

A Comparison of Two Out-of-Print Book Buying Methods

Two out-of-print book buying methods, searching desiderata files against o.p. book catalogs and advertising want lists in The Library Bookseller, are compared based on the data collected from a sample of 168 titles. The o.p. catalog method requires more staff time, yet yields less success in locating desired titles. The cancellation rate for unfilled orders is lower in the advertisement method. The average price of books quoted on The Library Bookseller is slightly higher than those listed in o.p. catalogs, but the overall acquisition cost of o.p. book catalog searching is more costly than using The Library Bookseller.

THE COMMONLY USED OUT-OF-PRINT BOOK BUYING METHODS by college and university libraries are checking desiderata files against out-of-print booksellers' catalogs, sending lists of wanted titles to secondhand book dealers for searching, and advertising the needed titles for quote in publications such as *The Library Bookseller* or *AB Bookman's Weekly*.¹ Also known but less frequently used methods are the use of book scouts, book auctions, book buying trips, and book exchanges. Libraries use one or more of these methods to obtain out-of-print books depending on the experience and preference of the librarian in charge. According to Shirley HepPELL's survey in 1966, the most commonly-used methods of college libraries are, in order of frequency, searching in o.p. book catalogs, direct contacts with specialist dealers, use of search services, and advertising.² A similar survey for larger college and university libraries reported by Sarah Cook reveals that

checking want lists against incoming catalogs is considered most effective by eighty-one libraries, while the circulation of a desiderata file to antiquarian book dealers is preferred by sixty-one libraries. The submission of lists to *LB (The Library Bookseller)* is the first choice by fifty-seven libraries.³

Several reports in library literature discuss the methods of buying out-of-print books, but the writers express various opinions and do not agree upon any one method. Checking all incoming lists of out-of-print books is considered a "must" by Felix Reichmann although it is "cumbersome, time-consuming and inefficient."⁴ Eldred Smith and Betty Mitchell report that the use of the search service of specialized dealers is more efficient than other techniques because of costly staff time, high cancellation rate, and the amount of clerical work involved in other methods.⁵ Emerson Jacob considers advertising want lists in *LB* "superior to other methods in numerous respects."⁶

The purpose of this study is to compare the effectiveness of two of these commonly used out-of-print book buy-

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ing methods based upon the measured statistical data. The method of checking a desiderata file against o.p. catalogs and publishing want lists in *LB* are examined here in terms of: (1) rate of success in locating wanted titles; (2) price of the book compared with the original publisher's price; (3) staff time involved in locating the titles; and (4) cancellation rate of unfilled orders. The study may be further expanded for broader generalization. However, the present investigation is limited to a study of obtaining out-of-print books which are generally needed by most college and university libraries.⁷ Highly specialized research materials, rare books, and foreign language titles are not included.

PROCEDURE

The study was conducted at Indiana State University library during the fall semester of the 1971/72 academic year. In September the file of 232 recently received requests for searching were examined, and 30 slips falling into the following categories were sorted out: (1) non-English titles and foreign publication (excluding British output); (2) rare books for special collections; (3) special reports and pamphlets; and (4) government publications. The remaining 202 slips were alphabetized and checked against the latest editions of *Books in Print*, *British Books in Print*, *Forthcoming Books*, and *Whitaker's Books of the Month and Books to Come*. A total of 27 titles were eliminated which included two duplicates, five reprinted titles, eight follow-up cancellations, and twelve which were "temporarily out-of-stock."⁸ Those with no original publisher's price were searched in the proper *Cumulative Book Index* or an earlier edition of *Books in Print* to obtain the original publisher's price. Seven titles whose price could not be verified were also removed.

The selected sample of the remaining

168 titles in alphabetical order were divided into two groups by alternating titles of Group A and Group B. Group A was used as the sample for checking o.p. catalogs and Group B was utilized as the sample for the *LB* advertisement method. The eighty-four slips in Group A were kept in alphabetical order, but duplicate slips were made to file by subject areas to facilitate the search of both classified and alphabetical o.p. catalogs. At the same time a list of eighty-four titles were made from slips in Group B for the *LB* letter requesting publication. On the same day in late September, the *LB* letter was mailed out and the check of incoming antiquarian booksellers' catalogs began.

All catalogs received were examined by the writer to screen out those which were inappropriate (such as foreign book catalogs, special subject catalogs, rare book catalogs, etc.). Those remaining were given to a staff member to check against either the alphabetical or the subject file of Group A. The time spent searching was recorded and the located titles were reviewed for order. If the price was less than \$20.00 and not more than three times the original publisher's price, or more than \$20.00 but less than double the publisher's price, and if the condition of the book was acceptable, the title was deemed acceptable for ordering. A form letter asking that the located titles be held was immediately mailed to the dealer. This process took place within a span of twenty-four hours from the time the catalog was received in the mail. The official purchase order was sent out within four days.

