

# Issues in Vendor/Library Relations — Report on the OhioLINK-YBP Relationship:

## Serendipitous Advantages of Buying Monographs as a Consortium

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by **David Swords** (Director Consortia Market Development, YBP Library Services)

It is becoming common for vendors to grouse about library consortia as buying clubs whose effect will be to put us out of business. And surely, many consortia exist only to improve discounts for their members. On the other hand, we now see that consortia are like cholesterol: some are bad but others are extremely good.

When YBP became the monographs vendor for OhioLINK more than two years ago, we were nervous about the discounts and service requirements. As it turns out, however, the contract has been good for us, good, we think, for the consortium and for individual libraries, good for a spirit of partnership, and good for experiments in cooperative collection.

Why so good? OhioLINK achieved excellent discounts and favorable terms for its members, of course. By and large, for individual libraries, the direct savings through discounts are significant, and across the consortium, the direct savings have been considerable. Before the OhioLINK contract YBP was principal monographs vendor to a handful of schools in Ohio. Now, because of the contract, we are the major vendor to every large university in the State, save one, and to a total of more than sixty libraries. Without the consortial contract we might *never* have gained so many customers.

The advantages, however, go deeper than discounts for OhioLINK or revenues for YBP. They begin in the commitment of member schools to the contract. That is, librarians around the State, and especially the members of OhioLINK's **Collection Building Task Force**, took the contract seriously from the beginning, supporting it by moving their business to YBP and by encouraging their peers to do the same. The OhioLINK office under **Tom Sanville** supported the effort in myriad ways, but especially through buying loaders to bring records into library systems in batches. To hold up its end, YBP tried to be always available on short notice to work with Ohio libraries, and we have assembled technologies to support cooperative collection. Still, good discounts, commitment, good service, and technological support are to be expected; they are not news. It is, instead, the serendipitous ad-

vantages of working with a consortium that I wish to describe here.

Some of the advantages of the YBP-OhioLINK arrangement are quite simple. For example, usually academic sales representatives cover geographically huge territories of several states and visit their customers no more than once a year. Comparatively, Ohio is small but because it comprises a sales territory, we are in Ohio libraries constantly. It is possible to visit anywhere in the State from one day to the next and to visit one library as often as needed. Conversely, we have held regional training sessions around the State that enable potential customers to come to us, some to learn more about YBP and others to obtain timely instruction in the use of GOBI, YBP's online acquisitions and collection management system.

### GobiSlow and NewGobi: Solving Problems Together

The concentration of customers in one small State has proved especially important when things do not go well. In fall 1999 OhioLINK libraries reported that GOBI was unacceptably slow, often too slow for people to use it to do their work. The situation was bad enough that the **Collection Building Task Force** summoned senior executives from YBP and our then brand-new parent, **Baker & Taylor**, to Ohio to discuss the problem.

Among the first things we did was to assemble a group of Ohio libraries to track their experience of what was by then being called "GobiSlow." With their help, we traced sources of the problem and bought faster servers, improved our internal network, and rewrote parts of GOBI's code. For their part, many customers adjusted their schedules to use GOBI early in the day. In time, GOBI's response improved, but we also realized that as an early product of its kind, the real fix would be to rewrite it from scratch.

We first announced the plan to rebuild GOBI completely (now, more or less officially, known as "NewGobi") at a meeting with OhioLINK last May. In the early phases of the project, members of our IS department visited 10 libraries in Ohio, large and small, whose use of GOBI ranges from simple to among the most sophisticated. We heard what was wrong, what customers hoped to see, and

what was right that they did not want to lose, and the meetings helped start the project in the right direction.

In sum, the concentration of libraries in Ohio that use GOBI in different ways makes for a ready source of volunteers to help us through problems, design issues, or beta tests. The organization under OhioLINK makes communication easy and keeps interest high. In return, Ohio's libraries have, *de facto*, a considerable voice in our plans.

### Experimentation and Cooperative Collection Development

An avowed interest of library consortia is always cooperative collection, but with respect to monographs, interest has generally outpaced action. Even in Ohio progress has been slower on some fronts than anyone would have liked, largely because people have full-time jobs to which these experiments are always an addition.

But we have made considerable progress. Among the first things YBP did as part of its pledge to OhioLINK was to develop **GobiTween**, a feature of our database that enables any member of a consortium to see all activity on a title by all members. We then developed a visual means of enabling selectors in a subject from different libraries to compare their several approval plans. Most promising, though, have been the "Not in Ohio" reports.

During a year of experiments with the **Collection Building Task Force**, led in this work by **Jerry Newman** of the **University of Cincinnati** and **Michael Zeoli** of YBP, we have developed a process that goes as follows:

- Six months after books are profiled by YBP, we run a report that gathers up all of those bought by no library in Ohio. Thus, in March 2001, we look at titles profiled in September 2000 that no library in Ohio has bought from YBP.
- OhioLINK takes our list and uses a program to run it against the statewide catalogue to eliminate books that libraries have bought from vendors other than YBP.
- We put the pared list on GOBI, in an account established for this project.

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Any selector in the State participating in the experiment can order titles for his or her library from the account.

The "Not in Ohio" experiment is at the point of achieving production status, in which a half dozen or more libraries will routinely buy books that otherwise would have escaped the consortial net.

**The Future of Consortial Relationships**

Not surprisingly, we believe that vendor-consortia partnerships will play an important role in both our futures. Corporations are scrambling to divide the eBook marketplace and libraries themselves must find roles in an increasingly virtual world. Specifically, if



patrons do not visit libraries, libraries must concoct ways to deliver services to patrons. . . wherever the patron may be. **YBP's** core competencies, describing books and profiling the interests of libraries, can easily be extended to faculty. Through **GOBI**, libraries will soon be able to deliver notification of new titles to faculty, based on a personal profile. Faculty can then recommend titles back to the library, but rather than choosing simply to purchase or not, will indicate whether a book should be "owned locally," "owned consortially," or not owned at all. **YBP** will then run the "own consortially" file against our database of the books consortia members have bought from us. Put differently, the ties between consortia and their vendors should lead to experiments that will profit both and to thinking that may help both find their way as critical parts of this new world. 

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