The Charleston Survey: Credit Card Purchasing

The Charleston Group recently surveyed a group of academic, public, and special librarians about their use of credit cards in purchasing books and journals for their libraries. We were overwhelmed with the number of responses which we received in a short period of time. These responses came from all across the U.S. as well as the U.K., New Zealand, and Australia.

Forty-eight out of 68 respondents—nearly 71%—have, or are in the process of getting institutional credit cards and are using them to make purchases from online bookstores. Another seven of the respondents use personal credit cards and are reimbursed by their libraries. A handful of libraries that do not have institutional credit cards plan to use our survey results as ammunition to get cards. It is by far the vast minority of libraries that do not use credit cards and have no interest in getting one.

The overwhelming use is for rush orders, orders for out of print materials from small publishers or organizations, or for prepaid orders. Libraries also use credit cards with foreign suppliers for speed of delivery and to simplify foreign exchange. Many of the libraries have just started using cards in the last year. Credit limits are between $500 and $10,000. In some cases, the use of cards has been mandated by the state, including Maryland and Virginia. “Our Comptroller’s Office wants us to charge all invoices that allow credit cards to be used,” said one librarian. And, this sentiment was echoed by at least seven other institutions.

The advantages cited were: speed of delivery, saves on cutting many separate checks, reduces paperwork, increases the likelihood of delivery since payment is in advance, eliminates or reduces the need to deal with petty cash, and eliminates some deposit accounts (e.g. GPO). Libraries are using credit cards as a step into the “electronic money” environment and are realizing the benefits of smoother Internet shopping.

The online bookstore of choice was Amazon.com, but other bookstores named were Powell’s Books and Barnes & Noble. Also mentioned were traditional vendors like Baker & Taylor, Book House, Yankee Book Peddler, and Blackwell’s.

Key Messages for Libraries

The Benton Foundation conducted six focus groups earlier this year to identify areas where libraries and their key publics may be disconnected. The new report, Libraries in the Balance (information is available at www.benton.org), offers these recommendations to libraries to secure their future:

1. Portray libraries as high touch and high tech, and in that order.
2. Root all discussions of technology in books and reading.
3. Teach the public that the librarian is an information navigator.
4. Emphasize that the library you trust can help you make the transition to technology.
5. Recognize the powerful connections Americans make between libraries and effective parenting.
Buyers Speak at ALA

With budgets up in all types of libraries, buyers at ALA were more vocal in their needs. Here are some comments which we heard.

$ Many universities and technical and community colleges are being pushed to provide more materials for distance learners.

$ Librarians are calling for full text of journal articles going farther back in time. Faculty bemoan the fact that citations to articles are only in recent periodicals.

$ Consortial buying is the rage. OhioLINK's plan to implement a book approval plan for its member libraries was under heated discussion in more than one session at ALA. Bids have been received for this project, and three vendors have been selected to make presentations: Academic Book Center, Blackwell's, and Yankee Book Peddler. The RFP is available at http://gold.ohiolink.edu/consortia under OhioLINK RFP for Statewide Approval Plan. A contract will be signed in late summer with implementation beginning in January, 1999. Participation by consortial members is voluntary.

$ "It doesn't matter what we librarians prefer. Our user base is demanding electronic products because people would rather use electronic resources."

$ Selection of electronic, print, and serials resources has been consolidated under one organizational umbrella. The umbrella is big and usually includes the head of reference, the systems librarian, the acquisition librarian, and the collection development librarian, among others.

$ One public librarian's reaction to telephone calls, "I don't mind cold calls. It is better to hear about something than to not hear at all."

Amazon Means Books

Only three years after making its first sale, online bookseller Amazon.com has become the third biggest bookseller in the country. Founder Jeff Bezos says, "To be nine times bigger [on the Web] than your competitor, you actually only have to be 10% better."

A principal reason for Amazon's success has been advertising, and the company at one point was spending $36 in marketing for every $100 in sales. Book publisher Peter Osnos explains, "Amazon brilliantly, at great expense, has branded. When people think of ordering a book online, they think of Amazon. It's like Xerox. It's entered the language." Washington Post, July 9, 1998.


ALA Hot Topics

The American Library Association's annual meeting in Washington D.C. the last weekend in June drew a record crowd of 24,798, of which 11,799 were paid registrants, 6,632 were exhibitors, and 4,107 attended the exhibits only. The following are some of the hot topics discussed by librarians at the meeting.

$ The exhibits were hot. Influential purchasers responsible for title selection visited in droves ready to buy books, electronic products, and integrated systems. Budgets are up, fundraising and grants are enhancing buying capabilities, and new and remodeled buildings are supported by one-time funds for collections and equipment.

$ Outsourcing was a hot topic from specific services to the whole operation of libraries. More technical services librarians are being assigned to public services. Small publishers are outsourcing more of their activities.

$ There is a need for standardization in how electronic information is displayed and delivered as well as in documentation for its use. "Help" utilities are getting better in response to this need.

