

Good morning and welcome to “To ‘Bay or Not to ‘bay .. E-bay that is: Maximizing Online Collection Development for the Savvy Shopper.” I would like to thank Swann Auction Galleries for generously sponsoring this session. Acquisitions has always been the backbone of any library. After all, we are what we buy. The three talks today will discuss how the Internet is impacting both what we collect and how we collect it.

This slide lists our speakers and their e-mail addresses. The ARLIS NA website will eventually post these presentations.

I am pleased that we have with us today Inge Reist, Chief of Research Collections and Programs, and Director of the Center for the History of Collecting in America at the Frick Art Reference Library. She will talk about acquiring auction catalogs in today’s market. Laura Harris, Associate Museum Librarian in the Joyce F. Menschel Photography Library at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, will share her collection development expertise in acquiring photography books. I am Terri Boccia, acquisitions librarian for the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute. I will be rounding things off with a practical look at the good, the bad, and the ugly of penny pinching in an online environment.

Please wait until after the conclusion of the three presentations for questions and comments.

[Slide] When I first proposed this session to the ARLIS Denver planning committee, I thought that it would be a fun opportunity to share some penny-saving tricks picked up over the years as an acquisition librarian. However, as I prepared the talk, I gradually realized what a zealot I was for maximizing the budgeted dollar. In my view, an acquisition or collection development librarian has a two-fold role. First, we are responsible for building pertinent collections of material for highly specialized research libraries. Secondly, we assume the role as responsible stewards of our institutions' resources. It can be a delicate balancing act between stretching the book-buying budget and acquiring new and retrospective publications. The dollar's recent steady decline and the rising cost of fuel and therefore shipping, can quickly erode the projected budget for any fiscal year. So, while I hope that you find my talk entertaining, my greater desire is that you find it beneficial as you try to balance books with budget.

[Slide] Warning: Proviso: Bit of Common Sense: Bargain hunting can become a mania. Just how large a discount can you find? Once you start expecting discounts of 30% and up, a 10% discount seems disappointing. Surely there must be a bigger savings somewhere out there ... There is the danger of sacrificing efficiency on the altar of price cutting. To use a shopping analogy, if you travel 30 miles to save \$3 on a pair of shoes, do you really save anything after figuring in the cost of gas? Remember, manpower is just another commodity, with its value set by the institution. Or to put it another way: time is money. It is necessary to build discount search strategies into the regular acquisitions workflow and then to resist the temptation to stray a field and shop just a little further.

[Slide] As part of our order record creation process, the Clark routinely searches titles that are likely to have US distribution against the ADDALL meta-site search engine. For those of you not familiar with this site, ADDALL is an independent website that currently searches books against 41 different on-line bookstores. It gives a snapshot of current prices and provides direct links to the book within each store's home site. For example, let's shop for the 2008 Whitney biennial catalogue. With ADDALL, you have multiple search options such as title, author, or keyword, but I find using the ISBN option produces the most consistent results. **[Slide]** So, here are the results of our search. As you can see, there are a variety of bookstores offering this title: sites that deal exclusively with new books like Amazon and Books-a-Million, and also some that are traditionally tagged as second-hand dealers (and here I am thinking of Alibris and Strand). A few things to note about the ADDALL search. Results generally appear in price ascending order. Also, ADDALL usually includes shipping costs. Keep in mind that many of the major online bookstores offer free shipping with minimum purchase. Do not underestimate the value of free shipping. Amazon, Barnes & Noble, and Books-a-Million ship at no charge for purchases over \$25. While you generally wait a few days longer with Amazon and Books-a-Million, Barnes & Noble provides expedited free shipping. Returning to our Whitney catalogue, it appears that Books-a-Million is offering the title to members for \$28.35 or 37% off the \$45 list price. Being over \$25, we could order this book alone and save an additional \$4 or so. It looks like Amazon is a close second at \$29.70 or a 34% discount, again with free shipping. And Barnes & Noble is selling the book at list price, with a 10% discount for members.

And speaking of member savings: Both Books-a-Million and Barnes & Noble offer an additional 10% off their lowest price to members. Books-a-Million's Millionaire's Club has an annual \$15 fee, while Barnes & Noble fee is \$25. These dues are quickly recouped and can realize substantial savings over the year.

[Slide] Books-a-Million, Amazon, and Barnes & Noble are all reputable online bookstores, so I usually order from whichever is offering the lowest price. However, it is important to know how to read between the lines when ordering online. Books-a-Million, for example, has several different ways of describing availability. "In stock" is pretty self explanatory as is "ships in 24 hours or 2 to 3 days." Amazon sometimes goes a step further and lists the number of copies in stock; this pretty much ensures that the book is indeed available. In contrast, Books-a-Million's "3 to 5 weeks" notation always gives me pause. That's basically their code for "special order, no guarantees, we'll tell you in one month whether or not we can provide it." If the answer is "not", they cancel the order.

