

Texas Vendor Study Group Evaluates Library Materials Vendors

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Introduction

The 1980s have been a period of slow growth for library materials budgets in Texas. As a result, acquisitions librarians have been faced with the need to find as many ways as possible to utilize their materials budgets effectively. One way to accomplish this is for each library to select the best vendor for each type of material in order to achieve maximum discount while utilizing minimum staff time. Recognizing the need for careful and astute vendor selection, some acquisitions librarians in North Texas began a dialogue concerning vendor evaluation and brought this interest forward to the Acquisitions Subcommittee of the Association for Higher Education of North Texas (AHE).¹

The Vendor Study Group

During the Fall 1986 meeting of the Acquisitions Subcommittee, the Vendor Study Group² was formed to design and conduct a vendor study for the North Texas AHE libraries.³ Discussion at the first meeting of the study group resulted in the realization that a lot of preliminary work was necessary

to accomplish this mission. In addition, it was recognized that the development of a viable vendor study might also produce valuable by-products along the way.

As a result, the Vendor Study Group expanded the initial charge. The performance evaluation became only one of a number of projects for the group. By the end of the first meeting, a goal and objective were formulated to provide a framework for the group's work. To achieve this goal and objective, the group developed a series of projects which would cumulate in a vendor performance evaluation study. The group's framework follows:

Goal

To broaden the general understanding among AHE librarians of library materials suppliers⁴

Objective

To provide factual information upon which individual AHE librarians could base their supplier selections

Projects

1. Develop and publish an annotated bibliography on evaluations of all suppliers of library materials
2. Identify all suppliers of library

materials (excluding publishers)

- a. currently used in the AHE Area
 - b. that AHE librarians would like included in the study
3. Identify services provided by suppliers listed in Project One, including subject specializations of vendors
 4. Publish a directory of suppliers and services
 5. Evaluate selected suppliers
 6. Publish the evaluation study

Project Outcomes

The Vendor Study Group began its work with a comprehensive study of the literature which resulted in publication of an annotated bibliography in *Library Acquisitions: Practice & Theory* in 1988.⁵ To compile this bibliography, each member of the group was responsible for searching a specific time period in the literature. The resulting references were read, analyzed and annotated. The group then began the work of evaluating the annotations for possible inclusion in the bibliography. Extensive discussion and rewriting took place during this period.

While finalizing the work on the bibliography, the group surveyed AHE librarians to determine which vendors were used. The group felt that it was necessary to identify all suppliers of library materials used within the last two years as well as to identify other important vendors. This information was compiled into a list of vendors for the use of AHE librarians. This list was later used to develop the *AHE Vendor Directory for Acquisitions Librarians*.⁶

The Vendor Study Group developed a questionnaire which was sent to approximately 200

material vendors worldwide. Based upon a study of numerous reference sources, the group decided what information to include in the directory. The questionnaire asked for the name of the chief executive officer, main address, telephone number, customer service number, North Texas vendor representative, and any other important addresses or telephone numbers. The vendors were also asked to describe their services and the types of materials supplied. With the return of 134 questionnaires from vendors around the world, the Vendor Study Group began to organize the information and design the directory entries. The group felt that an index to the materials and types of services of each vendor was essential to the usefulness of the directory.

This phase of the Vendor Study Group's work was made possible by technical and financial support from the Association of Higher Education of North Texas (AHE) through its Library Programs and Services Branch under the direction of Katherine Pearson Jagoe. With an AHE grant and guidance from various AHE support staff, the group selected type fonts, paper, style of binding and cover design. Using word processing software, the directory information was put into machine readable form by AHE staff and sent to the printer on a disk. The group was responsible for the final proofing of the galley copy. By October 1988, approximately ten months after the initial questionnaires were mailed out, the *AHE Vendor Directory for Acquisitions Librarians* was completed.

The final project began to take shape early in 1989. The Vendor Study group began the design of a vendor performance evaluation study which would include 19 libraries. A major concern in the

design of this study was the development of appropriate evaluation criteria. Although a search of the literature produced a list of those criteria most frequently studied⁷, the group felt that additional research was needed on this topic. Once again, questionnaires were developed and mailed. This questionnaire was mailed to a selected group of 37 vendors and 20 AHE libraries. The results of this survey formed the basis of another report to be released this coming spring.

