

Mini-profile:

a day in the life of a publisher services manager



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The first maxim one discovers in this position is that no day is typical. Many unexpected things happen, indicative of what's happening in the industry right now. It's hard to predict how the day will unfold.

And on this Tuesday morning, as I sit down to begin reporting for this column on the scheduled events of the day – which includes strategy meetings with our Information Systems and Services area, follow-ups with the seven managers in the department about ongoing projects and two conference calls with publishers – I am certain that today will be no exception. But for now, it's quiet in the office, and an excellent time to give you a behind-the-scenes glimpse of what happens here.

As General Manager of EBSCO's Publisher Services department, I serve as the liaison between EBSCO and its more than 78,000 global publishing

partners. Located at EBSCO's International Headquarters in Birmingham, Ala., USA, Publisher Services is comprised of 100 individuals working to ensure that orders for our EBSCO Information Services customers are serviced promptly and accurately. We are the publisher's single point of contact for order fulfilment, centralized payments, proof of payment, credits, cancellations, claims and more. One way to solve claims quickly and inexpensively is through EBSCO's Missing Copy Bank, another service of my division. The Missing Copy Bank, a complimentary service for EBSCO customers, is a one- to two-year back-file of more than 2,000 popular serial titles from which customers can order free replacement issues. I also work closely with the 60-member staff of EBSCO's Title Information Department, which maintains the company's database of more than 282,000 serial titles.

A broader view of this division's responsibility is to assist publishers in establishing their relationship with EBSCO. To that end, we work with the Publisher Relations division of EBSCO to offer a number of marketing opportunities. This includes advertising in one of EBSCO's 14 serials catalogs that are distributed worldwide and used by librarians to make buying decisions. Banner and cover image ads on EBSCO web sites are also arranged through the division. In addition, we offer assistance to publishers in reaching libraries through direct mail. I discuss these alternatives with the two publishers who call me this morning wanting to expand their subscriber base.

I then begin checking e-mails – all 150 of them. They vary from publisher news about title changes and pricing, forwarded to the Title Information Department to update our title file database, to notes about the status of invoices and e-journal concerns. These are sent to the managers of the respective departments for follow-up. Other e-mails include inquiries from publishers to visit our offices, a request we are always happy to accommodate.

It's now time to head to the aforementioned strategy meeting, where I will meet with the general manager of the Information Systems and Services Department and two programmers. Together, we will work on determining what type of programming should be added to EBSCO's system to run specialized reports for e-journal tracking, an ongoing exercise that continues to enhance the efficiencies we provide for our customers and publisher partners.

This meeting reflects a major effort within Publisher Services to identify and install various procedures to improve customer satisfaction. One of our latest successes in this area was the introduction of special alerting services to help make the transition to new pricing structures much less stressful.

Agents and publishers are natural partners to work together to make the transition to electronic publishing more efficient. Both parties share the goal of enabling the library to better utilize the publisher's products in a straightforward manner. As e-journals have gained importance in library collections, services to help manage them have become a major growth push for Publisher Services.

In 2004, we identified many ways to help reduce the e-journal workload, including expediting

e-journal order placement to publishers and facilitating e-journal activation via a dedicated e-journal customer service team that supplies critical data to both the librarian and the publisher. We have also initiated processes to assist with invoice payments, to gather and update IP addresses and to troubleshoot issues that arise due to non-access, including obtaining the publisher ID and/or subscriber ID numbers required for registration. Another service of the department provides an option for publishers to receive new e-journal orders by e-mail in a Microsoft® Excel file attachment, for more flexibility in managing the data. In this file, the customer's e-journal contact information is provided, including the customer's name, phone and fax numbers, e-mail address and IP addresses. We work and interface with all of the e-journal hosting services, and we are working to streamline the subscription activation and registration process even further.

After reviewing more e-mails, I settle into my office for an afternoon of conference calls. This reflects another integral part of my job, relationship building. While that entails an ample share of off-site work, including visiting publishers at their offices and during trade shows like the Frankfurt Book Fair, a considerable amount of my time in the office is spent on the phone.

The nature of these conference calls varies widely. In some cases, we are discussing the publisher's satisfaction with our services while assessing future needs. In others, the calls have more to do with brainstorming and problem solving. Right now, for example, I'm working with several publishers on the potential development of a publisher portal, a centralized access point for both EBSCO and each individual publisher to streamline inter-office workflow. The first round of calls about this subject commences today.

The rest of the afternoon is spent preparing notes and training exercises for an upcoming series of visits I'll make to the publisher services staff employed throughout EBSCO's eight European office locations. These visits will include continuing education training about new procedures and enhancements we've developed.

At a stopping point with the European CE training plans, I quickly review my itinerary for tomorrow's trip to our West Coast operation, then shut down my PC and call it a day.