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The CRIV Sheet

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From the Editor

This issue of *The CRIV Sheet* reports on site visits from this past spring that took place after the final issue of *The CRIV Sheet* in the 2001–2002 year went to press. Although the site visits in March and May did not allow immediate print publication, reports were posted online at the CRIVPage as soon as they became available. This issue also features two reports from Aspen Publishing. At the CRIV's request, Stuart Mowat, the chief information officer at Aspen, provides an update on the business system at Aspen. J. Craig Garrett, Aspen's library liaison, also prepared a progress report and presented it to the CRIV in Orlando, Fla., as a follow-up to the May site visit. The report, in chart form, outlines individual problems, their solutions and the status of improvements as of July. I want to thank all the authors of the reports for their excellent contributions and their patience in seeing this material through until publication.

The November issue introduces a new CRIV year. The new committee met at the 2002 AALL Annual Meeting in Orlando, Fla., where members were assigned to subcommittees. The members of the 2002–2003 CRIV and its subcommittees are listed on the cover. We look forward to a busy and productive year and plan to keep members posted on new developments with CRIVGrams and *The CRIV Sheet*. Please let me know if there are topics you would like to suggest or if you would like to write an article for *The CRIV Sheet*.

I am very pleased to welcome Lovisa Lyman as my co-editor this year. She is an experienced editor with a strong background in law library acquisitions, collection development and legal reference. In addition, she teaches legal writing part time. She previously served on the CRIV from 1995 to 1998 and was vice chair in 1997–1998. She can be reached at lymanl@lawgate.byu.edu.

Aspen Reverse Site Visit: The Vendor Asks the Questions

The CRIV sponsored a reverse site visit between Aspen and the Law Library Association of Greater New York April 23. The event came about after Aspen President and Chief Executive Officer Jane Butler considered the site visit concept as an opportunity to conduct a dialogue with customers in their law library environments. In a reverse-site visit, the vendor executives

are the guests of the librarians. The vendor may query the hosts to learn more about how its products are received, processed and use. Alison Alifano, associate director of library services at Sullivan & Cromwell, and Bill Mills, associate librarian at New York Law School, report on the library visits as well as the open forum luncheon hosted by New York Law School.

Alison Alifano

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Aspen Visits Sullivan & Cromwell

A group of Aspen executives arrived at Sullivan & Cromwell April 23 in New York for a reverse site visit. My staff and I were prepared to address six issues and problems with Aspen: supplement updates, renewals, customer service, returns, payments and account numbers.

I began by noting that our library could serve as an example for Aspen of how other firm libraries operate. Sullivan & Cromwell could highlight problems and concerns that many other libraries have had with Aspen Publishing over the last few years.

We described the problems Sullivan & Cromwell had experienced over the last two years in correctly updating current subscriptions. Large law firms with multiple domestic and international offices process material for all their offices. Aspen agreed to send one box of supplements for all of Sullivan & Cromwell's offices, rather than separate boxes. One box and invoice would save considerable processing time.

The discussion segued to acquisitions problems, in which S&C wasn't receiving materials it had ordered. For large sets, such as the Corporation Service, Aspen uses an outside vendor to

produce sets on demand. The contract stipulates that the turnaround time is seven days. Ideally, once the product is shipped, Aspen is alerted and the update order is placed. For unknown reasons, we have had problems with receipt of the original order. Supplementation was received subsequent to the order, but the set we claimed never arrived. The Aspen executives appreciated hearing about this issue and noted the details. They assured us that they would trace the order to determine where the system broke down.

The payment process is particularly problematic with Aspen. We have had the "misapplied-payment" experience on many occasions even when we were careful to include the invoice number on the check and the remittance stub. The Aspen executives took a specific example with them to find out why our payment was misapplied.

The payment problems quite naturally led to a discussion about account numbers and the unwanted creation of new ones. Prior to the billing system change in 2001, the S&C acquisitions clerk worked closely with Aspen to consolidate all S&C accounts into one primary account number. However, since then, whenever a new order is placed, a new account number has been created

rather than including a new subscription under the firm's primary account number. Standing-order items sometimes arrive with different account numbers as well. Aspen agreed to work on consolidating the firm's various account numbers on return to its offices.

Returns were the next topic. It sometimes takes more than two months for a return to be posted to our statement. What causes such a delay? Aspen explained that once the return is received, assuming that all of the appropriate paperwork is enclosed, it should take only two to three weeks for the return to appear as a credit on the statement. If there is a problem or if all the paperwork is not included and it has to be investigated, it could take two months for the return to appear on the statement, but absolutely no longer.

After Aspen executives addressed our questions, they inquired about how S&C chooses between paper and electronic formats and what happens to a release after it is delivered. During a tour of the library, I showed them the check-in and return processes and explained the paper-versus-electronic selection process at S&C. When the library subscribes to an electronic product, we do not necessarily cancel the paper copy. I explained that such decisions may also occur in a number of large law firms servicing lawyers in multiple countries and offices.

Throughout the visit, Aspen executives were interested in the problems and issues that were raised. They came away with suggestions and information that will help develop solutions to some of their customers' concerns.

Aspen Visits New York Law School

New York Law School Library hosted the luncheon and afternoon sessions of the CRIV-sponsored reverse site visit with Aspen Publishing. The Law Library Association of Greater New York organized the event. Seven Aspen representatives fielded questions and comments from the 21 LLAGNY members who attended the luncheon.

Aspen Library Liaison and Law School Manager J. Craig Garrett emphasized the importance of the CRIV's effort to orient the Aspen executives to librarians' perspectives on vendor issues. He reminded us that none of the Aspen representatives present, other than himself, has a library degree or a library background. The patterns set in this first reverse site visit by Aspen would set a positive example for future site visits by other vendors, Garrett said.

