that issues it. By rough estimate the larger houses, such as Bro-Dart, Demco, Gaylord, Highsmith, and Josten's, list 500-600 specific items in a catalog—fine calculators, laminating equipment, etc. Variations of these specific products (in size, style, quality, price) increase the total number of listings to more than several thousand. The variety of products described and priced in a single, periodically updated publication make the library supply catalog a most useful resource for handling the library's supply functions. It tells the librarian what is available and for what price, and it makes possible comparison shopping between library suppliers and local stationers. Its quoted prices are even useful in developing figures for the supply budget.

Most library supply houses issue their catalogs about every two years. The space is costly, so a lot of thought goes into what is included. Production costs are about $2.50-$3.00 a copy, so every column inch counts. Demand, availability, price relationship to other products and variety are some of the considerations that go into determining the addition or discontinuation of a product. Priority goes to those items promising the largest sales volume, followed by lesser selling items and including, of necessity, some items which will be handled at a loss.

Library supply houses build their catalogs around a core of library specialties, such as book processing kits, charging tray guides, and
Library Supplies

phonorecord carriers. These specialties are presented in as much variety as possible; Bro-Dart has twelve different styles of book jackets, Demco has eight kinds of magazine and pamphlet storage cases, and Highsmith has twenty-two different book trucks. General office products on which the library supplier can make a profit are also offered, but in more limited variety. Paper cutters, pencil sharpeners, correction fluid, notebooks, file cabinets, and so on, are added to vary and extend the product mix. The variety of library specialties and the inclusion of some office products will, it is hoped deter reference to the catalogs of competing library and mail-order office suppliers, eliminate the necessity of patronizing the local stationer if one is available, or if there is none, permit the supplier to fill the gap.

The comprehensiveness of such a product line is not without some cost. Some of the wide variety of library specialties may move very slowly. Also, the supplier's market is made up of so many different kinds of libraries—small, large, rich, poor, school, college, special, and public—that he can not afford to omit some products even if they do sell slowly. Pencil daters have been replaced by automatic charging systems in many libraries, but they are still being carried in most suppliers' catalogs. The time comes eventually, however, when an item must be dropped, fate which befell the folding library ladder.

The catalog must also keep abreast of the latest in library supplies and equipment. This is important not only as a means of offering a complete line of products, but also, and equally important, it is necessary to maintain an image as an innovator in this highly competitive field. New issues of catalogs are scanned by librarians for new products, and in recent years suppliers have made them easier to identify by giving them separate listings.

By offering as comprehensive a selection as possible, the library supply house attempts to develop and maintain a one-stop shopping image. Each house attempts to direct the librarian's search to one source of supply: its catalog. Whether from satisfaction or inertia, most librarians do just this. The first place they look for a supply item is in the catalog of their favorite supply house. For larger purchases or a new product they may shop the catalogs of other houses, but for most products they will stay with their favorite firm. Out-of-town retail stationers that issue catalogs are not consulted very often, even though their prices for some items may be lower.

Whether from habit, the ease with which it may be shopped, or the reputation for dependability and fair prices of the house that issues it,
the profession depends on the library supply catalog. As a source of quick, reasonably accurate information on library specialties and many office products, it has no substitute.

LIBRARY SUPPLY HOUSE SALES STAFF

Second in importance to the library supplier's catalog is his sales force. Some supply houses employ few field representatives. They compensate by allotting larger budgets for catalog distribution, more advertising and direct mail promotion. Most houses, however, feel that a sales force is necessary, and have from ten to twenty people in the field.

The value of sales representatives is that they provide the personal touch. Librarians, like everyone else, prefer to communicate with a human being rather than the impersonal page of a catalog. Talking with a salesman is not only more pleasant but it is also much more informative. Difficulties in understanding catalog descriptions are readily clarified, leads are provided on where to locate hard-to-find items, and assistance is available in writing orders and in developing specifications. Aid is even available, on occasion, to help penetrate the mysteries of government procurement and competitive bidding.

The relationships between librarians and supply house representatives help explain why library supply houses have such a large share of the library market. Salespersons representing firms which manufacture typewriters, copying machines, etc., also call on librarians, but these relationships are usually transient. Because these latter people sell products which may be of general interest to business but of limited application to a library, such visits are helpful, but often not very productive. After one or two calls, such salesmen are seldom seen again. They have many other prospects in addition to libraries, many of which offer a far larger potential market.

In contrast, libraries are the principal concern of the library supply house representative. He is knowledgeable about a wide variety of merchandise, almost all of which has application to the library market. He is one of the few people outside the profession with whom the librarian can talk shop. Just as the pharmaceutical house detail man informs the practicing physicians about the latest drugs, so the library supply house representative brings the latest supply and equipment developments to the working librarian. Visiting many libraries, the supply house representative knows a good deal about how they are using new products and finding new uses for old ones. He is a source
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of information on questions about the way in which the new charging system at another library is working out, or how children like the new story-hour plastic cushions that some libraries are buying. His visit is also social—he brings news of personalities and the gossip of the profession. Over the years his frequent visits consolidate the relationship—library supply salesmen seem to have long job tenure—and he becomes a trusted associate.

