

ANGLES ON ACQUISITIONS JULY 1993

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First of all, my thanks to the organising committee for giving me the opportunity to address this conference. I am only sorry that I can't be here in person. Unfortunately, the company had been committed previously to a conference in Darwin and while you are listening to this, I will be manning (sorry, staffing) a stand in Darwin. Lawrence can confirm that I chose to live in Melbourne, having found Sydney too humid, so you can imagine what I think of Darwin - I would much rather be with you in New Zealand, but such is life!

The topic of this conference is "Angles on Acquisitions" and one of the important links in the acquisitions chain is the library supplier or agent or jobber - the terms are interchangeable, although jobber is usually a US term. A supplier is an intermediary essentially, between the library and the publisher. Instead of the library sending off orders to 10 separate publishers, you can send it off to one source, the supplier, who will then obtain the material on your behalf from the publishers. Most library suppliers will not have a set list of publishers with whom they deal, as publishers will not make separate arrangements with suppliers, unless that supplier is also the publisher's agent. Most suppliers will try to obtain whatever material you wish to order, although with varying success depending on the supplier. For instance, it may not be a good idea to order American material from a UK supplier, as you will not know what exchange rates operate between the UK and the US; similarly, it may not be a good idea to order British material from a European source.

You may also hear the term "wholesaler" or "sole agent". These terms are not the same as the previous ones and generally refer to a relationship with either one or several publishers, where the sole agent acts for the publisher in an agreed geographic area and it is from this sole agent that the bookseller must first attempt to buy his books. I refer here to the Australian situation, as I am unfamiliar with the New Zealand book trade, although I would imagine that there are similarities. You will note that I say "bookseller" must obtain his books from the sole agent. Libraries are outside the parameters of this arrangement and have traditionally been able to buy their material from any source they choose. This is primarily due to the fact that in most academic areas at least, there might only be 10-15% of the collection at best coming from local publishers and local wholesalers have never historically held the depth of overseas material which academic and special libraries require.

Having said that libraries are free to choose how and where to buy their material, why would a theological library choose to go via an agent rather than go direct to the publisher or a general bookshop? I am rather biased I

suppose but I feel that the best interests of a library are served if an agent is used, certainly for the supply of monographs - periodicals can be a different matter.

The main reasons for this are:

1. add-on services
2. ease of payment
3. speed of supply
4. efficiency of supply

I intend to examine each of these areas and explain why I believe that using an agent can help the library both in terms of money and time.

1. Add-On Services

One of the most important reasons why I believe that libraries should use agents is the value of add-on services provided by these suppliers in contrast to the lack of them if you go directly to a publisher or a general book-shop. It is these services which make it cost-effective in terms of both time and money for many libraries. Among the most important are:

i. Accurate and timely reporting on orders.

For most libraries, this is one of the key elements in the supply of material. There is nothing worse than giving or sending an order to someone only to have it drop into a black hole never to reappear. It is essential that you know exactly what is happening to each of your orders not only to keep your readers informed, but also so that you don't waste your time constantly phoning the supplier to find out what has happened to the book. You should also know for budgetary purposes close to the end of the financial year how much material is outstanding to enable you to estimate your commitments and when the material is likely to arrive. Check with each supplier exactly how his reports are formatted and if he can tailor his reports to your needs. For example, you may want to read your reports issued by date order, someone else may want it in order number sequence, someone else in alphabetical author order sequence. A reputable supplier should be flexible enough to accommodate these requests.

ii. Ability to identify and source obscure material.

As I heard one senior academic librarian say at a booksellers conference, "Blind Freddy could source local and overseas commercial material; what I am looking for is someone who will obtain my Arabic Festschriften." While I am not suggesting that any of you would require this level of obscurity, it is an example of what is required of a library supplier. Bear in mind that you will pay for this material, as it is just as difficult for us to obtain as it is for you; the only difference is that if you use a large library supplier who specialises in academic and special library supply, it is possible that someone somewhere else in the world has also requested the book and we will therefore have a reference for it.

iii. Out-of-print searching facility

With even commercial material going out of print these days at a faster and faster rate, it has become imperative for suppliers to be able to offer this facility to their customers. Check to see if the agent in which you are interested offers this service, if there is a charge for it and what their "hit rate" or success rate is for the OP material; also check to see if you can automatically have all material put on to the OP search or if you have the facility to identify those individual orders on which you require searching.

iv. Provision of automated products

More and more these days the world of library supply is moving towards the paperless office - already in my organisation, we do not keep hard copies of orders - everything is recorded electronically. More and more publishers are accepting electronic orders from agents and are supplying reports in electronic formats. Even the smallest library is going to be affected by this change and it is wise to make sure that your supplier of books and journals is also capable of delivering what you require in the format you require. You may want hard-copy format now, but it is possible that in the future you may want something different. Ask the various suppliers where they stand on automated products - are their data-bases on open access to their customers, do they communicate electronically with publishers (this will affect the speed of supply), are they working with automation vendors to have interconnectivity between computer systems, where are they in relation to electronic document delivery for periodicals. You may not want these services, but it is important to make sure that the agent you choose is competent in this area, as this will become more and more important as time goes on.

