

## **A view from overseas of the 7 Cs**

### **Contracts/Consortium - Catastrophic or Commendable**

#### **A view from Croffhouse and the Catalan Consortium**

I feel qualified to speak to you this morning being qualified as a librarian in 1976 in West London and then went on to work in Oxfordshire library service in Banbury and Oxford. I left in 1982 to help run a bookshop in Banbury and in turn to start a library supply company called Special Libraries Book Service. Amongst the companies we supplied was Cunard and I was involved in putting the first library on a cruise liner the QE2 which as you know sails the seven seas. This was even the subject of a short television programme also starring Geoffrey Archer and so long as you don't blink there is a short clip of me struggling on to the ship with a box of books! Then in 1988 having realised that television was not going to be a viable career I started Croffhouse Books.

Croffhouse is an UK based library bookseller supplying books to libraries in South Africa, Europe, Israel and Brazil. Croffhouse is a specialist professional library bookseller providing libraries with books promptly and at the same time with good prices. Experienced librarians and booksellers staff the Croffhouse team with access to all the facilities that a modern library bookseller needs in today's library market and we count many of South African Tertiary Institutions' libraries amongst our clientele.

I would like, this morning, to discuss the various aspects of Consortia and fixed acquisition contracts and the various pros and cons of these two vehicles.

The principle behind both the consortia and contracts is for the library or libraries to ensure that they receive the best deal from their suppliers and with collective bargaining and open tenders the general assumption is that this is what the libraries receive. However in my experience this is not always the case.

I would like to examine first the situation in France.

In the European Union there is an EU law which obliges public organisations (e.g. University Libraries funded by the State) to advertise through the EU Tender system all contracts where the total value of the contract is over a certain sum? In practice this is applied rigorously by the UK, France and Finland. Croffhouse has since its inception supplied British and American books to France so I am now very au fait with the French tender system and the implications for French University Libraries.

French Universities issue "Invitations to Tender" or "Appel d'Offres" - "Call for Offers". They typically split the tender into various lots.

For example there might be a simple split of 1 lot for books published in France and another lot for books published abroad. But they can also be quite complex for example 1 lot for each academic subject perhaps with as many as twenty lots - one for each subject in both French and English and then a few in Spanish, Italian etc. Each lot would be divided up accordingly to the bookseller that submitted the most

favourable bid. The criteria are usually based on price and levels of service promised in the bid document.

Interestingly most of the librarians that I have spoken to do not like this approach and would prefer to be free from the limitations of these arrangements. The librarians would prefer to negotiate individually with their booksellers and to place orders with booksellers who they felt gave a better service according to language, subject or other criteria. The fact that often librarians are not included in the selection panel may be a factor. There is of course often a genuine resentment to the apparent "straightjacket" of this contract approach.

When I was a librarian I know that the policy of the acquisitions librarians was to place regular orders with at least three library booksellers. The distribution of these orders being based upon the perceived strengths of the bookseller. This of course may be based on the perception of the librarian rather than the real strength of the bookseller. For example Crofthouse supplies the Zentral Bibliothek in Zurich with most of their books on English literature and other humanities subjects and the librarian is not interested in learning of any new ventures that Crofthouse might develop in other subjects for example the sciences. But at least the librarian is free to experiment with a new bookseller who approaches the library with some new deals or new offers.

Another problem with the Contract approach is of course should the quality of service being provided by the bookseller start to slip there are the issues of suffering poor service whilst the contract period runs out with no practicable exit strategy.

## **Consortiums**

In the UK and the USA buying consortiums has become a very popular vehicle for libraries to adopt with the intention of improving the terms that libraries in the Consortia receive from their booksellers. A few such are:

A buying consortium that I have had personal dealings with is the one covering the Tertiary Institutions of North Israel. This includes the University of Haifa and a lot of the Colleges of Galilee including Acco (The old Acre from the Bible) and Ort Braude in Karmiel etc. They have awarded the contract for the supply of books from the USA to one American bookseller but this was not exactly a universal choice. I know that there are a few librarians who are unhappy with the bookseller chosen and would have preferred an alternate who offered a half a percent less discount than the one selected.

