
How can libraries dispose of unwanted stock?



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INTRODUCTION

Many university libraries are under pressure to provide space for an increasing variety of services (such as finance and careers advice), as well as study spaces that facilitate different learning styles. Inevitably, the space for 'traditional' library resources such as print books and journals has decreased, and this, together with the improved availability of e-resources, has led to many institutions discarding print in favour of electronic formats. The disposal outlets available to libraries tend to be based on either the commercial bookseller model or the charity partnership model. This article describes the main features of four outlets, and the experiences of some of the librarians who have used their services.

Anybook.biz: a for-profit bookseller

Their business model is as follows:

- They are a for-profit company (they do not share their profits with charities).
- They accept all books, including non-ISBN items.
- They have specialist staff who identify and market rare and collectible items.
- As well as collecting and providing empty boxes, their drivers (who are permanent members of staff rather than couriers), will also pack items if requested.
- Collections can be arranged from anywhere in the country.
- The books are catalogued and can be viewed through the Anybook.biz portal.
- Items are offered for sale through outlets such as Amazon and Ebay.
- When items are sold, the library receives a sliding share of the profits, starting at 100% if the book is sold on the first day it is made

available, and decreasing to zero after 100 days.

- Items which do not have a resale value are recycled, and the library receives the full amount earned by Anybook.biz for these transactions; however, the company is primarily a bookseller, rather than a recycler.
- Libraries can use the Anybook.biz portal to obtain a breakdown of numbers of books sold or recycled and revenue generated, and can also check the progress of individual items if they wish.

What librarians say about Anybook.biz

Emilia Vinci, Short Loans and Processing Team Leader, Edward Boyle Library, University of Leeds

'The University of Leeds Library has used Anybook.biz for stock disposal for as long as I can remember (I started working here in 2003). We have never considered changing our service provider as we have had no problems with them whatsoever.

We dispose of circa 20 000 items annually via Anybook.biz and generate a healthy income from the books they sell on our behalf. We find their service extremely quick and efficient – all we have to do is box up the books. We do not have to remove any library ownership labels or de-sensitise security triggers, all of which is undertaken by the company. Once we have a reasonable number of items for collection (around 80 boxes) I contact the company to arrange a collection date. They are very accommodating, often being able to collect within a week, or you can specify a date if you prefer. Additionally, when Anybook.biz make a collection they also drop off plenty of empty boxes (free of charge) for us to start filling up again. We do an annual stock weed every summer, usually disposing of about 8000 items over a period of 4–6 weeks. Anybook.biz are brilliant during this period, making as many collections and empty box drop-offs as are physically possible. The collections are made by the company's own driver, who is always punctual, efficient, friendly and very speedy at getting the boxes of books into his van.

In summary, they have been fantastic for quick, painless and stress-free stock disposal. (We also get a cut of any money they make from our books, which helps!)

Helen Buchanan, Head of Access Management, Imperial College, London

'We started sending our withdrawn books to Anybook.biz about six or seven years ago. They have always offered good customer service; the staff are friendly and very helpful. Their courier will collect boxes of books from anywhere in the library, which is a great help to us. They are happy to accept any material that we wish to discard; collection is free and we receive a percentage back from any book that is sold – which means that we also make some money.'

The following companies work with charity partners

Better World Books: a for-profit social enterprise company
www.betterworldbooks.co.uk/

- Better World Books is a for-profit online bookshop. Libraries and nominated literacy partners receive a share of the sales commission.
- The company accepts books in a saleable condition with an ISBN. There is also a specialist team, which identifies and markets rare and collectible items.
- Books are sold on multiple online marketplaces simultaneously, with prices changing daily according to demand. The commission earned is based on the net sales revenue generated by each sale.
- They will collect, free of charge, disposals as well as items for sale. The minimum collection is one full box (empty boxes are provided).
- At any given point customers can see how many of their books have been re-used or recycled, and an estimate of the water, electricity, greenhouse gases, trees and landfill space that has been saved.

Better World Books Literacy Partners

National Literacy Trust
www.literacytrust.org.uk

The National Literacy Trust supports professionals, including librarians, with the resources and information they need to promote literacy.

READ International
www.readinternational.org.uk
READ is an almost entirely student-volunteer-led organisation. Their flagship project is the READ Book Project. Through a community of student-

run projects, they mobilise university students to collect disused textbooks, stationery and sports equipment from UK schools, colleges and universities. These resources are then sorted by their volunteers to find the best quality, most relevant and up-to-date materials to be sent to schools in Tanzania and Uganda.

National Adult Literacy Agency

www.nala.ie

The National Adult Literacy Agency is an independent charity in Ireland committed to making sure people with literacy and numeracy difficulties can a full take part in society and have access to learning opportunities that meet their needs.

Room to Read

www.roomtoread.org

This charity supports educational and literacy programmes for children in the developing world.

Scottish Book Trust

www.scottishbooktrust.com

Scottish Book Trust is the national agency for the promotion of literature, reading and writing in Scotland.

What librarians say about Better World Books

Susan Rodda, Collections Librarian, Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln

'For my first three years in post our local Oxfam bookshop collected all saleable items of withdrawn stock, but by 2008 these collections were less regular and I began to look for alternatives. A stock-editing event hosted by the University of Newcastle introduced me to Better World Books, who offered not just to take the books away, but also to pay us a small percentage of what they sold them for. We joined in February 2009. Better World Books is based in Scotland, but the road miles to Scotland were not an issue as they use UPS as their carriers, so our boxes are collected as part of a journey rather than being the reason for one. We have tried a number of other companies but are still using Better World Books because it suits us; they give 5% of monies raised on our books to the National Literacy Trust which complements our institutional goals; but the bottom line is, they are very efficient.'