2. Ease of Payment

This is one other area where most libraries, regardless of size, find that it is more cost-effective to use an agent than to go direct. The costs involved in keeping track of a multitude of suppliers, both publishers and booksellers; of making out numerous cheques in various currencies and then making sure that the various suppliers have received payment can be enormous. Even if you yourself do not have to do this work, remember that it is a charge on someone in your organisation and should be borne in mind when estimating costs. Your agent will usually attempt to consolidate parcels together so that you do not have to deal with lots of small parcels and invoices all arriving at different times, which will happen when you go direct. You should be able to give instructions to your agent on the frequency with which you would like the deliveries made.

3. Speed of Supply

With the common use today of air-freight by many companies, the supply times from overseas have dropped dramatically. Air-freight is still more expensive than sea-freight and so bulk shipments are needed to obtain the best prices. As a consequence, many large publishers now routinely air-freight into Australia (I am afraid that I don't know the situation with

publishers' agents in New Zealand; Blackwells does air-freight into New Zealand and I am sure that other library suppliers would also offer this service), but there is a host of smaller publishers who simply do not have the volume to attract the cheaper air-freight rates and who will send all their material via sea-freight.

When looking at agents and library suppliers or booksellers, check to see if they offer air-freight and if they do, are there any extra charges involved and what the average delivery times are. This can vary from agent to agent and it is wise to make sure of these factors. When an agent gives you a supply time, make sure that you are clear on what this means - is the agent talking about supply time from his warehouse to your library; is he talking about the total supply time from receipt of order to dispatch of material; is he talking about the supply time from the date of your orders ... this whole area needs to be clarified in both your minds before either of you start complaining that agreements have not been fulfilled.

4. Efficiency of Supply

This last area is probably one of the most important areas in monograph and periodical acquisitions and one which generates a lot of heat in some quarters! In Australia at the moment, vendor evaluation is a hot topic and everyone is evaluating their suppliers and looking at new ones. There is great debate on whether to use a multiplicity of suppliers, so as to make sure that the library is taking advantage of all price offers and being fair to all suppliers or to whittle down the suppliers to just a few, so as to ensure efficiency of operations. My own personal view and I emphasise that this is a personal view, is that the latter course is the better of the two.

Edward Deming, the guru on Quality Management, once said that in hard times, it was better for the customer to be the large client of only one or two suppliers, rather than the medium to small client of many suppliers. His reasoning was that when times are good, suppliers do not need to worry overly much about service and price, as they have all the business they can deal with. When times are tough however, the supplier has to really work hard for their money and provide service and good pricing to stay in business. If you as the library have \$500 to spend and you decide to give that money to 10 suppliers, each will have \$50 worth of business. If on the other hand, you decide to use two suppliers, each of those suppliers now has \$250 worth of business. I will leave it to you to decide which customer will attract the suppliers' attention!

There are of course ethical issues involved in the choice of suppliers - should you choose a local, i.e. ANZ supplier (some libraries understand "local" even to mean the newsagent down the street regardless of his ability to supply the material required), or should you go to the country of origin; what responsibility does a library have if they are government funded to use local suppliers and keep local people employed as opposed to going overseas and using the funds possibly more efficiently. These are important

issues and ones which I think that Lawrence may cover in greater detail, as I do believe that this a professional issue for librarians and not one with which agents should get involved. My concerns are to point out the practical and financial issues involved in choosing a supplier.

I would think that most people would accept that it is probably cheaper to use a few suppliers rather than many in exactly the same way that it is obviously cheaper to use the supermarket for certain lines rather than to go to many corner shops for all your groceries. Corner shops play a very important role in shopping and I would hate to see them disappear in favour of large supermarkets, but I don't think that anyone would consider that price was their strong point. We use corner shops for emergencies when we run out or when we need something urgently; we also use them for specialty items which we feel the larger concerns may not be able to stock. I wouldn't like to draw out the analogy too far, but I think that enough similarity is there to enable you to see my point.

It has been said that in common with other industries, the book supply business will contract to the point where there are only a few very large suppliers (this was said about the periodical business, but I think that when you look at publishers in the last few years, it could also refer to monographs) and specialised smaller suppliers offering 'gourmet deli' type services. While we may not enjoy this prospect, I do think that it is possible that it is inevitable and as such, we should not only accept it as a reality, but try to see how we ourselves can take best advantage of the situation.