$ Both public and academic libraries are strengthening their educational programs for end users in the use of technologies.

$ Public library hot topics included outsourcing, Internet filtering, digitizing libraries, fundraising, and services to the "Millennium Generation" of children under 18.

$ Libraries are grappling with the balance of electronic and print resources. Electronic purchase decisions are usually group decisions. The need for critical evaluation of electronic resources is becoming widely recognized.

$ Metadata is the new buzzword to name cataloging for electronic products. Basically, metadata are "data about data" or data elements used to describe or represent electronic resources.

A Public Library's Home Page

More public libraries are expanding their home pages to add links to other resources. The Southfield Public Library, a medium-sized library in Michigan, has selected links that broaden, enrich, and complement the library's print and audio visual collections. They say sites are evaluated according to their credibility, quality, and usefulness in order to support the needs and interests of the library's patrons and staff. Further, selections of linked Web sites are based on reviews and recommendations in sources such as Internet World, Online, Library Journal, and School Library Journal.

Factors considered in evaluating sites to be selected include ease of access, stability of the site, if fees are required, and if the site is consistently available. The design must be well organized, easy to use, uncluttered, with clear instructions, and with graphics that enhance the content. The content must be appropriate, authoritative, documented, accurate, verifiable, timely, and updated regularly. Preference is given to educational, governmental, and non-profit organizational sites.

Linked sites will be reviewed periodically and will be removed if they become out-of-date or if the content is no longer central to the library's criteria. The home page should not grow beyond the number of links which can be maintained in a timely manner.
ICOLC Statement on Selection and Purchase of Electronic Materials

The International Coalition of Library Consortia (ICOLC) has issued a statement recently on the current perspective and preferred practices for the selection and purchase of electronic information. The full statement can be found at http://www.library.yale.statement.html. Below are the talking points in the statement:

1. Publishers should be willing to deal with consortia.
2. Publishers should state all terms in the contract and have all terms negotiable.
3. Consortia should be able to share pricing and terms with each other.
4. Libraries should not be asked to pay for undelivered features.
5. There should be no high premiums for Beta versions.
6. Libraries should not pay all R & D costs—these should be shared with shareholders.
7. Libraries would like to buy electronic without the paper and at a cost lower than the cost of a print subscription.
8. Publishers should have multiple, flexible pricing models.
9. Bundling print and electronic products should not be the sole option.
10. Electronic files should be available simultaneously or before paper.
11. Libraries want perpetual access to content, transferable to different delivery options.
12. Libraries should be able to archive (e.g., make back-up copies).
13. Publishers should offer open local systems, portable to major platforms and compliant with certain standards.
14. Publishers should offer a variety of formats: REAL PDF, SGML, HTML, etc.
15. Publishers’ offerings should be able to be integrated with other systems.
16. Given that e-information provides new capabilities and value-added features, publishers should not place any undue restrictions or burdens on use.
17. Publishers should permit fair use under the laws of the country of origin and permit paper and electronic academic inter-library loan.
18. Libraries should not be liable for content misuse if the library did not "intentionally assist in or encourage such breach to continue after having received notice."
19. Electronic files should be open to walk-in users.
20. Usage data should be shareable within the consortium.
21. The provider should gather and share usage data with the consortium.
22. Anonymity and confidentiality of individual users should be maintained.
23. Publishers should adhere to library principles on privacy.
24. Publishers should be flexible as to authentication of users.

By The Numbers
- One large public library, the Cuyahoga County Public Library near Cleveland, is projecting that non-print and electronic acquisitions will increase from 33% in 1996 to 45% of their total acquisitions annually in 2000.
- In a survey of 50 publishers, EBSCO found that 78% have tied online journal prices to the print subscription rate, while 22% offer the online version for standalone pricing. EBSCO lists 2,700 electronic journals as of June 1998, up from 550 in February of 1997.
- Most college and university libraries get 3% or less of the institutional budget. The Association of College and University Libraries' (ACRL) standard stipulates that the library's annual authorized expenditures should be at least 6% of the total institutional expenditure for educational and general purposes.
- The HighWire Press at Stanford University reports that 100 journals are now available electronically. HighWire adds one new journal and roughly 30,000 new pages of content weekly. Vicky Reich, Assistant Director and Digital Librarian, Stanford University.

CLIR Report Explores Libraries’ Technology Needs

The Council on Library Resources (CLIR) has recently published a report that explores how library systems vendors are meeting the needs of libraries in the emerging digital environment. CLIR commissioned the study in response to concerns expressed by librarians about technology options available to them as they integrate local collections and electronic information resources available on the Web. The report, Library Systems: Current Developments and Future Directions, is by Leigh Watson Healy and available from CLIR, 1755 Massachusetts Ave., NW, Suite 500, Washington D.C., 20036, for $25. http://www.clir.org. 202-939-4750.

The author interviewed library directors and staff of college, research, and public libraries to explore their plans for technology. She interviewed the presidents or senior executives of 12 vendors that have recently introduced client server-based library systems. Vendor profiles are given with the strategic goals of each company and the primary characteristics of the system that they are marketing.