The luncheon session focused on ordering, receiving, invoicing and returns of Aspen products, as well as products and product development. The questions from librarians reflected concern about the company's accounting and credit practices and with the Vista business system. The Aspen representatives answered questions or promised to follow up with measures to correct these problems.

The librarians present noted that many of the customer-service problems cited in the CRIV site visit to Aspen in March 2000 were still apparent. The new Vista computer system deployed in the intervening time has not yielded all the improvements that were promised, and many problems appear to have worsened. The librarians requested that Aspen review the training program for its customer-service staff and recommit itself to resolving some of the service issues that had been noted.

The group then raised questions about the future of Aspen's product offerings, particularly its computer-based services. The company plans to enhance the online presence of its secondary sources, primarily by developing hyperlinks from primary legal sources on its Loislaw online service. The Aspen representatives

acknowledged the possibility that Aspen might pursue joint Web site ventures with CCH, a sister company within the Kluwer conglomerate. At the same time, the Aspen representatives maintained that the company remains committed to print products. Aspen plans to produce about 30 to 40 new print titles in the coming year.

The Aspen representatives were receptive to the librarians' feedback about product development. They agreed that Aspen should not waste efforts on developing CD-ROM products because this medium is becoming outmoded. The company could best promote an online presence by offering customers reasonable site licenses for Internet-based products, the librarians said. One librarian recommended that Aspen cultivate its relationship with LexisNexis™, making Aspen secondary sources available through that system's search engines. Another suggested that Aspen offer customers trial subscriptions to its Internet-based products and that such trials not be linked to billed accounts.

The luncheon question-and-answer session was followed by a tour of New York Law School's Mendik Library. The tour focused on the technical services area, including the acquisitions, serials and cataloging departments. Paul Mastrangelo, the technical services librarian, guided the representatives through the offices where Aspen's print products are received, sorted and processed for the shelves. He described the receiving process and detailed his methods for dealing with materials that are unordered or unwanted. Peggy Perrin, the chief cataloger, unlocked the mysteries of the cataloging process for the Aspen visitors. Their tour ended at the library's computer labs and rare book room.

Aspen's executives displayed a keen interest in the library's procedures for selecting new acquisitions and the details of how the library chooses between print and computer-based sources. The technical services librarians outlined this process and answered questions.

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The Aspen representatives asked whether librarians would prefer e-mail or Web-based notifications of new Aspen offerings. The library currently relies almost entirely on paper-based selection sources, but the librarians agreed that this will inevitably change as the popularity of electronic sources continues to grow. The librarians also affirmed their preference

for standing orders over periodic "invitations" to purchase updated supplements or new editions. The representatives seemed receptive to this preference, especially after viewing firsthand the volume and complexity of acquisitions in a large academic law library setting.

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CRIV Visits Aspen's Customer Care and Distribution Center

In March 2000, the CRIV visited Aspen's New York headquarters to discuss customer-service issues and to learn more about the departments that handle sales, orders, distribution, returns, billing and resolution of account problems. On our follow-up site visit in May, we met at Aspen's Customer Care and Distribution Center in Frederick, Md., in keeping with our continued focus on customer service. The CRIV learned about new developments at Aspen in the past two years during this second visit, especially as they relate to customer service.

Among the business goals Aspen President and Chief Executive Officer Jane Butler discussed with the CRIV at the first site visit, two in particular resonated again during our second visit because of their impact on customer service. The first goal involved the expansion of the company's electronic publishing and the bundling of electronic product lines. The second was to improve service by implementing "one-to-one marketing," linking law libraries with a single national or regional sales contact person to provide optimum service.

Two years later, Aspen has achieved its publishing and marketing goals related to the electronic market. With the acquisition of Loislaw in 2001, the company has the electronic platform it needs to deliver a broad range of legal tools and services and reinforce Aspen's identity as a major legal publisher. Butler reminded the CRIV that Aspen did not originally specialize in legal publishing and had relatively few law library accounts. Therefore, until recently, the needs of the law library customer were not as familiar as they may have been to other established legal publishers. Butler acknowledged that Aspen is committed to improving its customer service for law library customers.

The goal of "one-to-one" marketing has also become a reality since 2000. Aspen has indeed tailored its sales force to provide most large law firm, government and academic law libraries with a dedicated sales representative. Its success with sales has prompted Aspen to implement the "one-to-one" linkage on the customer service side as well. Under the new model, the customer and the sales representative will both work with a designated customer-service representative, who is capable of correcting existing problems and identifying ways of improving service to the account. The sales and customer-service representatives can thus work together for the benefit of the customer. Some library customers will prefer to work with one

contact only, and they may continue to do so because the sales and customer-service representatives will be able to communicate as a team. Others who want to work directly with the two representatives, depending on the services they need, will be welcome to do so. The new and improved customer-service model eliminates the need to make countless phone calls trying to reach a person who can finally resolve a problem.

At the time of the CRIV's first site visit to Aspen, the company was preparing to replace its existing computer systems with an integrated Vista system. The new system was designed to correct the myriad of chronic problems customers encountered with orders, shipments and invoices. Aspen reiterated many times during the 2000 site visit that a system overhaul was the key to resolving old problems and improving future service. However, on the follow-up visit, the new system in July 2000 did not prove to be an immediate panacea. It had introduced its own complexities and new problems. Moreover, the company's acquisition of smaller publishers continued in 2000–2001, and the new units had to be integrated quickly into the system. Aspen hired Stuart Mowat as chief information officer during this period to stabilize the system and enhance the full range of business and customer-service functions. At the CRIV's request, Mowat reported on the current status of the new business system (p. 11).

