

### The Relationship

The public library and the library materials vendor have to develop a relationship that fosters good communication, mutual interest in the well-being of both entities, understanding of what benefits both sides of the transactions, knowing the constraints each side may be laboring under, trust, flexibility to handle events that are not perfect, unforeseen, or uncontrollable, and a good feeling that mutual goals are achieved. While studying the websites of the vendors I reviewed and listening to librarians talk about their vendors, goals in my decision to supply Middleburg Public Library were to choose a company that by its size and past performance could deliver on its promises, would provide services that would save me time that I need with patrons and staff, and would sell me products that were attractive, long-lasting, and in a variety of formats.

From working in school libraries for thirty years, I learned that the relationship with the vendor representative is the key to discounts, better customer service, expedited delivery, and news of materials that matched my school library profile. When I needed multiple copies for book clubs or to ease the reserve list of popular titles, the vendor representative was there for advice to help me make decisions. When book budgets were suddenly frozen, which happened quite a lot here in Oregon, the vendor representative needed flexibility to be open to future purchases and not write us off as an account not worthy of time and effort. Although I had no remarkable budget to make our library very lucrative to a vendor representative, I still expected fast, courteous service and a wide variety and excellent quality of library materials from which to choose.

## The Vendors

The first vendor I investigated was Blackwell Book Services found at <http://www.blackwell.com/> Shipping approximately 3 million books a year to libraries worldwide for over 126 years makes an impressive history. They serve over 15,000 academic, research, and special libraries in 120 countries. I could not find a number for the size of their available database of titles. On the home page, I was able to learn about a new service, *Title List on Demand*, and titles through the Special Offers link. As with almost all the vendors I examined, Blackwell has a web-based collection manager that aids in online selection of materials, ordering, and reporting of print and electronic materials. There is also a Series Manager that manages standing orders, billing history, claims, and monitors order activity. Besides having many partners in business, Blackwell offers many services. There are approval plans, firm orders, new title announcements, and one of the partners (Library Dynamics) helps with collection analysis services. Technical services extend to enrichment features such as adding tables of contents to the records, shelf-ready services for processing materials, and cataloging activities. They have been cataloging materials for twenty years. There are many specialized book lists to aid in selection. Recommended titles, top sellers, area studies, vocational and community titles are offered. Blackwell makes it easy to order electronically, by telephone, fax, or email and will bid for large projects. They will set up automatic deposit accounts to aid in discounting materials that earn prime plus 3% on the balance. Out of print services are the most detailed of the vendors I examined. The search will continue for one year, the volume secured will be in very good or better condition, and cost less than \$75.00 or the library will be contacted for a decision.

An Opening Day Collection is available with a project manager appointed and a schedule worked out with the new library. An analysis is conducted with the library to determine the character of patrons' needs. Materials selection can be guided by Blackwell, cataloging can be modified if necessary from full MARC records, and the physical processing can be customized. Their eBook inventory comes from 220 publishers and is powered by their partner *ebrary*. I could not find information about the speed of their delivery. Blackwell is a well-established company with their ordering, selection, evaluation, technical, and accounting services in fine order. From the look and feel of the website, an examination of the book lists, and the detail of the out-of-print services, this company will match the needs of an academic or specialized library better than with a public library. I did not feel the energy of the company in supporting the reading and literacy needs of a public library community.

Midwest Library Service found at <http://www.midwest.com> has a 40 year history and a scope of 20,000 publishers in the U.S., U.K., and Canada. They are involved in a philanthropic endeavor to help Dillard University in New Orleans replace their library books from the damage of Hurricane Katrina. I was interested in learning about them because our small university library has a good relationship with Midwest and I was curious to see what they offer. Midwest offers an out-of-print search service for searches up to ten weeks. There is a University Press Approval Plan, with competitive discounts, build on the library's profile. Their collection development plan provides lists from *Choice* for Outstanding Academic Titles for the last 5 years. Midwest has a plan for continuations and standing orders. They have 45 years of experience in book processing and offer shelf-ready options for processing and PromptCAT service for copy cataloging. Midwest also offers a paperback reinforcement service for the pre-binding of paperbacks. They use brief

MaRC records while ordering but offer full records upon arrival of items placed in the collection. Midwest also offers an online service called *InterACQ* that allows online access for collection and ordering. UPS and USPS are their delivery carriers and shipments are made every week, however, I was not able to discern the delivery speed beyond that. I emailed the company for information on an Opening Day service but did not receive a reply. As with Blackwell Book Services, Midwest Library Service is not a great choice for a public library. There was no discussion about leasing for popular titles, and no discussion of reading and literacy. There was also no discussion about the community profile or development of a collection to match users' needs. I expected this when I investigated them but, as stated earlier, was curious about them.

