
Report of a Survey of Librarians on the Launch of New Journals

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Aims

In June 1987 a survey was undertaken under the auspices of the Medical Information Working Party into librarians' views on the launch of new journals in the medical field. The aims of the survey were:

1. to identify the sort of information most helpful to the librarian on the launch of a new journal, and to establish the optimum timing for the launch announcement.
2. to isolate the media most frequently consulted by librarians and the meetings and conventions which would be the most promising occasions for conveying information on new journals.
3. to establish the reaction of libraries to specific techniques used in the promotion of new journals.

It should be emphasised that the survey was confined to medical, health and welfare libraries and that the questions and answers were focused on medical journals.

It is hoped that the findings revealed in the survey will be of interest to:

1. Publishers launching or intending to launch journals in the medical field.
2. Subscription agents and booksellers handling subscriptions to new journals.
3. Librarians involved in taking decisions on subscriptions to new medical journals.

Method

A questionnaire with fifteen questions was sent to 1800 subscribers to *Health Libraries Review* as an insert in the June 1987 issue. As a loose insert a proportion of the questionnaires may have suffered the fate of many other loose inserts and been discarded. No additional incentive to respond was offered.

Response

In total 93 responses were received, 5.16% of 1800. 72, or 78%, of the responses were from medical libraries either undergraduate or postgraduate or combined. 10, or 11% were from nursing libraries, 4 were from veterinary libraries, 1 was from a dental library, and 1 was from a pharmaceutical library. It was not possible to identify the source of 5 responses.

The results have been examined and compared. Sophisticated statistical analysis has not been employed as the sample size was not large and the response rate not conspicuously high.

Of the 93 responses, 82 were from the UK, 7 were from overseas, and 4 were unidentified.

Conclusions

The results were collated and assessed. What follows is a summary of the more interesting findings.

1. Only 2 replies were received which specifically mentioned that too many journals are already being published and that existing subscriptions are being eroded by the publication of new journals. No question was included to elicit this reaction specifically, although this response was expected.
2. 78.8% of respondents indicated that they prefer to hear of new journals 3-6 months prior to publication. However, no particular month emerged as being preferable for the provision of information on forthcoming journals. 36% stated no preference.
3. There was a clear majority in favour of fixed over variable start journals (83.1%).
4. 93.2% preferred to be notified about a new journal at the same time as, or earlier than, potential target readers.
5. 85.4% approved of the practice of sending unsolicited sample copies (where appropriate) into libraries. These copies would then be displayed or circulated, or both. Of those who indicated their disapproval of the practice of sending out unsolicited sample copies (only 12.4% of the total), half said they would throw out the sample.
6. Over 60% would ask for a sample copy of a relevant journal before being specifically requested to do so by a reader.
7. 68.5% indicated that a new subscription could only be taken out after consultation with a library panel. However, 30.4% suggested that a new subscription could be taken out without such consultation.
8. 66.3% would take out a new subscription in Year 1 of a new journal's life, whereas only 20.2%

indicated they would wait till Year 2. Of those who opted for Year 1, 44.9% said they would take out a single year's subscription as a trial, but only 5.3% of the Year 2 first subscribers supported this technique for testing out a new journal. On the other hand, 47.4% of those who preferred Year 2 as the first year for subscription, said that they would measure the importance of a new journal by the number of inter-library loan requests received.

9. The *BMJ* and *The Lancet* emerged as the favourite publications for learning about new journals with 62.7% and 44.8% of respondents saying they would look at them. Three-quarters of these said they read the advertisements. All of the nursing librarians indicated a preference for the *Nursing Times* in considering publications where they might expect to learn about new journals. Other specialist journals were quoted. These may be ignored since they reflect the specialisation of some of the respondents.
10. The Annual Study Conference of the Library Association, Medical Health and Welfare Libraries Group was by far the most significant meeting for librarians with 41 out of 71 mentions.
11. Visits from publishers' representatives to promote new journals are not welcomed by 80% of the respondents. Copies of the results of the survey are available at the nominal cost of £5.00. (cheques payable to MIWP) from the following address: Mr. Philip Shaw, MIWP, C/O Churchill Livingstone, Robert Stevenson House, 1-3 Baxter's Place, Edinburgh EH1 3AF.