What Caribbean Librarians want from Caribbean Publishers

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This article provides an overview of Caribbean Libraries, discusses some issues of selection and purchasing as well as bibliographic requirements of interest to publishers and, finally, makes some recommendations for collaboration between publishers and librarians. Specific country and language issues will be highlighted wherever possible.

The Caribbean can be defined in various ways. The one used in this article is that of the Association of Caribbean University, Research and Institutional Libraries (ACURIL), which includes those countries in the Caribbean basin, mainland countries including the Guianas, and the States of United States of America, which border on the Caribbean Sea or the Gulf of Mexico. In ACURIL, the countries number over forty. ACURIL's membership reflects about 110 institutional members, 10 association members and 80 personal members. This is different to the Caribbean Publisher's Network (CAPNET)'s, which includes mainly those countries in the Caribbean Basin.

Libraries in this area represent a population of over 40 million people. Unique to the area are the multi-lingual (Dutch, English, French, and Spanish) and multi-cultural aspects of a people who have a rich and diverse history and development.

The Caribbean Library Market reflects the types of libraries that exist everywhere – academic, school, special, national and public libraries. Each type of library has specific acquisition and collection characteristics, which reflect their purchasing ability and needs.

In the Caribbean, academic libraries tend to have better funding than other types of libraries. Purchases are often made in bulk from international publishers and agents. There are normally acquisition departments, usually, with at least one professional librarian. The larger well-funded academic libraries will be automated and have Internet access for both users and for library administration. Purchases are made based on the curriculum and recommendations from faculty and librarians employed at that University. The subject areas taught are an indication of the type of material needed by the institution.

School libraries in the Caribbean tend to have the lowest funding. Their needs are for a specific age range and level. Though with a specific curriculum, school libraries need a wide variety of books and periodicals. However, they often cannot afford these purchases because of low or minimal funding. Some secondary school libraries may have a professional librarian, but more often than not a library assistant or teacher-librarian would manage the school library at either the primary or secondary level. Use of information technology is often not very high in these libraries at this time. Even if Internet access is offered to users, library automation or use of the Internet for library administration is to a large extent non-existent.

Special libraries buy to satisfy their niche clientele. These libraries have collections in a specific subject area like law, business, health, economics, government, etc. These libraries have varying levels of funding and can be a good market for publishers who cater to their needs. Often their requirement for very specific information related to the Caribbean is not met due to a dearth of local publications. Special libraries usually have at least one qualified professional. The level of implementation of information technology can vary widely, often depending on funding, and its use varies with the level of expertise of the library staff.

National and public libraries also have varied levels of funding. Usually, a technical services area with at least one professional librarian manages central purchasing for several branch libraries. This often calls for multiple copies of materials, so that to be cost effective, libraries may have to seek international publishers. The application of information technology varies widely from country to country, based on funding and the level of training of library staff. Internet access may be available but library automation is not always implemented. Directors of public libraries in countries with small economies sometimes have to share a computer with staff and may check e-mail once a week or so.

One fact remains and it is that all Caribbean libraries buy Caribbean material. Caribbean materials can be defined as follows:

- books published within the Caribbean. (Caribbean origin)
- books on the Caribbean regardless of their origin. (Caribbean focus)
- literary works by Caribbean authors published outside the region. (Caribbean authorship) [Bandara 1994]

Caribbean librarians will buy from local bookstores, directly from local publishers as well as international publishers – wherever they find the material available.

There are a number of issues which affect what libraries purchase in the Caribbean. Librarians do not just buy books; they are building and developing collections. Many Caribbean libraries are trying to fill gaps in their collections. Thus, apart from the collection needs of the libraries, problems with selection, other major areas requiring further discussion are purchasing and bibliographic standards.

Some selection difficulties involve the fact that libraries must be aware of what is published in order to select for purchase. One major problem with selecting Caribbean library materials is that there are few reviews and regular title listings. Many, if not all, librarians want a review, a synopsis or even a title list of what is published locally. Librarians need reviews to justify publications. French Caribbean librarians claim to have money to purchase, but cannot identify what is available around the Caribbean. A professional approach would be to use catalogues, but it is acknowledged that producing one is costly for publishers. It was noted that 90% of books sent for review are rejected because of the lack of the resources to get this done and not because of any lack of quality in the books. (ForewordReveiws.com 2001)

Librarians have made attempts to strengthen the book industry by doing book review projects or producing extensive bibliographies. There was a project for a *Caribbean Books in Print* embarked upon in the 1990s. A *Caribbean Review of Books* was published 1991- 1993 (Bandara 1994). There are national bibliographies being attempted in a few countries. However, these are irregular and often not quite up-to-date. There are several Caribbean Bibliographies in print and online, including Mitchell's West Indian Bibliography, which is posted on the Internet (Mitchell 2003).