Baker and Taylor (<http://www.btol.com/>) has a long history as a bindery from 1828, 1912 when they started being a book distributor, 1958 when they were bought by Parents' magazine, to the present owners Castle Harlan Partners IV, L.P. who also own Marie Callendar's and Tru Temper lawn tools. Yankee Book Peddler (YBP) became a division in 1999, specializing in academic libraries. B&T's legendary cats, Baker and Taylor, make this large company seem personal and homey. Their history is outlined on the website and an art contest is still held each year for young artists. The Red Cygnet Young Authors' Writing Contest for writers 12 and under is to encourage stories about Baker and Taylor, the Scottish Fold cats. The company is helping rebuild the Alvar Street branch of the New Orleans Public Library. When investigating the Baker and Taylor Company, I was able to immediately scope to the Public Library information. With 4.7 million titles in their database, Baker and Taylor has an online subscription tool called *Title Source 3* for ordering. There is a free ordering service called *B&T Link Online*. Additional services include B&T MaRC for downloadable records and customization, continuation and stand-

ing order services, and selection lists. The travel series list is impressive for libraries whose users demand up-to-date travel guides.

Beyond the scope of this comparison review are the audiovisual services which are extensive. Their attention to DVD and audio music titles is remarkable and in step with consumer desire for commercial products. They have prepared an “A” list of 800 popular CDs to form a base collection of audio CDs. There are a *CD Hotlist* published and a *Bestselling Imported Music* list.

There is attention paid to Adult Large-Print selections and the children and teen titles are handled under the CATS acronym plan. The CATS plan can be scoped to watch for newly-released titles of particular authors, illustrators, and series. Also in collection development for children and young adults is the *First Look* program of forthcoming titles and e-lists specifically published to aid in summer reading with suggested reading lists, all complete with review source noted. Auto shipment plans, cataloging and processing, notification programs, selection lists, and continuation services can be set up to help the public library make selections to match their community needs.

For building the adult collection, customized library services are available as well. B&T has 40 years of experience in supporting Opening Day activities. They help develop a timeline with the library and establish a Project Manager and a team of other professionals. Offering customized cataloging services through their partner TLC (The Library Corporation), the company also offers customized processing from a “just spine labels” option to “shelf-ready” products.

B&T’s Information Services are many and varied. They offer a survey service called *BiblioStat* which is web-based, the *Content Café 2* to augment the item record with attention-getting user services such as book jackets, reviews, and author bios in the OPAC, and *Real Read*, the ability

to actually read portions of the book before buying it. B&T also states that they offer more full cataloging information for more titles than any other distributor. The support for Spanish language titles is astounding. Besides an annotated catalog, magazine, email newsletter of forthcoming titles, and searching tips for titles in Spanish, they support *America Reads Spanish* as a partner to increase the use and support for materials in Spanish for American readers. B&T's leasing program for CATS (children and teens) is a new service to temporarily increase the number of CAT titles in a collection. There is also a DVD leasing program and many newsletters to alert libraries of forthcoming titles and on-sale dates. Religious and inspirational titles are addressed in the Spirit Book leasing plan.

I have used Baker and Taylor for many years and found them easy to order with, the catalog records easy to download, and returns were managed well. The title selection was rich and varied with few backorders. The processing was high quality and nicely-executed, except sometimes the barcode was placed on the front covering some title letters with hilarious results. How much more simple it is now that selection, ordering, and cataloging and processing customization is online. Without current data (I haven't worked with them for four years) on delivery speed, backorders, and online software interface, it is difficult to be certain that the promises made are kept. However, the services offered on face value would be supportive of a public library that is opening soon with many tasks to accomplish. B&T would offer the deep experience and inventory in audio-visual materials when the time came to work in that area. I do believe they "get" the relationship with the community that a library manager must keep central to the library program.