While this relationship is advantageous to the librarian, it also has a negative side. Any salesperson’s advice has to be received with a degree of doubt, especially when he is representing his own product. Most of his information, however, will be honest and objective. Quite apart from the representative’s personal integrity, there is good reason for this. The library market is relatively small and its buyers are intimately linked together by associations, conventions, publications, etc. News of poor merchandise and unethical treatment travels swiftly. Far more than in larger, more competitive fields, librarians know, share and trust each other’s opinions. Stories of inferior supplies or equipment can quickly destroy a reputation that has taken years to build.

USING THE LOCAL STATIONERY STORE

There are many reasons why librarians patronize their local stationery store, usually a small business which is locally owned. The librarian may patronize it because he wants to keep the library’s business in the local community and because the owner is a friend or fellow club member. There are, however, sound economic and practical reasons for purchasing from a local outlet.

CONVENIENCE

The principal reason most librarians give for using their local stationery store is that it is easy to buy there. If the library is near a shopping center or in the same commercial area, the office products store may even be within walking distance. The number of stationery stores has kept pace with both the growth and spread of the U.S. population, and they are found in most old and new shopping areas. As with most retail organizations, many are open evenings and Saturdays, so it is easy to pick up an item when it is needed.

Convenience, as the economists tell us, has real economic value. For the busy librarian faced with a multitude of tasks, the convenience of the local stationery store has a monetary as well as psychological
value. There is the saving in his own and the staff's time, which is a substantial cost for most libraries, and accounts for up to 80 percent of some budgets. By using a local store, many purchases, especially small ones, can be made quickly with little or no interruption of work. The local stationer will have a new typewriter ribbon for that important letter that has to be sent this morning. The ribbon can be bought with cash or put on the monthly bill, so no time is lost in searching a library supplier's catalog, writing a check, addressing an envelope or waiting for the ribbon's delivery. While the time saved in using the local stationer may actually be, in some instances, time wasted (because there should have been an adequate supply of ribbons on hand in the first place), there are nevertheless many occasions in which time is really conserved.

Equally important is the satisfaction of expeditiously procuring an item. The flow of work is maintained, and with it morale—there are few things more frustrating to staff than to be unable to complete a task because of a missing supply or equipment item. Having a local source means that the job can be finished on time.

PERSONAL CONTACT

The librarian can also see and evaluate the product he is buying from his local stationer. Even if a library supply catalog has a full-color illustration and detailed description, the purchaser cannot really appreciate an item until it has been handled and inspected. This may not tell everything about its quality and utility, but it does make for a better-informed judgment. Moreover, the purchaser has the opportunity to ask questions. If the librarian does not know how to operate the new calculator, he can get an immediate demonstration. Most stationery store employees are knowledgeable about what they sell and can explain a product's intricacies. Seeing the item before it is bought also makes it possible to determine if it will be adequate. Is the paper stock heavy enough for those posters? If there are any doubts, a sample can be evaluated right in the store.

EXCHANGES AND REPAIRS

It is usually difficult to outdo the service offered by the local stationery store on exchanges and repairs. If a ribbon does not fit it can be quickly returned to a local outlet and another obtained in its place—no packing, no mailing, no waiting. The local vendor also has an advantage in maintaining the equipment he sells. A delicate slide
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projector, for example, which might not survive a return trip to the factory, is simply taken to the local dealer and the repairman told what does not work. Furthermore, repaired equipment can be tested right in the store to make sure it is working properly. Repairs by an out-of-town vendor require careful packing, freight charges, usually a longer wait, and no certainty that the equipment will work when it is received.

PRODUCT INFORMATION

The local stationer is the logical source of information on general office products and equipment. As a generalist, he can be quite informative about a wide variety of items: he probably reads Office Products Magazine and Geyer's Dealers Topics, the principal periodicals in the field. He may attend the conventions of the National Office Machine Association (NOMA), where he meets and exchanges information with other stationers, wholesalers and producers. Manufacturer's representatives visit him during the year, and he may attend sales promotion meetings to see their latest supply or equipment item. How an office product can be adapted to the library's requirements, or conversely, how a library's procedure can be changed so it can use a new or altered product, is also knowledge possessed by some stationery dealers. While few know much about libraries, their knowledge can often suggest a new approach that will save time and material.

Growth in office operations during the last few years has greatly expanded the office supply industry. So many products have appeared, disappeared or been improved that it is difficult for anyone not working directly in the industry to know what is available. A knowledgeable retailer is in a good position to know what is being used. He probably saw the latest filing equipment at the recent NOMA convention and he usually knows whether a company still makes the staple that will fit an antique stapler at the library.