With few reviews and abstracts, an actual physical assessment of the items is appreciated and, if possible, some librarians buy on the spot. For special collections, placing titles in the bookshops and notifying relevant librarians can work. Librarians appreciate visits to publisher houses to collect material that may not be available at the bookshops

Another way publishers can reach customers is to develop a selective dissemination activity similar to the ones that libraries use for their clientele. If publishers maintained profiles of libraries and their collections, they can service the

libraries better, and the profiles will give an idea of the subject areas, topics, even keywords for material which specific libraries and librarians need to build collections. Publishers may more easily come across titles that are in the process of being published and can assist librarians in filling gaps in their collections.

Also part of the selection process is the question of what is published. Audience-appropriate publications are needed. There is a need for local topics to be addressed in a simple manner; for example, with children books, where authenticity of illustrations and content is desired. Older readers may require large print formats. The Dutch Caribbean librarians feel neglected, as the scope of what is published is not always relevant to their users.

Publishers usually know when there is little information on a subject; they can be pro-active and publish a work knowing that there is a captive market that will purchase it. Publishers have a role to play in stimulating writing as well. There are insufficient materials on the Caribbean by Caribbean people. This may be to a large extent because of a lack of self-appreciation among Caribbean people as a result of their Colonial past-- a feeling that what they have to say is not worth documenting. Of course, Naipaul and similar writers who are held in high esteem discount this idea, but more books are needed that build self-esteem: more biographies, more books that put achievements by the Caribbean people on the world stage and show that they are comparable if not better in some areas. The mix of cultures and genes are the basis for their "Caribbeanness" and their achievements should be celebrated by being recorded.

Publishers need to address the issue of out-of-print material, which is sorely needed by Caribbean libraries. One suggestion is small runs with more than one item. India, for example, produces cheaper formats for internal distribution. There is also a need for multimedia materials, e.g. talking books for the visually impaired.

Language is a very interesting aspect of selection. The Dutch Caribbean librarians want publishers in the English-speaking Caribbean to know that they speak and want materials in English. They would welcome promotional material, reviews and title listings in English. All librarians want translations into their own language and, probably, because of the dominance of English, some librarians in non-English-speaking territories want books in English.

There are several issues related to purchasing. Libraries, because of their funding and traditionally bureaucratic administration, tend to use purchase orders and not cash payments. If publishers are to capture this market they have to accommodate this type of purchasing. Some libraries with funding usually want to purchase all that is published on a specific listing or catalogue, so this should be facilitated via purchase order rather than having to obtain them singly.

Regarding purchasing power, recent monetary devaluations (as in the Dominican Republic) and other economic problems besieging Caribbean countries have affected libraries. Budget cuts mean that the more expensive science and other speciality books are priced out of the libraries reach. Libraries want library editions for limited budgets and discounts for purchasing multiple copies. For electronic material, libraries want better rates. The French Caribbean librarians want it noted that they have customs and foreign exchange problems, and if publishers can do more to minimise this, they would be appreciative.

Publishers' use of information technology by establishing websites or sending e-mails is useful, but many Caribbean librarians still prefer to order by regular mail. Libraries need prompt confirmation of orders. They need to know all the charges up front, that is, the actual cost of acquiring the items. They expect prompt shipping at the lowest cost, naturally. They require stable mailing and contact information for

publishers. Libraries, in turn, can provide information by which they evaluate quotations. Such information can be posted on websites like the "Evaluation Criteria" page on Trinidad and Tobago's National Library and Information System Authority (NALIS) website (National Library and Information System Authority. 2003. Evaluation Criteria*)*.