[Slide] So while their 40% discount on the forthcoming "Chris Ofili, Devil's Pie" looks pretty good what I really want is the book. Amazon with a 37% discount notes that this as a straight pre-order, meaning that you are firm ordering and will get the book when it is released. The extra \$2 is worth the peace of mind that the book will enter your collection. BUT WAIT, THERE'S MORE! Here comes the ginsu knife. Fairly recently, Amazon has started a pre-order promotion. They take an extra 5% off pre-order titles and guarantee that you will pay the price listed at the time of order OR the price at the

time it is shipped, whichever is less. With art books being published in such short runs, it is essential that you get your order filled. Confidence in your dealers, whether online or in person, is essential.

[Slide] Here's a penny-pinching tip that can quickly add up to big savings: Use coupons! Sounds tacky, doesn't it? Yet, during April, I saved an additional \$150 from Books-a-Million alone by using them. In their promotions for new titles, Books-a-Million generally sends members an offer of \$10 off any \$50 order. I stick a note to my computer listing coupon codes and their expiration dates. I find Barnes & Noble coupons at barnesnoblecoupons.com, which often provides unadvertised savings anywhere from 10% to 25% on single items. When applied to an expensive purchase, the savings can be substantial. Googling "Alibris coupons" provides sites listing codes for discount savings. Unlike Books-a-Million and Barnes & Noble, Alibris allows the same coupon to be used for multiple purchases, but the savings are generally modest; they can, however, offset shipping costs. By a conservative estimate, the Clark will save approximately \$2,000 this year by using coupons.

[Slide] Retrospective collection development is burgeoning now that a whole new world of secondary book dealers has emerged. Can anyone remember those dense catalogues booksellers used to send around before internet shopping? Those pages were as time consuming to search as they were mind numbing. If you were looking for a particular title rather than just browsing, you would call the usual suspects to see if

anyone had a copy. Following the laws of supply and demand, you would pay what your supplier demanded. But around the turn of the century, we entered a new era.

Suddenly, all of those supposedly scarce, over-priced art books started showing up at a fraction of the cost at Mom and Pop online bookstores all around the world. The internet has particularly impacted the market for books and exhibition catalogues published outside the United States. The specialized book dealer suffered; but what librarian in charge of a fixed budget would knowingly purchase an Australian exhibition catalogue for \$750 from a US dealer when a copy of comparable condition was available in Australia for only \$30 (true example). Likewise, out-of-print German catalogues are usually more available in Germany, and so on. In short: the marketplace has changed and many fine art book dealers had to rethink their business model and recreate themselves to remain competitive in the contemporary market. Happily, most were able to make the necessary changes and remain in business.

Fortunately there are some excellent meta-site search engines similar to ADDALL that are dedicated to used books. Moreover, many independent used book dealers now sell new books and remainders. While these sources cannot offer new books as quickly as sites dealing exclusively with current imprints, they nonetheless offer tremendous savings opportunities. **[Slide]** Let's take a look at two of my favorite go-to sites.

Previously, ADDALL's used book search engine was my first choice when searching for an out-of-print publication. The site is easy to use, allows for various search strategies, and shows results in a clear and easy to read format. Recently, however, I have switched my allegiance to ViaLibri, which has significantly enhanced their search

capabilities with the addition of several important, international bookselling sites. ViaLibri advertises that they offer the most diverse and complete results of any secondary search engine, and I would have to agree. **[Slide]** More than the depth of their searches, however, what really caught my attention was the automatic translation feature, which utilizes Google translator. This is most useful when assessing the condition of a book sold on a non-English site. In my case, it's always the German descriptions that leave me wondering.

Dealers listing on sites such as Alibris, Half, or Ebay pay a commission and/or a monthly fee. Most dealers willingly extend a discount -- usually 10%, but sometimes higher -- if you purchase directly from them. I usually reserve this option for the more expensive items, since I prefer the ease of a click-through purchase. However, certain dealers whom I use frequently have requested that I go directly through them, and I always try to extend them this courtesy.

[Slide] Here's a tip from a haste-makes-waste learning experience: when searching for a fresh publication, you occasionally encounter an irresistible bargain. "Eureka!" you say. But imagine your chagrin when the book arrives printed on pulp, with a flimsy cover, no images, no index, and a great big PROOF label. In your rush to get a deal you overlooked the ARC in the description. I regard ARC as an acronym for "aren't really cheap," because you're going to have to buy this one all over again. ARC actually stands for "advance reading copy" and was probably picked up free at a conference like

ALA. Caveat emptor: If ARC was in the book's description, you will have a hard time justifying a return.

[Slide] Alas, the World Wide Web is no longer a safe place for the unsuspecting: the golden age is over. Buyers now need to be wary when purchasing from an unknown dealer, casting a more critical eye on the description of both the BOOK and the BOOK DEALER.