Other Consortia are formed for reasons other than just getting a good deal from their suppliers:

I have personal experience of a major consortium in Cataluña. As you know Cataluña is in North East Spain where Spain borders on France where the major city is

Barcelona. Amongst famous Catalans are: Salvador Dali, Antón Gaudi and Juan Miro,.

The mission of the Consortium of Academic Libraries of Catalonia (CBUC) is to improve library services through cooperation. The institutions in the CBUC are:-

The Universities of Barcelona, Pompeu Fabra, Gerona, Lerida, Rovira and Virgili, The Autonomous University of Barcelona, The University Polytechnica of Barcelona, The Open University of Catalunya, Biblioteca de Catalunya

What the Catalan Consortium provides to the libraries in the consortium is mainly:-

- Union Catalogue using an agreed classification system; at the moment this is CATMARC which is based on UKMARC.
- Identification of acceptable suppliers
- Management of Digital Library which consists of :-
  - o 5.000 e-journals
  - o 700 e-books
  - o 24 subscribed databases
  - o 18 Catalan databases
- A Union Web Site at [www.cbuc.es/angles](http://www.cbuc.es/angles)
- Management of Interlibrary loans

Of course this all comes at a price which is the additional overhead costs of the management of the Consortium which is calculated pro-rata amongst the Universities taking part in the Consortium so that a smaller University with limited resources and smaller student numbers pays less than the larger Universities. However each University gets the same quality of service.

65% of the CBUC's budget is provided by the contributions of the Catalan university administration, 25% by contributions of the members of the Consortium and the remaining 10% is covered by income from services provided to libraries that are not members of the CBUC. Some specific projects of the Consortium - in particular the Digital Library - receive special funding from the university administration.

The one uniting factor for these libraries is that the librarians and the client's maternal language is Catalán and that they are located in a clearly defined geographical area. When prompted ALL the librarians I spoke to felt that if the Consortium did not exist then their lives would be a lot harder.

The Consortium as part of the process of approving booksellers as potential suppliers requires their booksellers to produce cataloguing records in CATMARC. The bookseller would identify if the book being supplied were a new book to the consortium or simply an additional copy of a book already known to the system. If

the latter then the requirement is to simply add the location and quantities being added to the system if the former then the book record has to be added and a full catalogue record produced and added as well as correct classification in CATMARC. This of course had to be done in Catalan. Now of course this did represent a problem to a British bookseller who may have language skills in some of the major European languages but sadly not Catalan. However we managed to locate a Catalan Cataloguer who knew CATMARC and had access to the on-line Consortium database. So we were in business with providing the Catalan Consortium with books as well as the relevant cataloguing and classification requirements.

An additional challenge for us was when the library of the Autonomous University of Barcelona - one of the libraries in the consortium decided to become ISO quality certified ISO number 9001:2000 which ensures that the library provide books to their users within 55 days which in of course gives Crofthouse a very strict delivery date to work to.

This Consortium clearly shows the advantages of librarians working co-operatively in areas such as acquisitions and then this does not just have to be limited to trying to obtain the most advantageous price possible from the bookseller but the Consortium working with the booksellers ensures that the libraries receive a high quality book supply service together with additional services adding value to the acquisitions process.

#### **In conclusion:**

Whether the Contract or the Consortium works well depends firstly on the reasons for its inception. What is the main purpose? If it simply to try to get the best price from vendors this may be successful but it may be at the expense of service and it may be difficult to change once the Contract is in place.

In my experience the Catalan Consortium works well and in my opinion has achieved its aims of providing a Union Catalogue, Grouping of Electronic Databases, Journals and other services such as Identification of Suitable Booksellers.

However, one thing to be wary of is the funding for the management of the Consortium. There is a tendency even in the Catalan Consortium for the management of the Consortium to demand an increasing amount of resources and to “empire build” at the expense of the individual libraries.