The Ingram Book Group, merged with the Coutts Information Service in 2000, has a history back to the 1930s and 40s. It is the largest wholesale distributor in the United States. They have 1,350,000 titles ready for immediate delivery. They also have the highest fill rate in the industry. Their Windows-based online ordering system is called *flashback4*. They take 2-7 days to turn around on order processing. There is no service charge on net titles and there is a full standard discount on single library editions. For services, Ingram uses *Electronic Data Exchange* to interface with the major automation systems found in libraries. They have sixteen standing order programs with lots of lists to use for selection help. The popular youth book list looks very interesting. Using a library profile, continuations are managed. There is a free ABC Program (Advanced Buyer's Checklist) for customizing pre-publication titles. Ingram offers the services of *MyLibrary* offering over 75,000 eBook titles and adding 1,000 every month. This program requires no downloading with access in real time. Three patrons may view a single source at a time with no fees or checkout periods. MARC records are available for eBooks and they feature customized text size to make reading more comfortable for patrons. The popular "For Dummies" series is available.

Ingram shows support for titles for the African-American community with specialized catalogs and newsletters. The Opening Day service comes complete with MLS-trained librarians and 100 different processing options. Signature services feature customized collection development selection lists and customized labeling for branch libraries and special collections. Cataloging is full level MARC records through a proprietary cataloging database, *BookMarc*. There are 3-10 business day turnarounds for customizing processing of books. Books with Mylar or Kapco book

jackets ship out in 2 days. One of Ingram's partners, Hackman, does the pre-binding of paperbacks that are offered to libraries.

I interviewed the local public library director and she is thrilled with Ingram. The small community libraries here and the independent booksellers use Ingram as well. Forming an informal loose alliance, they wangled free shipping, and a 40% discount. They experience speedy delivery which is quite a feat in this isolated area in Oregon. Ordering from Ingram and paying them are easy processes. The public library staff catalogs and processes their own books. They also do their own copy-cataloging. I was a bit surprised by this. In my major paper in the Public Library class, I did a study of this library and found that this small staff of five needs to spend more time with patron interactions than squirreled in the back, stamping books and performing other processing activities. The librarian insisted that the staff learns the collection better by cataloging and processing by hand. This library staff is threatened by a movement to form a library district when technical processes will likely be centralized to some degree. The library director was very pleased with the service she was getting from Ingram. It is hard to not be influenced by this information. The librarians in this region are not professionally trained so if they report satisfaction with a vendor, the company must be very supportive and accommodating.

I investigated Book Wholesalers, Inc. (BWI) found at <http://bwibooks.com/>

and the website reads "Public Library Specialists with special emphasis on child and young adult services." They are a division of the Follett Library Resources Company. The first service outlined was the Opening Day Project which supplies a team and offers free storage for their collection until opening. Under Customer Service, purchase order acknowledgments are emailed,

faxed or online with their ordering software *Title Tales*. This software also helps manage reports and cancellation notices. Prebound books are made with Follett Bound Platinum products that are guaranteed for life.

Collection development consists of customizable lists, standing order plans, core bibliographies, preview plans, and award and “best books” plans. Ordering is accomplished through *Title Tales* made possible by Software System Interface featuring electronic ordering, ftp and modem data transfers, and email, telephone and fax ordering. Cataloging is managed by MLS-trained librarians and records are customized to fit the library’s specifications. Processing is completely customizable.

Two times a month, *eNews*, is mailed to customers of BWI to alert customers of new releases. Sales for BWI was 2 billion in 2007 and they employ 10,000 associates in the United States and Canada. I was not impressed with the website and the lack of detail presented about all the workflow of collection development. I got no sense of a partnership and felt that the website was not professionally-presented for the size of the company. I got no sense that the company cared about literacy and that the services were not outlined in enough detail to encourage me to find out more. There were very few graphics to give me any idea of what the products looked like. There were no resources for librarians or much mention of review sources. The Opening Day service material gave me no confidence that they could handle the job.