Despite Aspen's massive overhaul of its computer systems, some of the perennial problems librarians have complained about for years have not been resolved. The same scenarios and comments appeared over and over in the responses solicited by the CRIV both prior to the systems upgrade in 2000 and again two years later. These include problems caused by poor communication between sales representatives and customer-service personnel, multiple accounts, duplicate shipments, misapplied payments, unidentified credits and failure to credit returns. One problem actually appears to have worsened since 2000: Standing-order titles inexplicably lapsed for many library customers, causing extra work and inconvenience when they attempted to reinstate them.

Aspen has acknowledged all along that the new business system, however fundamental to a solution, is not the complete answer for every problem. Realistically, it will take some time for Aspen to address and resolve the many problems reported by law library customers. Since the CRIV's first site visit, Aspen has

improved some of its services and is planning to enhance others. A partial list is provided here:

- The departments handling customer care, order entry, subscriptions and returns have been reorganized so that they coordinate with one another and report to one director.
- New staff has been added, so that the number of customer-care representatives and supervisors continues to grow. Between 1998 and 2002, the customer-care staff grew from 32 to more than 50. Aspen will attempt to attract more experienced customer-service personnel by offering higher salaries.
- A key quality-control manager position was created to supervise representatives in the customer-care department and to follow through or track a problem until it is resolved.
- Compensation for customer-service personnel will include a system of incentives so that levels of success in resolving a problem will be reflected in employees' salaries.
- A law library hot line, 877/LAW-LIBR (877/529-5427), was established as part of a commitment to improve service to law librarians in 2000.
- Aspen set up an e-mail address for questions and problems related to law library accounts: lawlibrarian@aspenpubl.com.

- An Automated Response Unit line available 24 hours a day allows librarians to access account information or request other services, such as return labels or invoice copies: 800/234-1660.
- Aspen hired former librarian J. Craig Garrett in the fall of 2001 to fill its new law library-liaison position. He has visited and contacted law librarian customers as his schedule permits. Garrett has responded to many requests for help with account problems from law librarians in the six months he has worked for Aspen.
- New software allows Aspen sales representatives to view customer-service data.
- Library accounts will have a designated customer-service representative as well as a sales representative.
- All calls to customer care are assigned a "trouble-ticket" number for tracking purposes.
- A customer-service task force composed of people from different departments within Aspen is being created. The task force will be dedicated to identifying improvements and implementing them successfully.
- Measurement of customer satisfaction will be conducted on an ongoing basis. The CRIV recommended that Aspen use techniques such as call-backs, surveys and monitoring of several large law library accounts.

Aspen Addresses Customer-Service Issues

During the visit to Aspen's Customer Care and Distribution Center, members of the CRIV enjoyed an open dialogue with Aspen principals on a range of customer-service issues that were prominent in our survey of AALL members, including a perceived lack of communication and coordination between customer care and sales; training of customer-service staff; call-center staffing ratios, calls and response time; and the library-relations program.

Customer Care and Sales. Many librarians informed the CRIV that they had encountered an apparent "disconnect" between customer care and sales. For example, in some cases, sales representatives could not determine whether a standing-order title had lapsed in error or whether it had been deliberately cancelled. One customer reported that standing-order reinstatements she had requested several times from her sales representative were never shipped. Scenarios such as this have been common in the past couple of years, but Aspen has recently made changes to improve the situation. Most significantly, a new realignment (announced at the site visit) will provide many firm, government and academic law libraries with a dedicated customer-care representative. This means that the

sales and customer-service operations will be better coordinated to support overall service to law library customers.

Important system changes have already taken place to allow the sales force and customer-care representatives to share more information. In the new system, customer-care representatives access complete account activity and may enter additional new information pertaining to the account. Until this past spring, the sales department did not have access to the same level of information. Aspen's new software, the "Periscope," allows the sales force to view information in customer-care records not previously available to them. The old system used by the sales department was updated only every six months, preventing adequate coordination between the two departments. With the implementation of Periscope, Vista information is downloaded nightly to update the information available to the sales department. At present, however, the sales force still cannot access annotations that customer-care personnel made to the records by (e.g., during a phone call from a customer regarding a problem or account inquiry). The sales force is also unable to alter certain information on customer records.

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Aspen admitted that another possible cause of a "disconnect" between customer-care and sales departments could be multiple accounts. Depending on how a search query is run in Vista, one may not locate all of the accounts for a particular library. Aspen demonstrated several typical account searches during our visit. If a customer placed an order using a name or entry in a slightly different form than that listed on an existing account, a new account might be opened. Aspen recognizes that its customer-care staff must be trained to tailor their searching skills to the system; this has become a greater priority since the order-entry operation was incorporated into customer care at the beginning of the year.

Training. Many AALL members have reported speaking to a customer-service representative who assured the customer that he or she would remedy the problem, but the problems were never corrected. A sense of immense frustration pervaded the comments, because it was not uncommon for librarians to report the same problems many times to Aspen without any resolution. According to Judi McRee, director of Customer Care, new staff in the call center must undergo a two-week training course that covers basic customer-care procedures. However, it takes quite some time to develop the necessary expertise with the system, so Aspen holds weekly training sessions for customer-care representatives. McRee confirmed that there are different levels of customer-care representatives, describing some of the actions they are allowed to take. New supervisory positions are being filled to provide added support and to ensure follow-through with problems. Aspen recently conducted a comparison of customer-service positions in the region, including a salary study, and plans to recruit staff at higher skill and pay levels for jobs in the customer-care facility.