Bibliographic issues involve standards for format, both physical and layout. Many books published in the Caribbean do not conform to any standards. There may be a title and an author but no date, no information on the publisher or copyright. All librarians want better editorial and bibliographic standards in publications. Some suggestions for books are as follows:

Books must be physically suitable for library use (good paper and binding), should be user-friendly and should include the following information:

- Full title (A title page with basic information is acceptable)

- Imprint (Place of publication, publisher and date of publication)

- Copyright information - if more than one person is involved, that should be stated

- Publisher's address (especially. important for small publishers in the region)

- International Standard Book Number (ISBN): An ISBN is a 10-digit code that identifies one title or edition of a title from one specific publisher and is unique to that title or edition. NALIS states that since 2003 it has become the ISBN agency for Trinidad and Tobago. The ISBN is mandatory and can be obtained through a process of registration and paying a processing fee for a block of numbers. These fees may be waived in appropriate circumstances.

- International Standard Serial Number (ISSN): An ISSN is an 8-digit code which identifies a serial publication, i.e. a publication issued in successive parts, having a common title and intended to be continued indefinitely (if applicable)

- Table of contents

- Numbered pages

- Index (if applicable)

- Series information (if applicable)

- Cataloguing in Publication (CIP)

- Software capabilities.

Books must generally conform to international standards

Caribbean libraries are now purchasing more print materials that have non-book accompaniment and multimedia items, such as music CD-ROMs etc. Standards for this type of material maybe as follows:

- Names of the disc's artistes/author(s)

- If applicable, the instruments each artiste plays (we frequently see "J. Jones - all instruments" in the region; this is unacceptable)

- Universal Product Code (UPC): A unique thirteen-digit inventory tracking number assigned to a compact disc by the Uniform Code Council to allow tracking when sold commercially.

- Release number (usually an in-house code),

- The CD logo is mandatory, although many do not include it,

- The title

- Length

- Time of each track

- The name of the copyright agency e.g. COTT (Copyright Organisation Trinidad and Tobago).

Acknowledging that the relationship between publishers and librarians should be of mutual benefit, the following recommendations for collaboration are suggested. Publishers could partner with libraries, especially public and school libraries, to emphasise the importance of reading for personal and employment reasons.

Librarians should encourage publishers to support legal deposit activity. Legal deposit is the act of depositing published material in designated libraries or archives. Legal deposit legislation serves a clear national public policy interest by ensuring the acquisition, the recording, the preservation and the availability of a nation's published heritage. (National Library of Wales 2000). This tradition has been well instituted in developed countries since the 1500's. However, it has only recently been introduced to Caribbean countries and is extremely necessary for maintaining a record of who the Caribbean people are and their achievements.

One innovative idea for making librarians aware of what is published is to post a comprehensive website, such as the one under development by CAPNET, so that librarians can visit a central source to determine what books are being published. Of course, it will be only as good as the publishers who support the venture. Even the list of publishers available on CAPNET's website is extremely useful. One librarian from Florida pointed out that they do not even know who the publishers are in the region, far less get access to their title lists.

Librarians should talk to publishers about what services they believe to be important to their users. Librarians can invite publishers to attend various library association meetings in the region and arrange "focus groups" with groups of

librarians. These discussions are useful to librarians for learning about the issues for publishers, as well.

Librarians could encourage publishers to join library associations and exhibit at conferences like the annual ACURIL conferences and those of local library associations. This gives immediate exposure of titles to a ready market and an opportunity to network at the same time.

Users today are interested in having access to electronic full text publications. While this is especially true for journal titles, it is also important for monographs. While publishers may not want current list titles available in electronic full text form, they may consider making older texts available. Some libraries would be interested in working with publishers to digitise their works, thus making older, out of print works again available. Obviously, there are financial issues to consider. Libraries can work with publishers to digitise their materials in cooperative projects.

Librarians support all book promotion activities. Book launches held at libraries inform the librarians of what is published and provides an opportunity to celebrate reading and for networking. Providing information on writers, sponsoring writers' and librarians' awards, planning book fairs and debates are promotional activities, which can benefit all.

Acknowledging that reviews are expensive, library associations e.g. national and regional library associations may be able to assist by having training for librarians in "How to do Reviews." If the Associations produce newsletters or journals, they can publish reviews and the librarians would have benefited from continuing education, having acquired a new skill as well as have the required tools for selection purposes.

In conclusion, it should be stressed that, first and foremost, librarians and publishers should have a symbiotic relationship. This mutually beneficent relationship would be rewarding for all concerned as both can help each other achieve their objectives and should see each other as natural allies.

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