Because the local office products dealer does his own buying, he is likely to be a good source of information on the cost of many products. His frequent contacts with wholesalers and manufacturers make him sensitive to current prices. The prices listed in the library supplier's printed catalog are, of necessity, relatively fixed. Most local dealers issue no catalog, so they are free to change their prices at any time. His price flexibility may also make it possible to secure a good buy on marked-down, surplus or second-hand items, an area in which the library supply house can not compete. Although he is not always
objective in his price and product information—he is, after all, interested in selling his merchandise—the local stationer can be a useful source of information to the librarian.

The library supplier, a retail mail-order house, plays an indispensable role in the operation of American libraries. It provides the specialized supply and equipment items which cannot be conveniently obtained elsewhere. It is also the source of most general office products purchased by libraries.

Complementing the library supply house, and almost as indispensable, is the local stationery store. Because it is nearby, it fills the gap in the services of the library supply house in such areas as petty cash purchases, exchanges, repairs and product information.
Commercial Cataloging Services

THEODORE C. HINES

There is a significant number of commercial firms offering a wide variety of cataloging services to the library community. An unknown (but very high) percentage of libraries makes at least some use of such services for anything from catalog cards for a small number of items to the complete cataloging of all, or nearly all, of their acquisitions.

Strangely enough, there is a real lack of published studies of commercial cataloging services, even though some libraries and some of the services themselves have carried out comparative analyses for internal use. Hence, with the permission of the issue editor and under the pressure of necessity, this article will not be a summary and analysis of information presented in the literature since the last Library Trends article on this subject; indeed, there is no such article. This report will instead attempt: (1) to define what commercial cataloging services are, (2) to give an indication of what they do, (3) to contrast and compare them with noncommercial services, (4) to indicate how they may affect libraries, and (5) to comment on some aspects of their role.

Commercial means “in commerce or trade” and implies the existence of a profit motive. For a moment, then, a commercial cataloging service can be said to offer to do all or part of the cataloging operations of a library for a fee, and that the offer comes from a firm or individual in business for a profit. As the discussion progresses, the reason for this rather involved definition should become evident.

As an indication of the number of firms, it might be noted that the Library Journal’s “Annual Buyers’ Guide” for 1975 listed, under several different headings, some twenty-five companies offering cataloging services. A number of firms offered more than one service. The list showed that catalog cards for audiovisual materials were...
available from seven firms; catalog cards for books from ten; duplication or xeroxing of cards from six; Library of Congress catalogs or cataloging in microform from five; catalogs in microform or printed-book form from ten; cataloging services for audiovisual materials from six, and for books from twelve; and, finally, book processing kits were available from eleven different firms.

This is certainly not a complete listing either of types of services offered or of sources from which they are available. It does not take into account many local firms or individuals, nor a number of larger firms which provide such services but have not listed them in this particular guide. It is significant to note, however, how many names of companies important to the library world in other ways appear on the list, such as Alesco, Bro-Dart, Demco, Follett, Huntting, Josten, and Xerox.

The actual range of services, and the variety of combinations of services which are obtainable, is bewilderingly complex. A rather helter-skelter and overlapping sampling would include: (1) the provision of fully cataloged instant libraries; (2) provision of personnel to do cataloging on library premises; (3) provision of Library of Congress cards for books; (4) provision of cards from Library of Congress copy or MARC tapes, edited or unedited, with or without headings and class numbers; (5) complete cataloging to the supplier's "standard," to a choice of possible forms, or to individual specification; (6) card sets, prefilled or not prefilled; (7) cards with or without kits, or with or without complete processing; (8) cards with or for only those books or other materials ordered from the same supplier; (9) complete, printed book or microform catalogs in a variety of formats, with or without updating and cumulation; (10) services for books only or for audiovisual materials only, or for juvenile titles only; (11) cards for microforms ordered from a particular supplier; (12) cards only for items represented on MARC tapes; and (13) provision of a computer-based, on-line catalog.

The providers of such services include individuals, firms specializing only in cataloging services, and firms primarily or also considered as publishers, booksellers, wholesalers, library supply houses, equipment manufacturers, or combinations of these.

Things used to be simpler. Either cataloging was done from scratch at the individual library or system level, or Library of Congress or Wilson cards were ordered to expedite the process. That was the extent of cataloging. The burgeoning of commercial services more or less coincides with post-Sputnik increases in federal funding for
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libraries, particularly school libraries.

Similarly, there was a rapid growth over the same period in the number of governmental or quasi-governmental agencies and other nonprofit corporate bodies providing cataloging services, also of a bewildering variety. These include, but again are not limited to, such services as Cataloging-in-Publication (CIP); the Library of Congress’s MARC (machine readable catalog) project; independent cooperatively supported processing centers; state- or federally supported agencies like the Nassau Library System and others in New York State and elsewhere, and such organizations as Ohio College Library Center (OCLC), the New England Library Network (NELINET), and the Southeastern Library Network (SOLINET).

From the viewpoint of the individual library, these services compete with those offered by the commercial firms (and with the in-house method) for the cataloging dollar. They also face financial, organizational and administrative problems very similar to those of the commercial firms. In fact, they really have more similarities than differences.

