Tenth Annual Reader’s Choice Awards

... Reported by George Machovec, Managing Editor, The Charleston Advisor <george@coalliance.org>

The Charleston Advisor is now publishing in its twelfth year and for the tenth consecutive year the journal is sponsoring a series of awards for the best and worst electronic services and databases of interest to libraries. The awards are not necessarily limited to products covered by TCA, but TCA reviews (if available) were consulted in the final consideration. These awards are published on an annual basis. Members of the editorial board made the final selections in a September 2010 conference call.

Awards are given in a group of standard categories; special one-time kudos are periodically given and labeled below as a “Special One Time” award.

Best New Product
Govistics – The Center for Governmental Research (CGR) has a site to track tax dollars and government expenditures which are in every nook and cranny of the Internet. This tool pulls together this information for quickly assessing government spending by key categories including cool just-in-time graphing tools. http://www.govistics.com/

Best New End-User Product
iPad – Apple keeps turning out winning products which are easy to use and changing the way users access information, play games and use the Internet. Most magazine apps are beautiful, the e-book reader is elegant and this tablet device is changing the way we live. http://www.apple.com

Most Improved Product
Opposing Viewpoints in Context – Gale Cengage has come up not only with a new name for what was the Opposing Viewpoints Resource Center, but have improved it as a learning tool. The editorial content is great for the undergraduate rhetoric paper but where the older version required much explanation — both of its value and method — Opposing Viewpoints in Context simplifies finding both textual and media information on important controversial topics. http://www.gale.cengage.com/InContext/viewpoints.htm

Best Interface
Summon and EBSCO Discovery Service – Last year a special award was given to these two products as “Ones to Watch.” Serials Solution’s Summon and the EBSCO Discovery Service have not disappointed and both services are garnering substantial library acceptance as a single point of entry to take users into a library’s broad suite of licensed digital content. Which is best? It depends on who you ask and your specific situation. The November 2010 Charleston Conference (http://www.katina.info/conference) will offer a showdown between these two vendors so you can decide. http://www.serialssolutions.com/summon/ and http://www.ebscohost.com/discovery/default.php?id=2

Best Content
iPoll Databank – This service is produced by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Archives and pulls together polling questions and answers from 1935 to the present. Offering data from more than 150 polling

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**Best Customer Support**

The H.W. Wilson Company – is to be lauded for being responsive and having excellent support staff that provide detailed and correct answers. This is an important corporate value that is often lost in times of budgetary cutbacks. [http://www.hwwilson.com/](http://www.hwwilson.com/)

**Best Effort**

HathiTrust – is widely respected for bringing preservation assurance and enhanced functionality to books digitized by Google Books at the University of Michigan and other Committee on Institutional Cooperation (CIC) libraries plus the University of California. This repository is a national treasure. It serves as Google Book Project’s memory. [http://www.hathitrust.org/](http://www.hathitrust.org/)

**Vaporware Awards**

JSTOR – We all love JSTOR but their recent rollout of a new platform which had to be quickly pulled back was a quick vaporization. Also, their Current Scholarship Program, although excellent in concept, is muddying the waters for how JSTOR was originally envisioned. No longer does the “moving wall” for older materials simply apply. [http://www.jstor.org/](http://www.jstor.org/)

**Lemon Award**

Predatory Open Access Publishers – In our twelve years of publishing, the worst rankings ever given to a suite of publishers has been given to about 10 vanity open access publishers. The author of the review, Jeffrey Beall, noted “These publishers are predatory because their mission is not to promote, preserve, and make available scholarship; instead, their mission is to exploit the author-pays, Open-Access model for their own profit. They work by spamming scholarly e-mail lists, with calls for papers and invitations to serve on nominal editorial boards.” Check-out these “bad boys” in our review of Springer now offers resource sharing options for their e-books where libraries may share e-book content. This is an important step by a major STM publisher. More e-book publishers and aggregators need to develop solutions. [http://springerlink.metapress.com/default.aspx](http://springerlink.metapress.com/default.aspx)

**Best Contract Options**

Springer e-book collection – Springer now offers resource sharing options for their e-books where libraries may share e-book content. This is an important step by a major STM publisher. More e-book publishers and aggregators need to develop solutions. [http://springerlink.metapress.com/default.aspx](http://springerlink.metapress.com/default.aspx)
TCR Soundoff! — Is There Any Reward for Customer Loyalty?

Towards a More Sustainable Model for Library/Vendor Relationships

... Reported by Tim Bucknall, Asst. Dean of University Libraries, University of North Carolina at Greensboro and Founder and Convener – Carolina Consortium <bucknall@uncg.edu>

Most libraries have been long term customers of the publishers and vendors with whom they do business. In many cases these relationships have lasted for decades, or even longer. But these long-term library commitments aren’t always adequately recognized and rewarded by companies, especially given the current fiscal climate.

In negotiating deals for the Carolina Consortium (which consists of over 130 academic libraries), I am surprised and perturbed by the frequency of one-sided vendor offers that provide significant discounts ONLY to brand new subscribers and not to existing accounts, a tactic which would seemingly encourage “loyal” subscribers to cancel so that they could renew later at the lower price.

I understand that companies want to grow their business and increase their revenues, but have they given much thought to the kind of poor PR that strategy generates? It is hardly surprising that schools who have subscribed to a product for many, many years would feel it is unfair that they are specifically excluded from any new discount offer made to a consortium.