Noleen Osborne, Waterford County Council Library Service

'Waterford County Council Library Service has been dealing with Better World Books since early

2011. This free service provides us with delivery of boxes for items of stock withdrawn from our libraries. Labels required for transfers are printed easily from email templates and boxes are collected promptly by UPS. We are delighted to receive some funds from stock sales and that the items recycled provide funding for literacy partners. Our contacts are extremely helpful; efficient and correspondence is usually by email, with regular updates on our disposed-of items.'

The Book Rescuers

<http://bookrescuers.com/>

The Book Rescuers have been providing book recycling services since 2003 and have worked with libraries across the UK, including the University of Greenwich, Anglia Ruskin University and Middlesex University by either reselling, reusing or recycling their withdrawn books.

- Their free collection service accepts books in all conditions (with and without ISBN numbers).
- Libraries receive a commission based on the net sale price of their book sales.
- The Book Rescuers also makes a £0.25 donation to the African Children's Educational Trust (A-CET) for every book they re-sell online (they raised £15 000 for them last year).
- They have their own drivers and also work with couriers to collect consignments. Their minimum pick-up is 20 boxes.
- Books for sale are advertised simultaneously on more than ten websites including Amazon, eBay, Alibris, Abebooks, Biblio and Play. Prices are checked and updated daily to remain competitive.
- Specialist staff are available to deal with rare and valuable items.
- Statistics concerning books sales, inventory and recycling can be provided upon request. The Book Rescuers will be launching a customer portal in 2013.

The Book Rescuers work with their charity partners A-CET and School Aid.

A-CET

A-CET (<http://www.a-cet.org/>) funds long-term scholarships for locally selected vulnerable youngsters who, without support, would be unable to attend full-time education. In addition they build and upgrade rural community elementary schools using local labour and materials.

School Aid

School Aid (<http://www.school-aid.org/>) supports education in Africa by providing good-quality educational materials to meet the diverse needs of children and young people in disadvantaged communities. They collect schoolbooks and other educational resources in the UK and send these directly to schools in need.

What librarians say about the Book Rescuers

Jane Hartzig, Liaison Manager, Middlesex University, London

'We had a large project involving withdrawing a huge amount of stock, and two very different campuses to collect stock from. The Book Rescuers have been very reliable and helpful from the start of the project, and the van drivers are always friendly and flexible. Their staff are courteous and responsive to any changing situations. It's nice to know that none of our books will go to landfill and that they give money to the A-CET charity for every online sale they make of our old books.'

Nationwide Bookbuyers

<http://www.nationwidebookbuyers.co.uk/>

- Nationwide Bookbuyers sell or recycle unwanted books.
- They accept all discarded items and offer a free collection service to libraries throughout the UK.
- The company provides shipping containers, fold-down plastic pallets or boxes, depending on customer needs.
- Company drivers collect the consignments, for which payment is calculated by weight.
- Following collection, libraries are quickly informed of how much they can expect for the consignment, and payment follows shortly. The consignment is divided into collections for the marketplace and community project needs; all other material is recycled free of charge through a licensed paper waste recycle programme.
- The company is a fully licensed waste carrier, and can provide a full auditable trail. Nationwide Bookbuyers guarantees that none of the stock ever ends up in landfill.
- Their charity partner, Healthy Planet (<www.healthyplanet.org>) helps them to dispose of some of their stock.
- The company is currently launching a new service, to run alongside existing services (www.librecycle.com). Librecycle enables libraries to obtain an instant price for a book

by inputting an ISBN (the minimum price for qualifying books is likely to be £5). A consignment made up of this category of books will be collected within 48 hours.

What librarians say about Nationwide Bookbuyers

Jim Bagley, Stock Librarian, Durham County Library

'As all public libraries will appreciate, disposal of unwanted bookstock was a perennial problem for County Durham's library service. From the 1970s onwards the authority did start to sell surplus books but this was never going to be the absolute solution to the issue.

Unsold and frankly grubby books were put into skips and taken away by various refuse/recycling firms, but we had to pay for this service.

The advent of Nationwide Book Buyers five years ago brought about a sea-change in our arrangements. The most fundamental improvement was the fact that we do not have to pay to have our surplus stock taken away. Nationwide collect the books as soon as is required, let us know the total to be paid by the weight of the collection, and payment is received at the end of the month.

As well as providing a positive return on our books, Nationwide also give us an excellent service. Large plastic cases are provided for us to fill with the old books. When we need a collection a simple e-mail is sufficient to prompt a visit when fresh boxes are supplied as the full ones are collected. We cannot recommend Nationwide Books too highly.'

Buckinghamshire New University

'We have dealt with Nationwide Book Buyers for a year and a half now and we have always found them incredibly friendly and efficient. When we needed to dispose of an especially large collection recently, it could not have been easier to arrange. We just sent them an email asking if it was possible for them to pack and take away for us; confirmation of the collection was sent back immediately and when a change had to be made it just took a quick phone call. They have a very personal customer service – you even get given the name of the van driver and his telephone number. We like the fact that there is no pressure on joining the collection route for any given week and that you know straight away, based on average collection weight, how much your discarded books have earned.'

CONCLUSION

Susan Rodda, Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln, also pointed out that libraries are free to try different book disposal companies, in order to identify the model most suited to their needs, since agreements are not generally exclusive. To end with a further comment from Susan: 'These companies will never make us rich, but anything which generates income is welcome and (with a nod to Ranganathan¹), how satisfying it is when even a discarded book finds its reader.'

REFERENCES

- 1 S. R. Ranganathan, *Five laws of library science*, 2nd edn, Sarada Ranganathan Endowment for Library Science: Bangalore (1988)