The grandfather of all such services is the Library of Congress card service. By law, the nonprofit service is not permitted to lose money. Indeed, to avoid doing so, it is expected to regulate what it charges for cards it supplies so as to produce a surplus of income over expenditure of 10 percent—which is greater than the profit of some commercial ventures.

The Library of Congress does not charge against the card service the multitudinous professional and other costs involved in producing the original catalog card copy, and these costs may be regarded as an extensive federal subsidy of the service. On the other hand, this subsidy is equally available to the libraries, commercial firms, and other cataloging service agencies that use Library of Congress card or MARC services or CIP copy whenever they are available.

The other nonprofit agencies which provide cataloging copy vary widely in their financial structure. Some receive a continuing subsidy over and above whatever their fees or membership subscriptions may bring in. Some have been initially subsidized—that is, provided with start-up money from public or private grant funds—and then expected to be self-sustaining. A few of this later group have not only sustained themselves on the income from services they perform, but have been so managed as to take in enough to finance substantial and occasionally almost explosive growth.

On the other hand, some of the commercial firms providing cata-
loging services have done so with very heavy initial losses. Some seem to have regarded the cataloging services they provide quite literally as services—provided at cost to add to or retain customers for other goods or services the firm offers. It must be added, too, that some of the commercial services have been involuntarily nonprofit—some so much so that they have gone out of business.

All this is why commercial cataloging services cannot simply be defined as those cataloging services offered at a fee for a profit, or even as those services operated in expectation of either immediate or eventual profit on the cataloging operations in themselves. Thus, the most precise definition possible is that commercial cataloging services are those of firms in overall business to make a profit.

Nevertheless, there is a major difference between the commercial firms providing cataloging services and some of the not-for-profit agencies which is worth noting. Commercial firms must take in enough income from their overall business to stay in business, and this means retaining customers. This produces an attitude toward finding out customer needs and meeting customer demand which is often more positive than that shown by at least some of the not-for-profit agencies. To put the matter another way, the services orientation of an agency cannot really be judged by whether it is commercial or not, but there is a constant incentive for the commercial firms to be attentive to feedback from current or potential customers.

It is important to note that while some commercial operations are small, some are very large indeed. These large firms serve literally thousands of libraries, providing cataloging for an enormous range of titles and with a broad range of combinations of services. For example, one firm has served well over 5,000 different libraries with types of services including all original cataloging as well as cataloging to unusual specifications, providing LC copy card sets, standard sets of their own, cards with books, processed books with cards, and computer-based book catalogs in various forms.

As is the case in libraries, the degree of skills and knowledge and professional background available in the commercial firms varies widely. The vice-president of one publishing company eager to provide cataloging services was quite prepared to put Library of Congress card numbers on the spines of books on the theory that they were classification numbers. In another case, a major firm was contracted at a very low cost to computerize the cataloged titles held by a large school system. The reason for the low bid made on this complex task was simple and sensible enough; the company felt that by doing
the job at a loss it would have the opportunity to acquire a very large
cataloging data base for titles held by school libraries, and that the
profit would come from further use of this information. Unfortu-
nately for the firm, as any knowledgeable cataloger might have
suspected, the school system in question used its own rules for main
entry and descriptive cataloging, had its own subject headings which
varied substantially from the Sears or the Library of Congress lists,
and applied a classification which looked like Dewey but had actually
been substantially modified. This firm learned the hard way, in that
the contract had been signed before anyone became aware that such a
large school system need not necessarily conform to professionally
approved standard practice.

On the other hand, the cataloging personnel of some of the larger
firms are some of the most knowledgeable professionals in the field
today, far more aware than most of us of developments in codes, or in
LC practice, or of desirable improvements. They have close and
continual contact with a very broad range of libraries, the situations
which exist in them, and with both articulated and unexpressed
needs.

A few of these commercial firms represent what is probably the
peak of managerial skill in handling cataloging operations. Observa-
tion indicates that they can handle a broad variety of cataloging
situations with high efficiency and a minimum of professional staff
while maintaining sound quality levels. Unfortunately, they publish
little or nothing about their methods, which are worthy of extensive
study by libraries. At least one firm (and probably others as well) has
developed a highly structured division of labor and instructional
procedures for nonprofessional staff which should be the envy of
librarians everywhere. A number of firms, again without lowering
quality, have an extraordinarily high output per professional cata-
loger, and show what can be done if librarians do indeed function
fully as professionals, with appropriate use of subprofessionals and
other supporting staff, and with sound systems planning.

It is interesting that it is impossible to draw conclusions about the
cost of a given service to the library based on a simplistic belief that
doing it in the local library or using a not-for-profit supplier must be
less expensive than the same service provided by a profit-making firm
Even in extreme cases, where one supplier is both in business for a
profit and is actually realizing a great one, and the other is a not-for-
profit agency which is both subsidized and not trying to produce a
surplus of income over immediate costs, it is readily conceivable that
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the first might be cheaper and better for a particular consumer library.