The *LB* quotes for Group B began to be received in the first week of November. Their receipt continued for three weeks and then faded out. Every second day during the period, titles quoted were pulled from the Group B file and marked with the quoted source, price, date, and special condition. The

very same considerations, applied to the out-of-print catalog method, were used in deciding acceptableness of quotes. Earlier editions than specified, paperback substitutes, and books listed as being in poor condition were rejected. When more than one quote was received for a title in the same listed condition, the less expensive title was selected. A form letter requesting that titles be held was sent out immediately for all accepted quotes. The titles with an unacceptable quote were filed back with Group B for future use. At the end of November, or after the end of nine weeks from the beginning of the measurements, the searching of both o.p. catalogs for Group A and checking *LB* quotes for Group B were discontinued.

RESULTS

During the study period of nine weeks a total of ninety-eight catalogs were checked against the Group A file, fifteen titles (and one which was beyond the set price limit) were located. The staff time required for searching totaled eighteen hours and forty minutes. Table 1 shows the number of catalogs searched and number of titles spotted per week. In the same period a

total of thirty-two acceptable *LB* quotes were received, mostly during the sixth, seventh, and eighth weeks. Seventeen other titles were also quoted, but not ordered because the prices exceeded three times the original publication prices. Many titles were quoted more than once, in all a total of 124 quotes were received. Table 2 shows the number of quotes received and accepted each week.

The average price of the fifteen titles located in the antiquarian book catalogs was \$6.34. Table 3 gives the cost and original prices of these titles. Table 4 is for thirty-two titles accepted from the *LB* quotes. The average price for these titles was \$9.00.

The time associated with the processing of the eighty-four titles in Group A, including the preparation for searching, the searching and other activities totaled twenty-five hours and five minutes. This does not include the time taken to make the initial selection of slips, checking *Books In Print* or *Cumulative Book Index* and other tasks which were completed prior to the division of the samples into Group A and Group B. The breakdown time is shown in Table 5. All measurements were carefully preplanned; however, accurate measure-

TABLE 1
NUMBER OF CATALOGS SEARCHED AND TITLES LOCATED PER WEEK

Week Starting	Sept. 27	Oct. 4	Oct. 11	Oct. 18	Oct. 25	Nov. 1	Nov. 8	Nov. 15	Nov. 22	Total
Number of Catalogs Searched	11	13	10	9	11	14	13	10	7	98
Number of Titles Located	4	3	4	0	1	3*	1	0	0	16*

* Includes one title not ordered

TABLE 2
NUMBER OF ALL *LB* QUOTES AND ACCEPTED QUOTES PER WEEK

Week Starting	Sept. 27	Oct. 4	Oct. 11	Oct. 18	Oct. 25	Nov. 1	Nov. 8	Nov. 15	Nov. 22	Total
Number of All Quotes	0	0	0	0	0	83	21	18	2	124*
Number of Accepted Quotes	0	0	0	0	0	27	3	2	0	32

* Total number of quotes which includes certain titles quoted more than once

TABLE 3
COST AND ORIGINAL PRICE OF FIFTEEN TITLES LOCATED IN O.P. CATALOGS

Title Number	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Price In O.P. Catalogs	15.00	8.50	3.50	5.50	6.50	7.80	7.50	8.50	3.50	3.50	2.50	8.75	3.50	7.50	3.00
Original Publishers Price	5.00	3.50	3.75	4.50	5.00	3.00	3.00	7.95	5.95	1.75	3.50	3.00	2.50	4.95	3.50

TABLE 4
COST AND ORIGINAL PRICE OF THIRTY-TWO TITLES QUOTED ON LB

Title Number	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Quoted Price	7.50	12.50	6.00	7.50	7.50	10.00	14.50	6.00	12.50	15.00	8.98	8.98	8.50	7.50	3.50	5.00
Original Price	4.00	4.95	6.00	6.50	4.00	5.95	6.50	2.50	5.00	10.50	3.50	4.00	5.00	3.50	2.50	2.50
Title Number	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32
Quoted Price	6.50	8.50	6.00	14.50	15.00	8.50	8.50	8.50	10.00	8.50	12.50	7.50	8.00	5.00	9.00	10.00
Original Price	3.95	3.50	5.95	6.95	7.00	8.50	10.00	3.50	4.20	3.75	4.95	2.50	5.95	6.75	3.75	3.50

ment for some activities was not possible in practice and in such cases estimated times were used. The time required to prepare the *LB* letter, the process of handling *LB* quotes, and ordering titles in Group B is summarized in Table 6. The total time for the *LB* method was six hours and twenty-two minutes.

