

BUY AUSTRALIAN?

Over the past few months much has been written about the 'buy Australian books' movement which quite understandably has received considerable support from distributors of so called Australian books. Publishers and librarians have had their parrying in print, and maybe a third viewpoint can be thrown into the ring.

For the past ten years our efforts have been to supply libraries with books, and in doing so, probably because we were the newcomer, we were in the marketplace from an outsider's view. Libraries had a choice. Buy from overseas or purchase locally — keep in mind that you had to pay 30% more if you purchased locally. That is now considerably changed. Yes, there are more 'Australian' books on the market now but let's be practical, we in Australia have no chance of doing our own thing in comparison with the literary giants of England or America. The difference in the range offered by Australian book wholesalers and the professional library suppliers in England, is massive and as an Australian library supplier, our job is to bring the best range to librarians for their choice, be what it may. Everytime there is an *Australian book* of some merit to that library service, provided the service has the funds to purchase the book, *it will be purchased.*

How Australian are they?

Now to look at a couple of points of interest regarding 'Australian books'. How many of the so-called 'Australian books' are actually produced in Australia? If we delete the work done in Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong and to a smaller extent Japan, just how many totally Australian books are there? Just check your title pages and the story is self evident.

What about all the great 'Aussie' books which are exactly the same as overseas publications with 'Australian' added to the title. Just how Australian are they?

Next question is, why don't these quality illustrated books get produced in Australia? Would it be that Australian printers have to pay a duty on the paper, whereas to purchase the complete book overseas attracts none? Who is the government protecting? I would think that the Asian printers and binderies would be laughing all the way to the bank.

Maybe at this time one should point out the scene regarding book supply on the Australian market. If we are talking Australian, be genuine, just who owns a large proportion of the wholesalers in Australia? Ask some of the big names in book supply where do their profits go? Just how much goes out of the country? Do you really think John Menzies could keep the James Bennett scene if it wasn't doing all right out of it? Maybe Mr Coffey would like to tell us how much the parent company Hodder and Stoughton feel their Australian effort is worth to them? So, do we buy from Australian companies or from overseas companies with an Australian front board?

What can one say about the librarians who are involved in this scene?

The BIG, BIG cry is the shortage of funds to purchase books. There are many librarians who respect their power to purchase books and who really seek out and demand the best value for books. But what about the others? Probably the biggest joke on librarians is the 'pro forma' method of selling 'Australian books' to librarians. Just take a look at it for a moment. Librarians give a golden handshake

to a supplier (we all know who the biggest supplier is, note I didn't say Australian owned supplier), and in return have a permanent supply of books sent to them. The suppliers, full of gratitude for the golden egg which has dropped into their lap, offers, now look at this, not more discount for the golden egg, but less, a hell of a lot less discount than the majority of library suppliers are giving normally.

Your business is worth fighting for

For goodness sake get the message straight. Your business is worth fighting for. You can do a lot, lot better so don't scream too much about shortages of funds when you are not buying at the right price. Many will jump up and cry 'Service' at this point, but are the other alternatives really worth 10% or more loss in buying power? When things are tough, one cannot forever hide behind the old 'we've done it for years this way'. Modern management survives, the rest really do become losers.

Finally, how about a concerted effort to move governments to fund libraries correctly? For twelve months we have written to Mr Keating via Mr Barry Cohen, pointing out the problems in library funding.

You as an Australian, have every right to request the government to support library services. Write a letter, get it signed by your staff, raise petitions for library users to sign. The old saying 'the noisiest gets the most cake' is so true, especially when it comes to the brittle exterior facade that our politicians like to have.

Librarians unite. If you don't, you could become a thing of the past.

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