Staffing Ratios, Volume of Calls and Response Time.

Aspen employs 10 to 12 customer-care representatives to one supervisor. The customer-care department receives approximately 3,000 calls per day, averaging about 40,000 to 50,000 calls per month. The volume is not always steady. This past March, for instance, it tracked 100,000 calls. The unusually high level was due to an audit/collections notice that customers received, the first such mailing in 18 months. The automated response unit answered about 35 percent of these calls. An average call from a customer to the call center lasts about four minutes. Customer-care representatives are not under any constraints to complete calls within a set amount of time. A note field in Vista allows customer-care representatives to enter information pertaining to an account or details about a call. If a customer requests that a comment be entered into the system, that comment should be available to any other customer-care representative should the librarian need to call again about the same matter. This feature of the system should significantly help customers that need to contact Aspen more than once about a request. Aspen will begin assigning a "trouble-ticket" number to calls to aid in tracking and follow-through.

The CRIV also learned that messages left on Aspen's automated response system and calls taken directly by customer-care

representatives take priority over requests sent to the facility by regular mail, fax or e-mail. Mailed and faxed requests and queries may not receive a response for two to three weeks. The company is trying to improve the turnaround time and, as part of this effort, is looking into an e-mail-management report system. The targeted response time for e-mail requests is 24 hours. At the present time, two full-time employees respond to e-mail within three to five days.

Currently there are no Web capabilities for any kind of customer-care interaction, including claims. Claims now go through customer care/order entry before they are shipped. Because several librarians complained that back issues of newsletters were not available when they were claimed, Aspen is willing to retain stock of the newsletters for a longer period of time. In the past, newsletter issues were kept for a rolling 12-month period only. The CRIV has also recommended that Aspen archive at least one copy of all of its newsletters.

Following the CRIV site visit to Aspen in March 2000, Aspen set up a telephone hot line specifically for law librarians: 877/LAW-LIBR or 877/529-5427. The hot line is staffed by representatives who have a high level of training and the ability to resolve most account problems. Librarians have noted the positive difference this hot line has made in their interactions with Aspen. Unfortunately, the hot line is underutilized by many librarians because they are unaware that the number exists. Aspen does not publicize the number widely on its Web site or in advertisements to prevent non-law library customers from using it. The CRIV will remind librarians to use the number and inform Aspen about whether the hotline remains useful in communicating account problems and questions. Similarly, an e-mail address monitored by upper-level customer-care personnel is also available to law librarians: lawlibrarian@aspenpubl.com.

Library-Relations Program. During the first site visit in 2000 and again in July 2001, the CRIV and Aspen discussed instituting a library-relations program, similar to those at LexisNexis™, West, CCH, BNA and PLI. The library-relations programs at those publishers have facilitated an ongoing and mutually beneficial exchange between librarians and publishers. In the fall of 2001, Aspen hired former librarian J. Craig Garrett as its library liaison. Garrett, who was working for Loislaw, continued to do so for some months after accepting the library-liaison position with Aspen. He is now devoting his energies full time to Aspen's library-relations program. Though many librarians are now contacting him directly, he also receives referrals from Aspen's accounting, customer-care and sales departments. Customers are welcome to contact Garrett at 251/625-2341 or toll-free at 800/364-2512, extension 1529, or by e-mail at cgarrett@aspenpubl.com.

The CRIV also suggested that Aspen set up an advisory board of academic, private and public law librarians and issue a monthly electronic newsletter for the law library community. The newsletter would ideally include a list of upcoming releases, status reports on the Vista system, Web enhancements and research tips. It would not be a sales or marketing vehicle.

Conclusion. Aspen reported back to the CRIV in July during the AALL Annual Meeting in Orlando, Fla. The company updated the CRIV on measures to improve customer care; communication between the sales team and customer care; and plans to develop or expand the library-relations program. Aspen provided the

CRIV with a progress report on the issues we discussed during the site visit. (*Editor's note: The progress report presented to the CRIV in July appears in this issue of The CRIV Sheet on p. 11-12.*)

CRIV Brings Account-Management and Order-Fulfillment Problems to Aspen

Most of the complaints collected for the site visit fell into the categories of account management and order fulfillment. At the earlier site visit in 2000, Aspen was optimistic that the Vista system would correct all these problems. This has not been the case. Account-management and order-fulfillment challenges include returns, subscription renewals, standing orders and duplicate shipments.

Returns. In the first five months of 2002, Aspen processed 250,000 returns, contracting out some of the work. Currently, it takes Aspen two to three weeks to process a return after it is received. After delivery by one of the major mail carriers (U.S. Postal Service, UPS, FedEx, etc.), a return is opened in the warehouse and inspected to determine if it is resalable. If the invoice is included with the item, it is inspected and the bar code is scanned into the Vista computer system. If there are no discrepancies, the return will be posted to the account overnight. According to Pete Rozakis, Aspen's director of distribution, 90 percent of all returns do not present any problem and can be processed in this way, but some errors do occur. The installation of the new system in July 2000 resulted in a considerable backlog in the department because no returns could be processed for several months. This may account for some of the problems librarians reported last year with exceptionally long delays in crediting returns to their accounts.

If appropriate paperwork is not included with a return shipment, Aspen sends the item to the order-entry department for additional research before the return can be processed and reflected on the account. To ensure speedy processing, librarians should include the original invoice with a return shipment whenever possible. Return labels are available from Aspen to facilitate receipt and are usually mailed within 24 hours of a request. Though this process should result in credits being posted very quickly, customer service advises customers that it takes two billing cycles for a return to appear on an account. If nine months pass before a return is recorded, it has been lost. In cases such as this, Aspen will accept a customer's word and credit any outstanding invoice as paid.