The last vendor I investigated was Brodart found at <http://www.books.brodart.com/> In 1939, Arthur Brody invented the plastic book cover and the company was born. McNaughton Books, pioneers in leasing books, became partners. In the Who's Who section, there is a list of partners with familiar names like Sirsi and Reed Elsevier. With sixty years of experience, their delivery is quick and they are dedicated to the "zen" of librarianship. I was taken by that philosophy. They want to free librarians from the technical work of the acquisition workflow to spend more time with patrons. They make a distinction between "shelf ready," the term that other vendors use, to "circulation ready." It indicates a shift in focus to the energy of use and patronage. Brodart claims sales folks will come out in person to get the books on the shelf and ready for Opening Day.

The Opening Day service is quite detailed and based on developing the whole collection, the community, and goals of the collection as a focus. The library profile describes the community, the collection goals, budgets, and target number of the collection. Selection services include leasing for popular fiction crunches and hiring a dedicated staff for *Brodart Espanol*. This team selects titles from sixteen countries. There are extensive lists for "what's new," graphic novels, book lists, and award lists. There are also lists for core collections, standing orders, vendor selection, and movie tie-ins. There is also a collection analysis service. Continuations and standing orders are also services offered by Brodart.

The processing service is divided into four levels of processing that are progressively more inclusive from attaching the book jacket to adding theft detection. Brodart Bound is the company's

re-bound option, changing paperbacks to attractive hardcover books. Like the other vendors, there is an online system for ordering and Brodart's system is BIBZ. They employ Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) to connect with the major ILS systems found in libraries. Cataloging is based on AACR2 rules and the Library of Congress, including MaRC-formatted records and authority control. The standard cost for cataloging is 25 cents per record with customization costing more for services rendered. On the website is a cataloging glossary that is very useful. To aid in selection, TIPS (Title Information Preview Service) produces library profile-driven lists. They list the best review source and, for a fee, these reviews can be delivered in full text.

### Conclusion

Brodart, Baker and Taylor, and Ingram would be my choices for best vendors for the Middleburg Public Library. Blackwell and Midwest would not be used because their focus is on academic collections. They would not support the selection process for popular fiction and titles for children and teens. Their technical processes, delivery of books, and accounting practices would be fine but the basic scope is not on public libraries. I also would not use BWI because of the lack of strength of the website. I got little detail about their services to form a favorable opinion.

While they may have public library titles in their inventory, I got no feeling of passion for connecting young readers and older patrons to literature and learning.

Choosing among Brodart, Baker and Taylor, and Ingram in reality would come down to discounts, fill rate, ease of using the software to select titles, coordinating the MaRC records and the status of an order through my ILS, tracking and paying bills, and delivery speed. Of course, the quality of the product would also play into my decision. I would have to meet the representatives to determine if I could build a good relationship. I had one representative for a reference book

company who called me “darling” and other offensive sexist labels that had been popular in the 50s. I never bought from him and I never had the guts to tell him why. The professional relationship must be based on trust and I must know that the company cares what is going on with my patrons and collection. Going with Baker and Taylor would be easy as I have had good experiences with that company. Working with Ingram, because my colleagues in eastern Oregon use Ingram makes sense, too. That said, I was really impressed with Brodart.

Viewing the websites as an introduction to the companies, Brodart uses language that speaks in the terminology and to the training of a librarian. In the explanations of cataloging services, Brodart takes care to tell you what standard of practice they aspire to with AACR2 and Library of Congress Headings. They talk about authority control and even include a glossary of cataloging terms. In the processing and cataloging sections of the website, the idea that Brodart espouses is to allow other professionals do part of the detail work of the selection process to free you and your staff to do more outreach and work with patrons. A patron will remember that I recommended a new book to them but not that I was in the back room putting spine labels on a new book. Brodart supports multiculturalism by employing a team of selectors to work with sixteen countries to bring foreign language titles to the inventory. Brodart Espanol features Spanish titles in the database as well. There is much language in the Opening Day service narrative and in the discussion of customization about the library profile that describes the library’s community. It is here that the selection of materials needs to reflect the growing and changing needs of Middleburg. With a population “on the grow,” young families will look to the library for entertainment, early learning opportunities, and for vocational support. Knowing the community and having the company in tune with the collection goals is essential to the success of this library. From what I

learned about Brodart from studying the website, their services would be a solid and forward-thinking partner in supporting acquisition activities and collection development processes for Middleburg Public Library.