Talk to your colleagues about suppliers and agents; conferences such as this one are invaluable for checking up on this sort of thing as there will be such a good range of libraries represented, from the large to the small. Any chance you get, attend trade functions where the various suppliers have stands and where you can make direct comparisons on areas of service. Make sure before you go shopping that you are quite clear in your own mind exactly which services are the most important for you. You may find that services will vary from agent to agent and you may be persuaded that this particular widget, although inessential, is just what you need. If you have priorities in mind for what is needed for your library, you will be in a much stronger position to discuss those needs with the various suppliers.

Now that I have convinced you that you should be using an agent or supplier, and for those who already do, could I make a few suggestions as to how you could help the supplier give you the most efficient service.

1. ISBN

This is a thorny question and I am often asked if ISBNs should be put on orders or not. What I would suggest is that if you have definitely established that the ISBN matches the edition and format which you require, then please put it on. The danger arises when the ISBN quoted is for the cloth edition and the order clearly states paper preferred. I have known some suppliers spend ages to-ing and fro-ing trying to make sure

that they have covered the library's requirements. Unfortunately, we can't rely on the infallibility of ISBNs and so I would suggest that you come to some arrangement with the supplier, such as stating at the beginning of your business with them that paper is always preferred where possible. That then allows the supplier to make a reasonable judgement for you on the spot, when the ISBN does not match your written instructions. Most suppliers will come back to you if the edition you require is OP and ask if another format, with another price, is acceptable. It is wise to allow the supplier to do this, even though it may take longer. The price difference between say your preferred paper edition and the only cloth edition available may be horrendous.

2. Format of orders

Most suppliers really don't mind what format orders arrive in, as long as they are decipherable and clear. Typed orders are probably preferable to hand-written ones, although I suppose it does depend on your handwriting! Please ensure that the key elements of the order such as your library's name, author, title and quantity are clear and non-ambiguous. With all the amalgamations in academic libraries which occurred in Australia recently, the opportunity for chaos in order format has been utilised to the full, with institutions changing their names, their campus names, their library names, their automated systems and often their staff names quite regularly!

3. No matter how rudimentary, please try to put order numbers on your orders. Most suppliers will not be able to supply all items immediately - some books may be out of stock at the publishers, or reprinting or the publisher may simply be slow. It will be more efficient if the supplier can quote an order number which refers to an exact title and that way, there are no misunderstandings about what is being discussed. If you prefer to have one order number for a batch of items, it would then be more helpful if each item was given a number, for example: order number 123, item 5.

4. Please indicate on the order what you anticipate the material to cost. I appreciate that in many cases, you may not have that data, but it is useful for a supplier to have. If you do not put an estimate on the order, we can and will supply material at any cost, since you haven't indicated a frame-work within which we can move. If you quote for example \$25 as an estimate, most suppliers will come back to you and say "The book which you have requested is actually \$50. Do you still want it?" It really is useless coming back to the supplier once you have received the material to complain that it is too expensive for you, if you haven't indicated what "expensive" means in terms of your library. You can always also indicate to your supplier that you must be advised if the price of an item is a certain percentage (and you can fix the percentage) above your estimated price. That way, even if you don't know the price exactly, you can be fairly sure you will be alerted to a high priced item.

5. Last but certainly not least, please ensure that your invoices are paid in reasonable time. Even large suppliers these days are feeling the pinch and in most cases, by the time you have received the material, we will have pre-paid the publisher and will be even more out of pocket! This is even more essential when we are talking about periodical invoices. Most periodical publishers do not extend credit even to large suppliers, but expect payment within a very short time after the receipt of the order. As a consequence, large sums of money are sent out on the library's behalf and if there is a substantial delay in the payment of invoices, the supplier can be hit quite hard.

I hope that I have not taken up too much of your time with material which was either too basic or too boring. Again, many thanks for allowing me to participate in your conference, albeit by proxy and I look forward to seeing you all, I hope, when you come to Melbourne for the next ANZTLA conference.

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ST BARNABAS' THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE

A GUIDE TO THE LIBRARY

The library was founded in 1965. At that time it largely consisted of the holdings of the former Adelaide Diocesan Library. Since that time, it has grown through bequests, donations and purchases into a collection of approximately 18,000 books and periodicals. The library currently receives 67 different periodicals and church newspapers.

The library exists primarily to meet the information needs of students studying at St Barnabas' College. However, the resources of the library are available to the students of other Adelaide Theological Colleges as well as to Anglican clergy and interested lay people. A registration fee of \$5 is required of people who do not attend St Barnabas' College.

The Collection

The collection is a fairly specialised one, covering mainly religion and theology. Its strengths are in theology and Biblical studies, early Church history and spirituality. The library also has good collections in the areas of Christian ethics, pastoral theology and social theology. As the main Anglican library in South Australia, the library specialises in Anglican theology, liturgy and worship, and Anglican Church history.