Volume affects the speed with which returns are processed. Most returns come back during the first quarter of the year because new editions and supplements are mailed between October and December. The CRIV representatives questioned why the workload could not be better distributed over the year inasmuch as this practice affects other Aspen departments as well. Aspen responded that authors, many of them university faculty members, revise their publications during the summer. In addition, legislators enact laws and regulations during the late

summer or early fall. Thus updated materials are published and distributed during the last quarter of the year. There seems to be no viable way for Aspen to alter its publishing schedule.

Subscription Renewals. Many librarians complained about Aspen renewal notices. These notices, which resemble invoices, allow the customer to request renewal billing for annual subscriptions. Librarians say that the numbers on the renewal notices do not match the numbers on the invoices, causing a great deal of confusion. If a library does not respond to the renewal notice, there is a risk that the subscription will be dropped.

Aspen President and Chief Executive Officer Jane Butler asked the CRIV if law libraries would prefer an automatic renewal, or "auto-renew," so that the subscription would continue each year unless a library takes the action of canceling the title (for example, by marking the invoice accordingly and returning it to Aspen). The CRIV indicated that most libraries would prefer the auto-renew option because it reduces paperwork and saves the library the step of returning a renewal notice. As a result of our discussions, auto-renew will be the default for law library subscriptions unless individual libraries specify otherwise.

Standing-Order Problems. An alarming number of librarians reported problems with lapsed standing-order titles. As is the case with many other problems, multiple accounts appear to be one of the primary causes: Attempts to consolidate accounts have sometimes resulted in the inadvertent cancellation of standing orders. Some standing orders may have been lost when Aspen acquired a company and transferred its accounts. Returning a duplicate shipment, too, may cause the erroneous cancellation of the primary standing-order copy. Aspen's current policy is to require written notification before a standing order may be canceled so that titles are less likely to be dropped against the wishes of the library.

Some customers receive what Aspen refers to as a "positive notice" when a supplement is published instead of receiving the supplement automatically. The notice for supplemented titles usually states: "Our records indicate that you are not scheduled to receive the latest update to the title listed below. To ensure that you have the most current material, contact us to order." Some libraries prefer to be notified of new supplements each time one is published. However, a problem may arise when a library responds that it does wish to purchase the supplement if a standing order for that particular item is also listed under another account for the same customer. Moreover, a response to a positive notice could result in a standing order entered for that customer, and yet a notice will still continue to arrive each time

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a supplement is published! It seems to be difficult for Aspen to remove a customer from the "positive notification" database. If libraries do not want to receive positive notifications, they should notify Aspen, instead of ignoring the notices in light of the mischief they may cause in some cases.

Duplicate Shipments. Many librarians reported problems with duplicate shipments. The primary reason Aspen may denote an incorrect number of subscriptions to a library is due to the old business system. Claims for missing issues or supplements automatically added a standing order, which would result in duplicate shipments. When Aspen switched to Vista, its new business system, these duplicate orders were also transferred. Another reason is that libraries with multiple accounts may have a subscription or standing order to the same title under more than one account number. Back orders may create more than one standing order because an order may have been entered once when the title was back-ordered and again when it was published. Duplicate shipments may also result from overnight orders — i.e., one item is shipped quickly but the second ships by regular mail — and from placing an order over the Internet and then following up with a sales representative who places a

second order. Finally, in the past, Aspen has included librarians in "negative option notifications" mailings, which require a library to return the notice if it did *not* want to receive the material specified. A failure to respond could thus result in an extra copy of materials the library had ordered separately. Aspen is no longer sending these notices to libraries.

Supplementation Schedules. Librarians have requested more information on supplementation schedules. Though most of Aspen's treatises are updated only once a year, the CRIV recommended that Aspen post its supplementation schedule on its Web site and include information about supplements and new editions in a regularly published electronic newsletter for library customers. The CRIV and Aspen also discussed the possibility of allowing a library to opt for one annual invoice that would cover all the supplementation for the year rather than being billed with each piece. Although a large number of library customers could not or would not adopt this type of account, a few libraries have requested the flexibility to choose this option. Aspen will investigate these suggestions as well as the problems customers continue to have with duplicate shipments, positive notification and lapsed standing orders.

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Aspen Clarifies Its Billing Practices

Among the billing issues discussed with Aspen in May were insufficient title information on invoices and statements, invoices not sent with the products, solicitations that resemble invoices, shipping and handling charges, and misapplied or unapplied payments and credits.

Invoice Information. When the CRIV solicited comments from AALL members prior to the site visit, librarians responded with a number of complaints about the information on Aspen invoices. Truncation of titles was a common complaint. Until recently, Aspen's billing system limited the title line to 150 characters, making it difficult for customers as well as Aspen's customer-care representatives to recognize titles. Aspen customer-care staff now have a full title display. The company began to use standard abbreviations for a number of titles on its invoices in March. Eventually all Aspen titles would employ the standard abbreviations delineated in the *ALWD Citation Manual*, according to Aspen representatives. The CRIV suggested including the abbreviations on the Aspen Web site for greater convenience.

Invoices Mailed Separately. Aspen acknowledges that shipments arriving without invoices or invoices arriving separately from packages may be problematic for customers, particularly where there are multiple accounts for single institutions or where "bill to" and "ship to" information are not identical. Invoices sent separately travel first class, whereas packages ship surface. Thus the two could arrive days apart. If the "bill to" and "ship to" addresses vary even slightly, an invoice is separately mailed to the "bill to" address. Aspen now sends all packages with accompanying paperwork even if the "bill to" and "ship to" information vary. For a brief period in the winter of 1999-2000, an outside shipper handled Aspen

shipments, and Aspen mailed invoices separately. Some problems reported by librarians may date from this period.

