

THE ROLE OF THE LIBRARY SUPPLIER

By David Lindley, Director, Books for Students Ltd (UK)

Agradeço-lhes a oportunidade que me têm concedido para falar-lhes.

Tenho um enorme prazer em estar aqui em Portugal, atender o Congresso e participar da Feira em Braga. Como podem ver estou a esforçar-me para aprender o português. Espero desculpem os meus erros. Mas com a sua permissão gostaria de fazer esta comunicação em inglês.

Mas, primeiro, gostaria de dizer que estou impressionadíssimo com o desenvolvimento das bibliotecas públicas em Portugal.

Sou bibliotecário. Também sou livreiro e tenho trabalhado já há alguns anos com bibliotecários na Inglaterra.

Os senhores têm uma oportunidade única e extraordinária à sua frente. Talvez os senhores pensem que estão ficando para traz do resto do mundo.

Isto não é verdade. O sistema de bibliotecas públicas no Reino Unido, como sabem, já está bem estabelecido. Mas é velho, está a ranger – como uma casa antiga – está a sofrer. Está a sofrer por falta de fundos, e parece-me a mim que tem perdido a sua direcção, tem perdido alguns dos seus ideais – os ideais da educação, da literatura, da cultura.

Do outro lado, aqui em Portugal, graças ao Instituto Português do Livro e da Leitura, estão a começar uma nova caminhada final do século vinte com todas as vantagens da tecnologia moderna e com a facilidade de basear-se na experiência de outros serviços de bibliotecas europeias.

Desejo-lhes muito sucesso. Espero na verdade, que eu possa contribuir para este êxito.

The UK public library market for books is worth, this year, £100m. This is a very large sum of money, and very important to companies such as mine.

A lot of that money finds its way to local booksellers or a specialist bookseller, but most of it is spent with quite large, specialist distributors – library suppliers. The library supply industry in the UK has grown over the years to meet the needs of public libraries and

academic libraries. As these needs have grown – particularly in the field of information technology and the increasing use of computers in libraries – so the services offered by library suppliers have also grown.

It is a fact that today the largest part of the cost of acquiring books in libraries is borne not by the library itself but by the library supplier. The situation today is that libraries now depend on booksellers and library suppliers. Without them it would be difficult – perhaps impossible – to provide an efficient library service.

What are these services that are so important?

First – information.

Last year nearly 68000 titles were published in the UK. In the last ten years publishing output has risen by 73%. It is impossible for every librarian in the country to find out for himself what those titles are – he can't see them all, can't read them all or read reviews of them all.

He depends on the network of library suppliers who provide him with the information he needs. The library supplier, in turn, depends on the publisher to provide information about new books – before they are published.

This works very well. The publisher knows that the bookseller and library supplier have an important role in ensuring this information reaches the librarian. It is particularly important for the academic and specialist publisher. But it is also important for the publisher of fiction and popular titles.

The industry is a closely-linked network – of publisher, supplier, librarian – all mutually dependent.

So the library supplier has this important function – he gathers together information from all publishers and sends this information – usually weekly – to his library customers. Most suppliers have a particular specialism. It might be children's books, fiction, academic books, books in other languages. In our case one of our specialisms is paperbacks. These are the most popular and most widely distributed books in the country.

I said earlier that it is important that this information is available in advance of publication. This allows the librarian to plan his expenditure on books, and, even more importantly, to anticipate the demands of his readers, rather than merely react to them.

With the increasing use of computer technology in libraries, suppliers now make some of this information available in electronic form. The essential bibliographical data can be transmitted, either directly or on tape, to the library. The need for the cataloguing of routine acquisitions in libraries is beginning to disappear. More and more of these functions are being carried out by the commercial sector, by library suppliers.

The other major service we provide to libraries is the preparation of books for the library shelves and the protection of books during their lives.

In my company, for example, we supply two million books a year to public libraries. I have a team of 14 people to create and develop these sales. But there are 114 people employed to process these books, prepare these books for the library shelves.

This is very expensive for us, but of great benefit to the libraries themselves.

Perhaps the most important thing we do is to put plastic jackets on books to protect them. These jackets are unique, made especially for my company.

But we do everything.

Unlike Portugal, UK libraries prepare their books in hundreds of different ways. There are no two libraries alike. We stock stationery for all UK libraries. It is nearly always different.

We catalogue books, classify books, put in date labels, transaction cards, spine labels, ownership marks, security triggers for electronic security systems.

So you can see that today we have a situation where the library supplier on the one hand is dependent on the library for his business – and the library is equally dependent on the supplier both for information and for the physical preparation of library books.

I think also you can see that there are ways in which this arrangement, this association, this partnership between the two can be of benefit to libraries in Portugal.

The librarian's function is to plan for and anticipate the needs of his readers. For this he needs information.

Equally, it is not his job to spend the whole day in an office or a workroom wrapping books in plastic. His readers are more important, people are more important, children are more important, his professional duties are more important. Our job is to allow the librarian to do his job.

I am here this week to talk to publishers about these needs and about good communication between publishers and booksellers. I am here to continue my discussions of the cataloguing needs, the bibliographical needs of libraries in Portugal. And I am here to offer the services of plastic jacketing (plastificação) and book preparation to Portuguese libraries. I hope to speak to as many librarians as possible while we are here, so that we can keep in touch with you personally.

You are setting out on what I think is a great adventure for a people who are known historically as great adventurers. I would like to be with you on that adventure. I hope the discussions and negotiations I have had this week will lead to a successful conclusion and that I will have the opportunity to come back again.

Espero voltar para acompanhá-los nesta aventura. Mas com melhor capacidade de falar o português.

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