Thirty titles out of thirty-two *LB* quoted titles were actually received. The remaining two were cancelled on a follow-up cancellation which took place in April 1972. Of the out-of-print catalog orders, nine out of fifteen were received; five were reported "sold" or "out-of-stock indefinitely" and one was cancelled on the same follow-up.

DISCUSSION

Rate of Success in Locating Desired Titles: By carefully searching the wanted titles in ninety-eight out-of-print catalogs, fifteen acceptable titles were located. This represents 18 percent of the eighty-four titles. The success achieved by placing ads in *LB* was higher than the o.p. catalogs check method. Overall thirty-two out of eighty-four titles, or 38 percent of the titles were found. The results of this study indicate that by publishing a want list in *LB* it is possible to locate more titles than by checking o.p. catalogs; moreover, the success rate was about double. When one has certain urgently needed titles, or is ready to pay more than triple the original publisher's price, the success rate is even higher. If seventeen titles which were quoted at high prices are added to the thirty-two titles, the percentage of titles located rises to 58 percent. It is undeniable that some of the titles quoted were very expensive; however, when considering the price of reprints or photo duplication which are usually more than three times the original price, an acquisition librarian may wish to pay the high price for out-of-

TABLE 5
TIME SPENT FOR O.P. CATALOG METHOD

Activities	Measured or Estimated Time
Duplication of slips to be used for subject file	1 hour 45 min. (measured)
Classification and file of titles by subject areas	50 min. (measured)
Preexamination of catalogs (approximately 1 minute each for about 200 catalogs)	3 hours 20 min. (estimated)
Searching time (for 98 catalogs)	18 hours 40 min. (measured)
Preparation of form letters (approximately 2 minutes each for 15 titles)	30 min. (estimated)
Total	25 hours 5 min.

TABLE 6
TIME SPENT FOR LB QUOTE METHOD

Activities	Measured or Estimated Time
Preparation of <i>LB</i> list and letter	1 hour 10 min. (measured)
Process of <i>LB</i> quotes—to pull out quoted titles from the file, evaluation of quotes, price check, and file back nonacceptable quotes (approximately 2 minutes each for 124 quotes)	4 hours 8 min. (estimated)
Preparation of form letters (approximately 2 minutes each for 32 titles)	1 hour 4 min. (estimated)
Total	6 hours 22 min.

print books, even when an extra cost is required for rebinding.

Price of Out-of-Print Books Compared with Original Price: The total price of books found in out-of-print catalogs was \$95.05 and was 1.56 times the total original price of \$60.85. The total quoted price for titles listed in the *LB* advertisement was \$287.96 or 1.78 times of the original price of \$161.60. When considered solely in terms of the book price, checking o.p. catalogs is more economical than using *LB*. The difference in average price, however, was not critical and, if necessary, the differential could be reduced by holding the received quotes several days and comparing all the quotes.

Of course, the delay introduces the chance of losing the quoted title, especially when only one quote is received. Considering the fact that desiderata

files should include only those which are urgently needed, this process is not highly recommended.

The diversity of the quoted prices for the same title with similar condition in the *LB* method is notable. One title was quoted eight times with a price ranging from \$4.00 to \$15.00. Quotes are based presumably on the dealer's perception of how difficult it was to obtain a particular title. Therefore, no librarian should criticize the judgment of what constitutes a fair price. On the other hand, acquisition librarians must also spend tax money as wisely as possible by paying the lowest price possible. Most dealer prices are usually reasonable, but the prices of some dealers were found to be consistently high. It is possible to establish a list of "reasonable" dealers based on an average price index for each bookseller by dividing

the average quoted price by the average original price. This is possible only when more than several quotes are received from one dealer. The index can be used as a helpful reference when there is only one quote, when original price is not known, or when handling a large number of out-of-print titles. Many sellers' indexes are more or less 1.5; however, the indexes for some dealers were found to be as high as 4.75. (However, this index should be used only as a guide, not as an absolute tool.)