Renewal Invitations. Aspen explained that periodical renewals are handled differently from pre-shipped item transactions. Payments for received items are treated as account receivables with specific invoices matching specific shipments. Renewal notices, on the other hand, are considered invitations to renew and are not actually invoices. If a payment is unwittingly made on what Aspen classifies as an "invitation," there is no corresponding "account-receivable" record at Aspen's end. This may result in a renewal appearing as an open item on a statement even though the librarian knows the payment has already been sent. A renewal invitation is designed for an affirmative reply, not a payment, which then generates an invoice. As noted earlier in the discussion of account management, Aspen plans to address this confusion by changing the subscription invitation format to a renewal invoice, "auto-renew." This will take several months.

Shipping and Handling. In response to complaints about excessive shipping and handling charges, Aspen issued a statement designed to clarify its new policy. The text was posted on several listservs as a CRIVGram soon after the CRIV visit. The text of Aspen's new policy follows:

Shipping and Handling Policy and Improvements

Aspen's current shipping and handling charge of 8.75 percent was raised in the fall of 2001 from 8.5 percent. This 0.25 percent increase represents Aspen's first shipping and handling increase in eight years, since the fall of 1994. To put this in perspective, for a \$150 single volume treatise, the shipping and handling fee was increased by 37 cents.

- Effective in April, Aspen set a cap of \$50 for shipping and handling fees for each shipping occurrence. As a result, all orders over \$571, shipped at one time, will be capped at \$50.
- In addition to this cap, low fixed shipping fees have been set for specific products including lightweight CD products. As a point of information, shipping and handling charges reflect picking, packing, interfiling, returns processing and miscellaneous warehouse expenses.

A flat fee of \$10 is charged for shipping and handling of a CD product. If a CD is bundled with a print product, the \$10 fee will be assessed over and above the \$50 cap established above. In addition to shipping and handling, Aspen adds sales tax for some states. Shipping and handling fees are not charged for credit card orders nor do customers receive invoices for these purchases.

Unapplied or Misapplied Payments and Credits. One source of unapplied or misapplied payments and credits was identified above: confusion between the “renewal invitations” and “renewal invoices.” A second source of unapplied or misapplied payments or credits may be the existence of multiple accounts, discussed in detail earlier. A third source is undoubtedly the company’s use of a lockbox between July 2000 and May 2002 to process payments. When payments are processed in this manner, invoices accompanying a payment are scanned into the system and the payment is applied to those invoices. However, if the printed invoice does not accompany the check, the payment is applied to any similar open charges, even if a customer identifies the invoice number on the check stub, because there is no human intervention.

During the site visit two years ago, Aspen indicated that only payments accompanied by statements went to a lockbox. Invoice payments were still processed manually. The site visit report explained that as long as customers identified the invoice on the check stub, their payments would be applied as specified. However Aspen changed this procedure when it installed its new system only a few months later in July 2000 and failed to notify customers. After that date, both statements and invoices went to the lockbox; any alterations to invoices were not noted by trained personnel. More than any other factor, this explains why many librarians reported problems with unapplied or misapplied payments and credits. For example, if a customer had annotated an invoice or statement with information about which items were returned, not received or already paid, Aspen did not receive these messages. Further, any payments received without an invoice were applied to any open charges in order of listing. This meant that some items that may have been returned or not received were noted as paid, and other items further down the list were left outstanding. If the amounts did not exactly match, it could appear as if there was a credit on an account — a frequent occurrence, judging by complaints received by the CRIV.

Aspen has now changed its procedures and assures the CRIV that invoices for its law library customers will now be handled manually. A new remittance address for law library customers will soon be clearly printed on invoices and statements: Aspen Publishers, Inc., P.O. Box 911, Frederick, MD 21705.

According to Aspen, payments sent to the old address will still be processed. The CRIV published this important change in a CRIVGram following the site visit and posted it to several listservs to ensure that the information would reach the law library community in a timely fashion.

Unsolicited Shipments, Telemarketing and Other Miscellaneous Issues

A number of problematic issues that do not fit within the parameters of a single area include unsolicited shipments, telemarketing, loose-leaf binders, the comprehensiveness of product information on the Aspen Web site, rush deliveries and online product content.

Unsolicited Shipments. Aspen informed the CRIV that it is not its policy to send unsolicited material to law library accounts. Nonetheless several law librarians complained that they had received materials that they had never ordered. Thus some initial discussion was directed to a definition of “unsolicited material.” Aspen does not regard CD-ROMs that are packaged with print treatises as unsolicited. The company explained that the CD-ROMs are integral to the product. It would be more expensive to produce and mail the CDs separately from the print product. The CRIV acknowledged that this kind of product bundling is not unusual in the context of legal publications.

If the unsolicited shipments involve products related to an item or topic area from which a customer has purchased previously, the CRIV explained that it is unacceptable to ship these without

an existing order. Jane Butler, Aspen’s president and Chief Executive Officer, agreed that these products should not be shipped to law libraries. Aspen’s longtime policy stipulates mailing materials only when a library specifically requests them. She asked for examples of any specific titles that may have been sent in this manner, so she could investigate and follow up with the CRIV in July at the AALL Annual Meeting in Orlando, Fla.