There are cases, for example, where for at least a certain range of juvenile titles it may be cheaper and faster to get catalog cards with headings on the top, call numbers, and complete processing for the book, including mylar jacket, from a commercial firm than it would be to buy an unheaded card set for the same book from a nonprofit organization. This may be true for an even wider range of materials if we are comparing a prefiled, headed set of cards ready to go into the catalog with separate, unheaded card sets for each book from the nonprofit institution. Reversals of such situations can occur as well, of course.

It would be as false to jump to any conclusions about the inefficiency of nonprofit or governmental organizations which charge more as it is to accuse the commercial services of greed or venality when the reverse may be true. For both commercial and noncommercial organizations and for the consumer, there are questions of the nature of the operations, the scale of operations, and the predictability of coverage involved.

The commercial cataloging services have made very substantial contributions to cataloging standardization. In the main, they have tried very hard to determine what represents a good standard practice, and by offering this to libraries at a lower cost than individualized deviations, have induced many libraries to conform. It should be noted that in almost every instance the library which does conform not only achieves economies and desirable uniformity with other libraries, but also raises the quality of information access.

Nonetheless, many of the libraries purchasing cataloging services persist in demanding individualization, and some firms will supply it—at a price, of course. It is a sobering, frustrating, and depressing experience to look through the files of specifications for such cataloging sent in by some libraries, and to realize, for example, that there are still librarians, some in libraries with very restricted budgets, who will pay a premium price to have subject headings in red, or to have their classification done by Dewey 14, or for the use of outdated, outmoded subject heading lists. The “standard” practices agreed upon by the profession appear to be based on the concept that each library is applying the standard itself, rather than accepting a cataloging job as being as complete as possible as it is done by an outside agency, whether profit or nonprofit.
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As those who have established or worked with federated systems well know, it is surprising how often the published codes, lists, rules, or classification systems leave open alternatives to be chosen by the user. If there can be bitter debates over such totally inconsequential decisions as whether to use "92" or "B" for biographies, one can imagine what happens in the case of more substantial issues, such as the momentous question of book numbers.

In choosing among alternatives for their "standard" cataloging and offering it at a cheaper price, the commercial firms have developed needed extensions of codes and rules, generally well chosen, have promoted uniformity, and have increased quality for many libraries. However, as the files in the firms show, far too few librarians have been wise enough to take advantage of this.

The amount of educating of librarians which can be done by these companies about the wisest procedures to follow is limited. The companies are almost entirely limited to influence by price, since company representatives feel they cannot criticize, even by implication, what a librarian is doing, even if he happens to be using a 1930 Sears list. Moreover, company representatives tend to be very diffident about anything which might seem critical of the profession when they speak at meetings, present papers, or work on committees. This is not solely—and in the case of some professional librarians employed by the firms, not even mainly—because of a fear of losing customers. It can be partially attributed to the attitude of at least some librarians, despite evidence to the contrary, that persons who work for profit-making agencies cease to retain their professional ethics and professional attitudes.

Fortunately, this misconception seems to be fading, thanks to the efforts of some outstanding librarians employed by cataloging services and to the fact that some excellent librarians who have worked for commercial firms are now working in libraries and have seen both sides of the issue.

Not only have the commercial firms made a de facto contribution toward providing a standard practice where present rules leave options open, they have been forced into other areas—the cataloging of nonprint materials and the classification of phonorecords and tapes, for example—where conflicting rules existed or no suitable rules were available. Here, in order to meet customer demand, the firms were forced to generate some kind of standard practice for themselves pending professional resolution of the problems. Indi-
individual libraries or library systems have been forced to do the same thing, of course, but the influence of this is by no means as strong as is that of the larger firms which serve many libraries.

While it should not be forgotten that commercial cataloging operations frequently serve large university libraries and that some of them can and do handle materials in any language and deal with law, medicine, and other highly specialized disciplines, the bulk of their services goes to school and smaller public libraries, with a lesser amount to colleges, community colleges, and technical institutes. Thus, for most services, the vast preponderance of work is done with English-language titles, mainly current and mainly American. Within this category, most of the volumes handled are juvenile titles or comparatively recent adult titles at the secondary school level. Given the relative lack of effectively centralized administrative units doing cataloging on a system-wide basis, the commercial firms have probably contributed substantially to maintaining quality cataloging in many school libraries, including those centralized systems which they supply.

It sometimes seems that a high proportion of informed comment and criticism on cataloging problems from the field—and consequently, influence over cataloging codes, rules, and policies—comes from the larger university and research library group. This remains true despite the recent very substantial contributions of the Library of Congress in handling juvenile titles, and the Library of Congress's awareness that the use of its cataloging, by volume, is enormously higher for current U.S. titles and for juvenile books than is the use of cataloging for the rest of the titles in its output.

On the other hand, the commercial firms have been quite sensitive to the needs of public and especially of school libraries, since these constitute the really predominant customer group. It remains for the profession to tap and make proper use of their accumulated expertise in this area, especially on questions of subject access to juvenile materials and the cataloging of nonprint media.