Staff Time Needed to Locate Titles: The method of checking out-of-print catalogs is more time consuming than the *LB* advertisement method. The total staff time needed to locate fifteen valid titles in o.p. catalogs was twenty-five hours and five minutes, the average being one hour and forty minutes per title. On the other hand, only about twelve minutes of staff time were needed per title located by the placement of ads, or a total of six hours and twenty-two minutes for thirty-two titles. When these are converted into dollar costs, the out-of-print catalog method costs \$4.17 per title, calculated on the basis \$2.50 for the hourly wage of a staff member. The *LB* advertisement method costs about \$.50 to locate one title. There is, however, a subscription charge for *LB* of \$25.00 per year to become eligible to place advertisements. Since a cycle of the *LB* advertisement sequence takes about three months, Indiana State University library sends lists of out-of-print titles about four times a year. The service charge is then calculated at \$6.25 per issue, in this study, or about \$.20 per located title. When comparing \$4.17 for the o.p. catalogs searching with \$.70 (\$.50 for wage and \$.20 for subscription charge) for the *LB* method (or one hour-forty minutes per title against twelve minutes), the latter is far more favorable.

The major problem with the out-of-

print catalog method is the lengthy, less productive, and tedious process of searching wanted titles against numerous secondhand book catalogs which can be compared with "looking for a needle in a haystack." The arrangement of catalogs and the different scheme of classification in subject catalogs makes searching even more difficult. Some antiquarian book dealer catalogs list titles alphabetically under broad subject fields such as economics, history, literature, etc.; while others use smaller classifications and list titles in several alphabetical groups such as American history, European history, ancient history, or modern history. Some booksellers further subdivide European history, for example, by countries, others subgroup these into centuries. It is conceivable at this time to think of storing desiderata lists in a machine-readable data file such as on punched cards, tapes, or discs. All incoming catalogs then could be converted into machine-readable form, and a computer can be used to search desired titles against received out-of-print book lists. Unfortunately, most antiquarian booksellers' catalogs are printed or mimeographed and libraries would be required to convert the printed pages into machine-readable form. This is an expensive process, and until o.p. dealers start publishing available out-of-print titles in a new form, or libraries initiate a large scale cooperative venture, the procedure is not yet a practical one.

Cancellation Rate for Unfilled Orders: A notable difference exists between the cancellation rate of the two out-of-print book buying methods. In spite of immediate notification to dealers after the decision to order, only nine titles of fifteen titles were actually received, when the o.p. catalog method was used. With the *LB* orders, thirty out of a total of thirty-two orders were received. Since out-of-print catalogs are printed by antiquarian booksellers and hundreds

of copies are distributed to libraries throughout the country, an acquisition librarian must compete with his fellow librarians who may have received the same catalog in the mail sooner. In this respect the *LB* quote method is a direct communication between a particular librarian and a dealer and is comparatively safe unless the librarian delays his response too long in the hope of receiving a less expensive quote later.

CONCLUSION

The result of the study shows that obtaining out-of-print books by searching o.p. catalogs requires more staff time

and yields a lower success rate than advertising in *The Library Bookseller*. The cancellation rate of unfilled orders is higher in the catalog method. The higher success rate and lower cancellation rate with the *LB* method makes it more favorable than the out-of-print catalog search method.

The price of books listed in antiquarian booksellers' catalogs are generally less expensive than those quoted in *LB* advertisements. However, when considering this in relation to the much larger staff costs needed to search o.p. catalogs, out-of-print titles are obtainable at a lower cost by advertising.

REFERENCES

1. *The Library Bookseller* is known as *TAAB* to many librarians. But the more proper title, *The Library Bookseller*, is used and abbreviated as *LB* in this article.
2. Shirley G. Heppell, "A Survey of OP Buying Practices," *Library Resources and Technical Services* 10:28-30 (Winter 1966).
3. Sarah A. Cook, "The Selective Purchase of Out-of-Print Books: A Survey of Practices," *Library Resources and Technical Services* 10:31-37 (Winter 1966).
4. Felix Reichmann, "Purchase of Out-of-Print Material in American University Libraries," *Library Trends* 18:328-53 (Jan. 1970).
5. Eldred Smith, "Out-of-Print Booksearching," *CRL* 29:303-9 (July 1968). Betty J. Mitchell, "A Systematic Approach to Performance Evaluation of Out-of-Print Book Dealers: The San Fernando Valley State College Experience," *Library Resources and Technical Services* 15:215-22 (Spring 1971).
6. Emerson Jacob, "The Use of *TAAB* in Out-of-Print Book Searching," *CRL* 17:16-18 (Jan. 1956).
7. Titles included are not limited to specially selected basic titles such as those listed in *Books For College Libraries*.
8. Re: A follow-up cancellation: Indiana State University library periodically sends out follow-up letters for all outstanding orders which are more than six months old and cancels out those for which no response has been received. These titles cancelled on a follow-up were not included in the study because they may or may not be an out-of-print book.