Aspen identified several reasons why unsolicited materials are sent erroneously. One scenario related to multiple or duplicate accounts. Aspen regards multiple accounts as a “feeder” problem that generates unsolicited shipments in a number of areas. Once these multiple accounts are cleared up, that source of unsolicited materials will be eliminated.

Unsolicited shipments also arise from Aspen’s negative-option notification system. Under the negative system, customers receive a mailing stating that a product is available for shipment. Unless recipients notify Aspen that they do not wish to receive it, the item will be sent. Aspen asserted that

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this marketing tool is not used for law library accounts. The company has tried to exclude all law library names and addresses. Anyone who receives such a solicitation in error should contact Aspen using the law librarian hot line: 877/LAW-LIBR or 877/529-5427.

Telemarketing/E-marketing. Telemarketing and the newer phenomenon of e-marketing raised the hackles of a number of law librarians in the CRIV survey, where librarians detailed an annoying frequency of telemarketing calls, especially about Loislaw. Aspen responded that Aspen and Loislaw have different marketing groups and tactics. Telemarketers for the regular sales group are not supposed to contact large firm, academic, or government law libraries or individual members of AALL. Instead, these customers are encouraged to work with designated account representatives. Because smaller law firms are sometimes not included on the Aspen AALL list, Aspen may continue to contact them. For those who do not want to be contacted by Aspen's telemarketers, call the Aspen law librarian hot line, not the telemarketer. Aspen can then add those customers to its "Do-Not-Contact" list. Similarly, Aspen maintains a "Do-Not-Promote" list for customers who prefer not to receive messages via e-mail or direct mail.

Unlike Aspen's regular marketing force, Loislaw sales personnel use telemarketing for leads. It neither attempts to suppress the Aspen AALL list nor determines if more than one name is at the same address. Understandably, Aspen and Loislaw are eager to publicize that Aspen treatises are going online with searchable engines. Nevertheless, beginning in March, Aspen responded to complaints from librarians and implemented the suppression criteria necessary to eliminate AALL customers from these calls altogether. The field sales organization has begun contacting customers to set up appointments for visits.

Loose-leaf Binders. Librarians reported that loose-leaf binders break too easily and the rings lose their alignment. They also indicated that Aspen was slow to respond to requests for replacement binders; in some cases, the requests for binders were placed on backorder with no due date specified. Aspen encouraged librarians to report any defective binders, whether the defect results from wear and tear or from a manufacturing problem. The company will send replacement binders at no charge and try to improve the turnaround time. Most binders should not be on backorder, and, if they are to be shipped to a customer as a replacement, should be received within 30 days. Further, Aspen is currently evaluating the quality of its binders. As for replacement pages for loose-leaf publications, the cost depends on the number of pages needed; customers can discuss their specific needs with Aspen representatives.

Titles on Web Site. Aspen and the CRIV discussed the comprehensiveness of Aspen's Web site as a resource for titles and supplements. Aspen admitted that, though most titles are listed on the Web site, they are perhaps not described as fully as necessary for efficient retrieval. Its Vista computer system drives the Web site, and the records need to be cleaned. Some titles are not where they ideally should be for precise subject retrieval — e.g., bankruptcy under commercial law. Aspen is considering using cross-references in its Web site resource but also recommended two courses of action: Notify representatives when a title does not appear or use the feedback button on the display to notify the webmaster that a title is not listed. The Web site resource may be searched by title, author, ISBN and keyword. Pricing information is included with the title information.

Rush Delivery. Librarians reported that, on occasion, rush deliveries did not arrive on time. Instead, some rush items were shipped with regular delivery. Aspen stated that it does, for the most part, honor rush requests. However, if an account is on hold for a particular reason, the rush would be held over, possibly adding an extra day or two to a rush delivery. The CRIV members recommended that the customer always be notified if for any reason a rush order will not ship as expected.

Online Publications. Aspen is taking steps to ensure more efficient navigation of its electronic products. Although there are inherent differences between online and print products, the company is investigating concerns about missing content in one online product and considering the CRIV's suggestion about a structure for adding pagination to enhance the electronic publications. Aspen promised that it would look into the issues surrounding online services and report back to the CRIV. The date of release is provided at the very top of the online product.

Conclusion. During the CRIV site visit, Aspen's expressions of good faith, willingness to listen to customer feedback and explain why problems persist, and ongoing efforts to improve policies and procedures resulted in a productive and hopeful encounter. Aspen plans to create a task force within the company to work on issues discussed at the site visit. Realistically, it will take some time to resolve these issues completely. It is encouraging that the company is committed to improving services, so that the intrinsic value of its products will not be undermined by faulty operations or service.

Acknowledgements. The CRIV expresses its appreciation to Jane Butler, Aspen president and chief executive officer, for Aspen's willingness to host the CRIV visit. The committee also thanks J. Craig Garrett, Aspen's law library liaison, for organizing the meeting and discussion. We would like to acknowledge all of the Aspen attendees for their time and hospitality and for making the visit productive and enlightening.

Aspen's Business Processing System: An Update

*Stuart Mowat
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It has been two years since Aspen Publishers updated AALL on the status of its business processing system, Vista. The new business system is an Enterprise Resource Planning computer system that is used in every aspect of the business, linking all departments together with shared information for planning, processing and reporting. In those two years, the system has progressed — it has been a long road, but we are now on a smooth highway.