There would appear to be a strong future for the commercial services. Most have weathered the economic shocks of the past few years—quite severe shocks which wiped out several companies and caused others to withdraw from the field. By combining cataloging with other services, serving selected markets, making use of advantages of scale, and being alert to standards, they can provide many libraries with more economic and better cataloging than would be
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available in other ways. The incentive to stay in business, if not to make a profit, means that they must be responsive to needs and develop efficient procedures. For the future, it is to be hoped that there will be more recognition within the profession that the commercial services are an integral part of the field, and that greater participation by them in its councils is to be encouraged rather than feared.
The Evolution of Commercial Library Supply and Service Houses

GEORGE BONSALL

IN MARKING a copy of the 1888 catalog of the Library Bureau for its next printing, Melvil Dewey added "Founded 1876" to the printed incorporation date of 1888. The Library Bureau, the most important of early library supply houses in America, was actually formed in 1882 as an outgrowth of the Supplies Committee of the American Library Association, to whom Dewey had turned over a very small business he had started in 1876. Whatever their actual birth may be, commercial library supply and service houses are surely happy to celebrate with libraries everywhere the centennial anniversary of the founding of the American Library Association, the first publication of the Library Journal, and the formal presentation of the Dewey decimal system of classification, which opened a new era in information science in North American and throughout the world.

Very broadly, library supplies and services in the present context may be classified as stationery-type items, furniture, media supply (wholesaling), technical services, circulation systems and bibliographic services—not necessarily in that order. The smaller or newer houses may be concerned with only one or two of the above categories, and others with many of them. Few, if any, houses are identical in their coverage, which may cause some confusion in the selection of suppliers and will therefore be commented upon separately. The firms considered in this article, including subsidiaries of companies engaged in other fields, are those serving libraries as a primary market. Publishers, periodical distributors, binders and manufacturers of business equipment are not considered.

Automation, and the development of MARC in particular, has (or will soon have) influenced library operations everywhere. In discussing supplies and services available from commercial library supply and service organizations, it seems useful to divide them into those

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which existed prior to MARC and continue to be the backbone of service to libraries, and the newer and more dramatic—if less measured—tools of the post-MARC era.

Since stationery-type items (normally referred to as library supplies and which also include shelf accessories, small items of equipment, etc.) are unique in this field, library supply houses have undertaken their manufacture or conversion. A large number of such items have been invented or developed by library supply houses either speculatively or in response to specific requests from libraries. In this respect, the library supply house is very different from supply houses or jobbers serving other fields. Manufactured and converted items are supplemented by other products of lesser demand which make it possible for libraries to avoid the additional acquisition and handling costs involved in breaking up their requirements into many parts. There is considerable similarity among the lists of items handled by firms marketing library supplies, all of which issue illustrated and priced catalogs.

Library furniture is classified according to its material (wood or metal), its style (traditional or stylized), and its function (replacements and additions, or new installations). Furniture, primarily of wood, is manufactured by a few of the library supply houses. There are also a number of firms which manufacture wood and steel, or steel furniture only. Manufacturers of furniture often issue priced catalogs of stock furniture, usually used as replacements or additions. Quotations must, of course, be obtained for new installations and custom-built items. Some library suppliers provide a furniture consulting service relating primarily to requirements involving significant library additions or new construction. Such consulting services have grown from the traditional development of suggested layouts and budget estimates to include planning for some of the more sophisticated equipment for use with library media (e.g., visual projection equipment and sound equipment). Such services are available either for a fee or at no charge. Suppliers who specialize in work for libraries are quick to develop new products in response to technical library requirements.

It has only been in the last few years that media distribution by library suppliers meant anything other than distribution of books. Even now only a selected range of audiovisual materials is distributed to libraries by such suppliers, although there is every likelihood that broader coverage of both audiovisual materials and related services will develop in the next few years.
Evolution

Firms selling books to libraries may be divided into three types: (1) general book wholesalers, handling books of all publishers distributed through normal commercial channels; (2) firms selling limited classes of books to libraries (e.g., medicine, law); and (3) firms selling books to a restricted marketplace, such as schools. In addition to the usual pattern of book selling, some houses offer approval or leasing plans. In addition, just as there are a few houses selling both library supplies and furniture, a few sell both library supplies and books, and one house sells all three. Issuance of catalog materials and prices is varied.

The media supplier (wholesaler) is a source of supply for the media which is produced by thousands of individual publishers. Through the commitment of significant capital investment, the wholesaler eliminates the need to deal individually with thousands of publishers (each of which has different business practices, procedures and requirements), enabling the library to receive a uniform product, conforming to the needs of most libraries. The uniformity of service procedures available from the wholesaler opens the door to the involvement of the supplier with the library's order-placement, receiving, and associated procedures. Such involvement may be viewed as being a cost-effective one when compared with earlier traditional methods. As a result of this increasing trend, the library/supplier partnership is quite evident, and the benefits derived are clearly substantial.