As of this writing, the vendor performance evaluation study is currently under way. Nineteen libraries are collecting data on the performance of ten different library materials vendors. The data will be collected and analyzed this winter and the resulting report will be made available to AHE librarians in the Spring of 1990. This report will then be submitted for publication as the Vendor Study Group's last project to fulfill the group's goal and objective.

Reasons for the Vendor Study Group's Success

The completion of the vendor study and the final report concerning it will bring to culmination the efforts of more than three years of work. The group has been amazed at its own accomplishments as well as enriched by the experience. The group's chair, Dr. Zary M. Shafa, has attributed the group's success to the following factors.

1. A goal and objective were set at the very first meeting which provided direction for the group throughout the study.
2. Each member of the group had perseverance and was dedicated to the completion of the study.
3. Each product was carefully

prepared and edited until declared finished by the group.

4. Each member had the ability to write and to critique the others' work objectively. All members understood and accepted the groups' criticisms as vital to the successful outcome of each project.
5. Each member of the group had the ability to focus on the goal throughout the study.
6. The attitudes of group members were down to earth and cooperative.
7. Each group member was professional and forceful in expressing his/her own ideas while respecting the contributions of every other member.
8. The financial and technical support provided by the Association for Higher Education of North Texas made the entire study possible.

Conclusion

Each member of the Vendor Study Group gained enormously from the work of the past three years. Outside of reaching the goal and completing the related projects, some very special benefits accrued to each participant. A special collegial relationship developed among all of the group members. Each now feels confident and comfortable to call upon the other member when the need arises for an outside opinion concerning mutual professional interests.

What may have seemed an impossible task was accomplished because of the synergy which was generated through group dynamics. Each participant brought diverse experiences to the group process and each went away from meetings with something new to take back to his/her respective institution. The value of this exchange to the professional development of each individ-

ual is impossible to measure.

Finally, this communication experience helped each member further his/her individual writing, editing, and publishing skills. As Shafa stated in regard to the *AHE Vendor Directory for Acquisitions Librarians*, "Librarians are typically the purchasers of printed materials. It is not often that we have the chance to participate in the total creation of a book".⁸ Finally, the Vendor Study Group hopes that their success in tackling a common problem will encourage the formation of other groups to do the same. It is through such shared experiences that the library profession can move forward.

Notes and References

1. AHE is a regional, not-for-profit, educational support services organization located in Dallas, Texas. It provides diverse support to 21 public and private colleges and universities in partnership with 19 private sector corporations and two public libraries.
2. The six members of the study group are: Zary M. Shafa, Chair, (University of Dallas); Glenda A. Thornton, Recorder, (University of North Texas); Julie S. Alexander (University of Texas at Arlington); Kristine L. Murphy (Southern Methodist University); Thomas E. Nisonger (University of Texas at Dallas until 1988); Audrey V. Vanderhoof (Texas Christian University).
3. The libraries of the following institutions participated in at least one phase of the vendor evaluation project: Austin College, Baylor College of Dentistry, Baylor University, Collin County Community College, Cooke County Community College, Dallas Baptist University, Dallas County Community College District, East Texas State University, Fort Worth Public Library, Grayson County Community College, Midwestern State University, Southern Methodist University, Tarrant County Junior College District, Texas Christian University, Texas College of Osteopathic Medicine, Texas Wesleyan University, Texas Woman's University, University of Dallas, University of North Texas, University of Texas at Arlington, University of Texas at Dallas, and University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center.
4. For the purposes of this study, *Library materials* are defined as those items acquired and made available for the use of library patrons. *Suppliers* are the commercial sources from which library materials are obtained.
5. Vendor Study Group, "Vendor Evaluation: A Selected, Annotated Bibliography, 1955-1987," *Library Acquisitions: Practice & Theory*, 12:17-28 (1988).
6. Vendor Study Group, *AHE Vendor Directory for Acquisitions Librarians*. 1988: Association for Higher Education of North Texas (17811 Waterview Parkway, Suite 123, Dallas, TX 75252). (Available from the Association)
7. October Ivins, "The Development of Criteria and Methodologies for Evaluating the Performance of Monograph and Serial Vendors," in *Advances in Serials Management*, (Greenwich, CT: JAI Press Inc., 1988).
8. "Vendor Study Group Completes Directory," *AHE News*, 4:1 (Winter 1989), p. 5.