To continue the highway metaphor, the implementation of a new ERP system is like rebuilding a massive piece of infrastructure while it is still in use. Imagine, for example, the Wilson Bridge on the D.C. Beltway, the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway or the San Francisco Bay Bridge being rebuilt, while everyone continues to use it — not exactly an unimaginable scenario! This is how it was with Aspen's ERP systems. We changed our order-entry, invoicing, inventory, accounts-receivable, accounts-payable and royalty systems at one time, and the business continued to run while the changes occurred. Whether one is describing the reconstruction of a bridge or a business system, even after a job is completed, it takes a little time for the dust to settle. Yet at Aspen, with much happening all at once and virtually no time to adjust, we immediately struggled through subscription renewal problems and many other difficulties. In fact, Aspen's system, by supporting many features, had become very complex. In order to use it effectively, staff needed to receive in-depth training — an ongoing process.

The implementation occurred in three stages: In the first six months after initial implementation in July 2000, Aspen worked through the normal bugs that arise in every new system implementation. The second stage took place during 2001. Normally, an ERP system would at this point be in its settling-down phase. However, Aspen acquired six additional companies in that time frame, all of which needed to be integrated into the Vista system — and full integration was needed to fully realize the back-office cost savings that are always part of a merger or acquisition. Difficulties arose as each new acquisition added its own idiosyncrasies and thus required various enhancements to the system. Each enhancement to a system creates its own set

of problems, new and self-inflicted. As 2001 progressed, Aspen engaged in the cycle of implementing new enhancements and then correcting their unexpected consequences.

We are now in the third stage, where the system has stabilized and full integration is moving forward. This year's acquisitions are merging into the system without additional enhancements. The system supports books, standing orders and subscriptions, all from a single system, and is now reporting accurate data via our data warehouse. It has great expandability, which is very important to us. We are working on speeding up the returns processing, so that returns received with the appropriate documentation (i.e., the original invoice) are processed in days rather than weeks. When a problem appears, we can check to see if it is a result of human error, rather than assuming it is a computer mistake.

Aspen now processes 40 percent of its orders electronically and is looking at means to increase this percentage by working with subscription and telemarketing agencies. Aspen often receives orders via PUBNET, a service of Bowker. The major advantages of electronic ordering are the obvious ones of greater speed and accuracy for order entry, but it has also meant faster shipping because of the way electronic orders come to us. Aspen is working on a system that merges customer accounts overnight (once the customer has agreed) and allows the company to react much faster to customer requests for account consolidation.

The sales department is also using a new in-house written system that reads its data from the Vista data warehouse, thus immensely increasing the accuracy and currency of the data available.

There are, of course, always ways to further improve the system. Aspen envisions greater interaction with its customers via its Web page. Although the company currently does accept orders on the Web, further customer interaction is limited. Aspen is now developing additional enhancements that will enable it to report order status and review customer statements and details of standing orders and subscriptions — all positive steps the company is taking to ensure a high level of quality service.

Report to the CRIV from Aspen Publishers, Inc.

by J. Craig Garrett

Initial Problem	Solution	Status
Not all items/publications are listed on the Web site.	We are reviewing all titles and ensuring revised descriptions on Web site and no suppression of out-of-stock items.	Completed
No publication of supplement schedules	All supplementation schedules will be added to the individual product pages, including the date of the last supplement update and the update frequency for the product.	Ongoing, supplementation cycle has been added.
No easy access to filing instructions for supplements	All filing instructions for new product releases will be posted on the product Web pages along with all highlights.	Completed
Renewal notices/ subscription notices treated as invitations	Auto-renew for all libraries (excluding government and education) unless the library specifies otherwise.	Completed
Binders break too easily and what about replacement binders?	We are reviewing current binder suppliers to determine if we can provide heavier clip mechanism; replacement binders for all publications should be in stock and if not, no longer than 30 days to restock.	Reviewing binder designs, will survey librarians at AALL and by e-mail to determine preference. Deadline for decision was Sept. 1, 2002.
Rush or overnight shipments not received	Institution of a new procedure regarding rush shipments. When a product is rush ordered, the person taking that order will be tasked with the follow up the following day.	Completed
Credit holds have affected library accounts.	All library accounts have had credit levels adjusted. Unless an account is severely past due, no hold should be placed.	Completed for currently identified law library accounts.
Identification of library accounts	All accounts have been reviewed and cross-checked with the existing AALL file to ensure proper coding; we will continue to work on this as accounts are consolidated.	Completed
Payments	New P.O. Box address released.	Completed
Development of team concept among customer care, sales and accounting	Job descriptions have been drafted, and interviews will be scheduled in Customer Care.	Completed
Abbreviations on invoices are not readily identifiable and Customer Care cannot view enough of the record.	Standard abbreviation list to be posted on the Web site and Customer Care viewing screens to be adjusted.	Customer Care screens are changed. Standard abbreviation list posted.
Back issues of products are not available.	We are working with ProQuest to explore a PDF archive and customer access to all past periodical issues.	Completed
Cannot opt out of mailings or e-mail solicitation.	The process has been redefined to ensure suppression of addresses and phone numbers.	Completed
Receipt of unsolicited products	We are reviewing our suppression files to ensure that the AALL list is totally suppressed and will also review accounts to ensure proper suppression.	Completed
Tracking of complaints	Trouble-ticket system is in development.	Completed
Task force appointment and reporting	Appointed and conducting monthly meetings; will continue in operation for next 6 months.	Ongoing
Larger role and expanded library-relations program	Higher visibility and role for liaison office, increased marketing support for the law library line number, and continued growth in outreach efforts.	Ongoing
Follow up with the CRIV and full AALL membership	At the CRIV meeting in July, Aspen proposed three additional "Focus Meetings" in the fall, one in Washington or Boston, one in Chicago and one on the West Coast. Aspen sent an online survey on Aug. 15 to follow up the CRIV meeting.	Dates and schedules to be coordinated with the CRIV.

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