A generation ago, the idea of buying a book cataloged and processed outside the library was unheard of. In the late 1950s however, contract cataloging and processing was tried experimentally, and libraries that were short of staff or falling behind in their technical service departments began to use it. For the first time it was possible to see the tremendous number of variations possible in meeting the individual requirements of thousands of libraries. It was not until the mid-1960s, when large government funding made possible the creation of thousands of new school and college libraries and the expansion of many others, that contract cataloging played its first important role. The new libraries had little staff and had to move quickly. Although specifications varied widely, they were far more simple than those of older public and college libraries, and the large volume could be handled more readily.

The various houses then offering books cataloged and processed to specification (there was little demand for audiovisual cataloging at that time) charged a base price for a "standard" product, usually
including a list of free alternates, to which were added separate charges for other custom requirements. The extra charges gave many libraries an opportunity to re-examine their costs and compare them with benefits derived. Many subsequent changes resulted in economic advantage for the libraries. Spurred on by technical developments, the move to standardization has today escalated this trend beyond anything which could have been foreseen a dozen years ago. This will become more evident in a discussion of the post-MARC era.

Library circulation control systems, from the simplest manual system to computerized equipment, is an important area of products and services provided by some of the library supply houses. There is no single book-charging system which is all things to all libraries. New systems have been designed to meet the special needs of different types and sizes of libraries, depending upon their volume of circulation, reserve or recall requirements, and efficiencies in handling overdue and delinquent borrower information.

The case for the use of commercial supply and service houses is easily made. They are cost effective, a fact which is better recognized as the growth/budget squeeze tightens. No one today believes that what is done by contract costs money and what is done in-house is free. Those who serve for a fee seek profit. This must and does come from savings to the customer due to volume, greater specialization in job categories, utilization of expensive and sophisticated equipment, flexibility in handling peak demand, and other efficiencies of concentrated service and production planning. The fees of library supply and service houses have the very real check of those looking over their shoulders—their competitors. Furthermore, the library paying for goods or services holds an extra card: the right to fire.

For a library whose purchasing office requests bids from potential suppliers of product or services, it is important that librarians make sure all acceptable library suppliers of the items required are on the purchasing office's bid list. Suppliers try to ensure that they are on bid lists, but it is a difficult task. From time to time there may also be misunderstanding about the categories into which infrequently ordered items fall. Some of the terms used by the library may not be recognized by purchasing office personnel. This problem can be minimized by indicating on requisitions the broad area covered by suppliers' catalogs (library supplies, library furniture, etc.).

While the bidding process is viewed with dismay by many librarians, this is largely true because of the inability to delineate in written specifications those requirements and procedures needed by the
library to assure efficient and satisfactory relationships between vendor and library. Such problems have materialized in virtually all areas, including supplies and furniture, but have been most evident in the area of media supply. The commercial firm, however, can be of immeasurable assistance in this otherwise troublesome area. Those who are willing to do so can develop comprehensive, detailed and yet unrestricted specifications for a given library. Library purchasing agencies are generally very receptive to such specifications in that they simplify both the task of qualifying capable potential vendors and the job of evaluating vendor problems. Utilizing a commercial firm for draft specifications development also benefits the library by creating a forum in which vendor capabilities and library requirements may be opened for discussion; the outcome may well be a cost-effective improvement in order-placement and receiving functions.

Some of today's larger supply houses have experienced a dramatic change in their organization and capabilities in this post-MARC period. Instead of being identified as a seller of specific products or services (e.g., library supplies, media wholesaling, or library furniture manufacturing), the supply company today frequently takes a "systems approach" to the services it offers. This systems approach can be seen to follow the concept of value engineering, which consists of the analysis of the ultimate goal to be achieved and the development of the most cost-effective methods by which such goals can be achieved. The foundation for this very significant development derives from a much closer relationship between the commercial supplier and the libraries. This in turn stems from the traditional commercial concern with gaining a thorough understanding of the practices, objectives and problems of its markets. Also of importance is the realization that the profit motive requires the commercial firm to develop cost-effective products and/or services.

For a better understanding of this kind of development, one must examine closely the results to date—and project the consequences into the future—of the distribution of bibliographic data in machine-readable form. Through its MARC program and distribution service, the Library of Congress has, of course, created the basis for both commercial and noncommercial services relating to the supply of bibliographic data in standardized form.

The combination of the computer and MARC have brought about the realization that many of the thousands of variations previously thought to require time-consuming, manual effort can be accommodated within the automated system. Moreover, in addition to the
advantages of speed and flexibility provided by the computer, it is now possible to capture bibliographic data in machine-readable form as a byproduct of the book order at minimal extra cost. The significance of this major accomplishment is that it puts the library in a position to move toward library automation and its associated benefits. These may include the implementation of an automated circulation control system, or the replacement of the library's card catalog with a book or microform catalog. Each of these possibilities, of course, requires that the library's holdings and the bibliographic information associated with them be in machine-readable form. The computer has also made possible efficient and low-cost conversion of bibliographic data now available in the library only in card form. Library awareness of these services and their significance is growing. Like the tip of an iceberg, there is far more available than is initially apparent.