The report provides an overview of the state-of-the-art for those who are concerned with the development of digital libraries and the role of library technology providers in libraries today. This report will be useful to any company that develops and supplies technology to libraries and to publishers and vendors that interface with libraries and their systems. It offers insight into issues that concern libraries as they integrate digital libraries with traditional library services.

The biggest worry of librarians is how to get cooperation from multiple vendors and multiple systems both within the institution and outside it. Databases and systems compliant with standards are needed. In essence, librarians want content and technical providers to develop open systems that can talk with each other. The report will be reviewed in depth at a preconference to the Charleston Conference on November 4, 1998. Please see page one and the enclosed brochure.
Libraries Need Electronic Product Trials

Would you buy a car that you hadn’t driven? How about a boat that you hadn’t seen? Or a house that you hadn’t inspected?

If all of your answers to these questions are no, then you are like librarians who are asked to make purchasing decisions on databases, many of which cost comparatively as much money as these consumer products.

So, why is it that many publishers are so reluctant to allow electronic product trials in a way that libraries and their end users can really evaluate them for purchase? Many libraries place databases which they are considering for purchase on their home pages in order to get maximum input from patrons, staff, and end users. Frequently, a form for specific reactions is included so that the library can evaluate the purchase from many perspectives. Why not allow this if you are trying to sell a product?

Here are just some “must-dos” if you want to please your library market and make a sale.

1. IP addresses are preferred to passwords—especially passwords that change every week. Looking for a password blocks access to your product.

2. Allow a trial period of at least one month. People get busy. They don’t know that you have the best product on the market.

3. Don’t badger the library to make a decision before it is ready. The “car sales” approach does not work in libraries.

4. Ask for criticisms of the product, write them down, and act on them. And, don’t argue with the library’s criticisms; try to understand them. It could be that what one person is saying is being said by others.

The library market is buying but there is a lot to buy!

Katina Strauch, Head of Collection Development, College of Charleston

How Librarians Buy

According to a recent survey of 5300 librarians by Karen Schmidt at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, librarians named their three most popular sources of marketing information about materials as follows:

1. Publisher’s information received in the mail.
3. Library vendor information.

Librarians have strong negative feelings about telemarketing, but like fliers and other informational pieces in the mail. In general, the larger the library, the more likely the acquisition decision will be made by subject specialists or acquisitions librarians. In libraries with smaller budgets, (up to $100,000 for books and other materials), the director of the library is more likely to become involved. Directors in all sizes of libraries are involved in the acquisition of electronic products. Schmidt’s results will be featured in the preconference noted on page one and in the enclosed brochure.

Short Takes

In a survey of the membership of the ACRL, five critical issues emerged. In order of priority, they are: providing information in multiple formats; adjusting to technology; managing tight budgets; staying relevant; and maintaining traditional print services.

Ninety-four percent of trade magazine editors prefer to receive press releases by mail rather than by fax or e-mail. The most common faults of press releases according to the editors are being too promotional, lacking adequate graphics, lacking technical content, and too many technical inaccuracies. Thomas Rankin Associates in Bottom Line Business, July 1998, pg. 15.

Elsevier Science, the largest publisher of scholarly scientific journals, will now allow libraries to make paper copies of requested articles appearing in electronic journals and share them with scholars at their institutions. The new policy still prohibits libraries from sharing the electronic version of the article. EduPage, July 2, 1998.

Libraries on the Move


Libraries are digitizing parts of their collections and partnering with publishers to market the product for potential profits. Three current projects include Cornell University’s Rare Books Online series from Primary Source Media, the University of Virginia’s Electronic Archive of Early American Fiction with Chadwyck-Healey, and the University of Cincinnati’s George Catlin: The Printed Works produced with the University’s Digital Press.

The David and Lucile Packard Foundation has given the Library of Congress $10 million to begin development of a state-of-the-art National Audio-Visual Conservation Center for preservation, storage, and access needs. The Library’s present research collections of film, television, radio, and recorded sound items are the largest and most comprehensive in the world.

Where Books Are Purchased

By far the largest number of books purchased by public libraries are acquired through a wholesaler or vendor. According to a survey conducted by Library Journal of 2000 public libraries (LJ, February 15, 1998, pg. 106-110), only the very smallest, serving under 10,000 people, tend to buy from local bookstores. In the range of service to 10,000-499,999 people served, orders are sent to wholesalers/jobbers 83-85% of the time, direct to publishers 7-10% of the time, and to small press distributors 4-5%.

The very largest libraries, serving populations over 500,000, tend to have a somewhat different pattern. They order 74% of their materials through wholesalers or jobbers while placing 14% of their orders direct to publishers. Bookstores are used only 3% of the time, and online stores represent 2% of the orders.

Future Issues Will Feature:

- How e-journals are purchased
- Libraries buying online
- Trends in library technology
- The new consortial discounts