In fact, it would probably seem logical to most people that loyal customers (who have generated years and years of profits and revenues for a company) might actually be more entitled to discounts than schools that have yet to pay a dime. And often it is these long-standing customers who could best promote the product to the other schools in a consortium, sharing the experience and knowledge they have gained from years of subscribing. But the vendors undercut this possibility when they refuse to extend their discounts to these early adopters.

Perhaps publishers and vendors feel that such an offer might offend existing customers, but are relying on the fact that libraries do not have mechanisms in place to compare prices with one another and thus will be unaware of the disparities. That would have been a fair assumption a decade ago, but it is becoming less true all the time as libraries become more and more cooperative in reaction to reduced budgets and the changing information landscape. And the assumption that schools don’t compare prices is nowhere less true than in a consortium setting, where all pricing is typically made available to the entire membership. Indeed, for most consortiums that is not only standard operating procedure, it is the only way they do business. I would certainly never consider a consortium offer that forbade me from sharing the discount pricing with existing customers, whether they could benefit from it directly or not.

Perhaps publishers and vendors feel that their experience justifies rewarding new customers over existing ones. In years past, most libraries would renew their existing subscriptions almost without question. In that environment, companies have little incentive to enhance customer loyalty. But today’s tight budgets, dynamic curricula, and widespread availability of usage stats (almost unknown in the print serials era!), have librarians questioning and evaluating nearly every single renewal. It is no longer a wise choice for a publisher or vendor to assume ongoing customer loyalty.

Similarly, a system of sales quotas based largely on new revenue streams no longer fits the academic library world. Vendors and publishers often tie sales quotas to the bonuses or salaries of their sales force — and those quotas tend to emphasize new sales over customer retention. Does that still make sense? If “a penny saved is a penny earned,” then staving off a cancellation produces the same effect on the bottom line as a new sale.

In 2009/10, my own institution was forced to cut $215,000 worth of database subscriptions, and $196,000 in journal subscriptions. We’re likely to cut again this year. And again next year. To be blunt, it seems to me that companies should worry more about preserving our current subscriptions, and should worry less about capturing new money. Don’t incentivize your sales force to convince us to buy new products with new money we don’t have; instead, give us a reason to stand by your company’s products, and cancel someone else’s products instead. Which brings us back to the concept of customer loyalty. A library that feels valued by a company is more likely to stick by its products when times are tough. On the other hand, a library that feels taken for granted will feel little sense of loyalty when making cancellation decisions.

In my own state of North Carolina, the legislature is abandoning the long-held policy of calculating the UNC system’s funding increases based on enrollment increases. The new formula will instead be based on student retention and graduation rates. Perhaps vendors and publishers could consider following suit, and focus on retaining and rewarding customers, rather than on doggedly pursuing the rapidly evaporating prospect of new accounts.

Ed Note: Care to reply? TCR welcomes alternative viewpoints and comments from the publishing and vendor community. Feel free to send your reply to any TCR Editorial Board member.
By the Numbers

2 million... The online version of the Oxford English Dictionary gets 2 million subscriber hits a month; the 126-year-old printed version is rumored to have seen its last edition as more users are flocking to the $295-a-year online subscription. For more information, visit http://www.oup.com/uk/pressreleases/OEDdictionarystatement/.

42... The average age of a book buyer is 42 according to the 2009 U.S. Book Consumer Demographics and Buying Behaviors Annual Report from Bowker. This and other industry highlights can be accessed through http://www.bookbusinessmag.com/article/new-industry-report-released-consumer-book-buying-behaviors/1.

3 million... A recent study by Attributor, a company that develops anti-piracy software, estimates that daily up to 3 million people worldwide are seeking pirated e-books. Read more about their findings here http://attributor.com/blog/a-first-look-at-demand-for-pirated-e-books-across-the-web/.

6%... According to a report from Library Journal and School Library Journal, “The Growing Importance of Ebooks in U.S. Library Collection,” academic libraries that do not offer e-books to their patrons are only at 6% of the 435 respondents. In contrast, of the 820 school libraries responding, 67% did not offer e-books. Read the highlights of this survey at http://www.libraryjournal.com/lj/home/887020-264/ebook_summit_kicks_off_with.html.csp.

New Entrepreneurial Opportunity?

... thanks to Bob Holley <aa3805@wayne.edu> for the following suggestion

Accept donations of print journals that libraries are discarding because they have digital copies. Knowing that acquiring electronic versions of articles can be expensive even to the author, store the journals inexpensively. Offer the journals or articles for sale individually at prices lower than the digital copies. Would anyone be interested?

Check out the full article on the ATG NewsChannel at http://against-the-grain.com and be sure to add your comments! Thanks....

Short Takes

The Consortium Directory Online (CDO) a project formed by The Consortium Directory's partnership with Ringgold, Inc. will serve as the “most comprehensive directory of the library consortium market available [and] will include over 600 library consortia in 100 countries.” The new CDO’s highlights: users can search by name, region or country and can identify consortia members’ contact information, membership type and subject specialty. Included in the downloaded Excel or PDF results are publishers licensed, the structure of the consortium, and licensing criteria. For more information or for subscription inquiries, contact <directory@frontlinegms.com>.