The maturation of a whole range of library automation concepts into a series of tangible and affordable tools for increasing library effectiveness and efficiency is evident today. In many ways one should view the pioneering work carried out principally by large institutions as being analogous to the pure research activity common in the scientific environment. Only recently have we seen the beginning of the engineering and product-construction phase of the development cycle. Viewed in this way, it becomes clear why the oft-heralded breakthroughs announced in the professional literature have had no measurable impact on the operation of the vast majority of libraries. These breakthroughs actually have been a reflection of progress made in increasing the fundamental body of knowledge concerning the topic, rather than being announcements of improved alternatives to library operation. This does not suggest that the value of these pure research activities is in some way diminished; without the foundation and framework that they provide, little could be accomplished. However, it must be recognized that the next step, the engineering and product-development step, is inevitably taken by organizations with capabilities and motivations that are substantially different from those of the research group. To expect researchers to develop the final product is as unrealistic as to expect engineers to conduct pure research. In our economic system, the task of final product development and support is with few exceptions undertaken by the commercial sector, where the willingness and ability exist to invest funds and resources effectively. The library can achieve many of the benefits made possible by the far-reaching and interrelated
services now available by focusing on what it would like to accomplish rather than on apparent obstacles. This approach creates an opportunity for a substantial improvement of library operations.

Librarians and administrators who recognize that the problems underlying library operation today require a more business-oriented approach (i.e., value engineering, cost-effective procedures, etc.) will welcome the emergence of a more comprehensive library service organization, embodying the resources, knowledge and flexibility to assist in reaching their objectives. It will require the coordination and cooperation of departments within the library to take maximum advantage of these capabilities. For example, the selection of a single supplier—responsible for the supply of media, bibliographic information, provision and maintenance of the library's automated catalog, maintenance of accounting information (relating to costs of materials and services), provision of circulation control and interlibrary loan facility, and the resulting supply of inventory and management reports—will involve virtually every department in the library. A library may secure from a single supplier with a single order: books, processing, bibliographic information and production of the library's catalog, as well as maintenance of the library's record of expenditures. In addition to such comprehensive service, the same supplier can provide the circulation control system (hardware and software) utilizing the bibliographic data updated through the acquisitions operation, permitting the library to generate information relating to the use of its resources (i.e., management and inventory usage and control reports).

The phenomenon of bibliographic data networks for library use has given rise to much speculation concerning their impact on the future of the library. There has been a great deal of confusion about just what these networks truly offer and how their offerings can best be exploited by the library.

In order to understand bibliographic data networks, it is helpful first to understand what they are not. They are not a library operations system. Although a network facility can be a supportive component of a given library's operation, the network itself does nothing to improve the performance of the library. In fact, it has been convincingly demonstrated that the mere injection of a network facility into the library without careful consideration of a given library's overall system requirements can have a negative influence on both economics and performance.

A network facility is a utility—a utility much like those providing
electric, telephone and other services. It is characterized by some of the same semimonopolistic behavior as other utilities, and suffers some of the same limitations imposed by the need to provide an essentially uniform and somewhat inflexible general service to customers with differing specific needs. It becomes evident that the task of gaining improvements through use of a network utility is one that must follow, not precede, the design and implementation of the overall library automation system. To do otherwise is as pointless as to contract for electrical service without first having understood and planned the application of that utility.

As mentioned earlier, we find ourselves at the beginning of the engineering and product-development cycle of library automation tools. How long will it be before meaningful advanced systems are actually available? The answer is that worthwhile automated systems are available today. It is true that their scope and function are relatively modest when compared with that which will become available. There are good reasons, however, to consider seriously their adoption now rather than waiting until an indeterminate future time to take positive action. Some systems to consider are discussed below.

Circulation control systems, especially those that deal effectively with interlibrary loan functions and collection management information. With regard to the latter, be sure that the system can actually present circulation, patron and other management statistics in a useful fashion. Some can only collect data. Expect a modest saving of staff time but a substantial opportunity to improve service.

Book and media catalogs, with special emphasis on microform versions. The economics of this card catalog alternative are quite good today, and the current capability for easily producing special-interest subcatalogs is quite attractive. The presentation of an entire page or screenful of information in a book catalog helps to make the search process much more effective than the one-entry-at-a-time card catalog reference. Good microform viewers designed expressly for library use are available.

Automated ordering systems, both electronic and microform. A substantial number of dollars and an even larger amount of time can be saved in the ordering process. Up-to-date publication status, cataloging availability, information, and price can be known at the time the order is being initiated. Perhaps most importantly, the use of these systems provides assurance that there is an accurate com-
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munication to the supplier of exactly what is desired by the library. The electronic systems are extremely fast and accurate. The microform systems tend to be quite economical.

The most compelling reason for not deferring automation is that the entire process of moving to more effective systems is evolutionary and takes time. Although dramatic wholesale change impacting a library's entire operation is occasionally discussed, in practical terms a well-managed ongoing program of progressive adoption of new systems is usually the most realistic approach. If done in concert with knowledgeable vendors, a building-block approach is practical today.
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