[Slide] POP QUIZ: Which of these booksellers would you buy from? Look closely, what does the book dealer on the left have that the one on the right lacks? Aside from the really cool hat. BOOKS!!! Pretty basic concept – buy books from someone that has them. There are now many booksellers bloating the used book lists that do not actually have books. But how would anyone even come up with such an idea?

[Slide] Let's look at these enticing ads, "Make your fortune selling books and have no inventory expenses," or even better, "Open your own bookstore today," without "the money or the space to maintain a book inventory." What are these people actually selling? Traditional dropshippers act as a middle man, collecting full retail price from the buyer, sending an order and paying wholesale to a third-person supplier, and then having the third-person supplier ship the goods directly to the purchaser. But the internet has produced a breed of dropshipper that has added a new twist, making the

practice more profitable for them, but more insidious for the rest of us. By sending out a spider over used book aggregators, like ABE and Half, they gather records from other dealers, and then list them as their own with a substantial mark up. After receiving an order, they turn around and order the least expensive available copy and ask that third-person dealer to ship directly to the original buyer without a packing slip. While not illegal, it is a shady practice that is frowned upon by most legitimate bookdealers. These sellers are known alternately as drop shippers, megalisters, or my favorite, “greedy book-peddling vultures.”

[Slide] Here are a few tell tale signs that you might be dealing with a “greedy book-peddling vulture.” Chief among them is the lack of information concerning the book in question. The description will be long on conditionals (may have, could have) but short on actual condition. Or they will state that it is “standard used condition.” What does that mean? It could be anything from opened once to having the cover half off. Also, they tend to have very restrictive return policies, accepting books back only if “not as described.” Well, you will have a hard time making your case that the book isn’t as described if the dealer never actually described it! They also are notorious for not responding to customer’s queries either before or after the sale. After all, what can they tell you about a book they have never seen before?

[Slide] The listing from Half.com contains a prime example of a drop-shipper / megalister/vulture listing, i.e., those at the bottom of the list. Note that the dealer ships

from “multiple locations.” Also, if we look closer at the item’s description **[slide]** we find that it “may contain markings” and additional contents “may not be included.”

I choose not to patronize this breed of seller for various reasons. If they can find a less expensive copy somewhere on the web, so can I. Also, even if they claim to have a book in stock, they are actually relying on someone else’s inventory; I would be wasting valuable time should they be unable to fill an order. Finally, I won’t patronize them out of respect for genuine dealers who maintain an inventory and incur all of its related expenses.

[Slide] So, whom can you trust? First and foremost, you can trust all of the book dealers down in the exhibition hall; please take time to connect with them at some point during the conference. You can’t go wrong with these vendors or with the other ARLIS affiliate members that were unable to attend. But what about all of those anonymous sellers that pop up on an out-of-print search? How does one tell the good from the bad? First, consider the source. Are they member of ILAB/LILA (International League of Antiquarian Book dealers)? If dealers list books with ILAB/LILA, it’s a pretty good bet that they are reputable: the book is in hand and as described.

[Slide] ILAB/LILA is a members-only listing site with the mission of maintaining standards and integrity within the bookselling profession. Unlike other vendor

aggregators, membership is not based solely on fees. ILAB members must undergo a stringent screening process and sign off on the group's rigorous code of ethics. **[Slide]**

Besides receiving peace of mind from dealing with an ILAB member, the site offers some useful features, particularly the multi-lingual dictionary and a glossary of book-terminology. I am drawing a distinction here between purchasing from ILAB members and purchasing via the ILAB site itself. Unlike Amazon, Alibris, and ABE, ILAB does not include shipping charges, necessitating an additional layer of communication with the vendor.

All of the used book dealer sites include a rating system for vendors, usually based on fulfillment rates. In general, I find these scores to run high, with an occasional negative comment buried among the positives. My rule of thumb is that while a high rating means little, a low rating presumably means something.

[Slide] The title of this session hinted at a discussion of Ebay, so here are a few brief thoughts. Do not be afraid to use Ebay. I usually reserve it for some of the more expensive or harder to find volumes because Ebay results are not included on AddAll or ViaLibri.

Actually, Ebay has two shopping options – their trademark auction site and a more conventional “stores” section. As with any other used bookstore, purchasing is a click through process, usually using PayPal for added security. Some dealers have a “make an offer” button. Take advantage of it. I once for a book on Ebay listed for \$1,000 that

was offered elsewhere on the web for \$1,500 to \$1,800. After first verifying the book's condition, I made an offer of \$900, which the dealer accepted. It was a win-win situation.

As for the auction side: I recommend determining your maximum bid and locking it in right away. Bidding rises incrementally and will stop when your bid is reached. It can be too tempting to keep taking a peek and drive up the price beyond what you planned to spend. And that is totally contrary to the bargain hunting I have been promoting today.