

BookManagerNews

February 2008

It's renewal time (oh boy!)

This newsletter should include an invoice for renewal of your BookManager Support and Updates for 2008 unless you've already paid. Most stores have their current support expiring on January 31st. Although you are not required to pay support to continue using your current version of BookManager, paying support offers the following:

- ◆ Downloads of the latest version of BookManager.

Important! 13-digit ISBNs beginning with 979 will be issued sometime this year, perhaps as early as this Spring. There is no ISBN-10 equivalent to an ISBN-13 starting with 979. This means that any store still using a version of BookManager before version 9.0 will not be able to enter these books! Please check your version (found at your BookManager's main menu). If you find you are using a version prior to 9.0, you must update before you can enter books with 979 prefixed ISBNs.

- ◆ Access to your store's website at BookManager.com, which is increasingly providing new tools to manage inventory.
- ◆ Free electronic ordering and invoices with Canadian suppliers including Random House, HB Fenn, Raincoast, Sandhill and Monahan.
- ◆ Free multi-store exchange of files (for owners with multiple locations).

A considerable portion of your renewal fee is used to pay for the development of new ideas and services. The direct benefit from this development varies from year to year depending on the scope and complexity of the projects we undertake.

Pay now or later?

Our renewal rates are based on the presumption that most of you financially support us every year at this time. If you prefer to only pay when you need to update your system, please be aware that we base your renewal fee on the number of days since your support last expired (to a maximum of two years). Essentially this means that you must defer payment for more than two years before you will save on overall renewal costs.

We hope that you are finding our services worthy of the cost.

The people at BookManager

Matt Gunn: Matt handles technical support and manages the equipment and supplies that we sell.

Trevor Neill: Yes, that's Neill as in Michael Neill's son. Back in the 80's, my wife, Michele, made BookManager sales calls to the East Coast at 6:00am to get the cheap phone rates. Trevor was in womb at the time taking notes so that he could have whack at helping in the family business 20 years later. When calling our support staff you may have noticed that Trevor has a lot of energy (gee, I wonder where that comes from?). He is enjoying the steep learning curve while he helps you solve problems. Don't forget to remind him to call me Dad when he says, "I'll ask Michael how to fix it".

Kellynda Scherck: Kellynda has been back at BookManager since June after taking a leave to begin raising her beautiful daughter. Kellynda works three days a

week to coordinate all of the data that makes the TitleLink and PubStock magic happen. She also has a keen interest in most everything we do.

Carley Bortolin: Carley and Kellynda share the workload for our data services. Carley is also very talented graphic artist and loves to design Gift Cards and create artwork for bookstores.

Eric Batchelor: Otherwise known as “the all-knowing one” around here, Eric is the one that has created most everything you use from us, other than the BookManager program. If you could only see the inner workings and technology that is carefully choreographed to make EDI, Gift Cards, TitleLink, PubStock, your webstore and other things work in harmony with BookManager!

Mike Batchelor: Yes, that’s Batchelor as in Eric’s twin brother. I wanted to clone Eric, and suddenly, presto, it happened! (And you thought that Dolly the sheep was just an experiment). Mike has only just started at BookManager. His role will be to work with his brother and learn how the symphony of software works. Already, I am thoroughly impressed and looking forward to see our development team create new possibilities.

Michael Neill: That would be me, the guy that has a very hard time staying focused on just one thing. As many of you know, I can bend your ear for a long time on the phone. I guess that’s because I am curious to know how you are making out in hopes that we can learn ways to make your store stronger.

We lost Kaare this year due to some crazy idea he had of travelling through Europe. I’m hoping that he goes broke before too long so that we can entice him back to BookManager!

We truly appreciate the many kind words and thoughtful gestures that you send our way every now and then... they go a long way around here.

Do we have your current email address?

We sent a few emails out this past month that dealt with supplier rebates and my take on the fall pricing crisis. Please email or phone us if you don’t recall receiving them so that we can make corrections for the future. I hope to be using email more frequently to keep you informed on topics of interest. Now, if someone could just shoot all the spammers, I’d love email a lot more.

Windows Vista

It looks like Vista is turning out to be a problem for many people in the business world. Despite the fact it has a slick new look and a few worthwhile goodies, we are finding that BookManager is occasionally closing due to low memory. We found a means to tweak a little extra memory if you are finding this to be serious. Remote support requires an extra step to make it work due to the intense Vista graphics. Finally, Vista comes in either a 32-bit or 64-bit version. We have learned that the 64-bit version will not load BookManager. If you’re having problems with running BookManager on Vista, or troubles with anything else, give our support staff a call.

BookManager is still in DOS?

The years fly by, don’t they? With Mike Batchelor now on board, we have begun a project that will take Mosaic’s daily backup and copy it to our MySQL server so that we can access it with the latest technology. We then apply some of the same programming tools used for TitleLink and PubStock to develop programs that will perform many of the things done in DOS BookManager. Aside from the ability to present data in a more visual sense, the speed to access the data is amazing. We can also access Mosaic’s data from any computer’s web browser.

The eventual goal is to have a system similar to Gift Cards whereby critical routines such as the POS will access and

store data online but also flip to an offline (local data) mode in the event of an Internet problem. More and more businesses are relying on a network of retailer, supplier and customer interactions.

It will be a fascinating series of steps to gradually export all of the BookManager functionality to a new platform.

Remote support

You've gotta love this! How on Earth did we handle support before? We do it using a product called Ultra VNC. When we're on the phone with you trying to solve an issue, you press <Alt>H (Help) and then we can both operate your BookManager.

Unfortunately, we haven't gained the knowledge to know if Ultra VNC can be easily set up to access your store from home. Your local technical guru might be able to help you, since it is becoming more widely used. I still use the Windows XP Pro Remote Desktop to access Mosaic's BookManager from anywhere with my laptop.

Changes in BookManager

Aside from numerous minor changes that would bore the majority reading this, here are some changes that might be of interest:

- ◆ Orders that you create from your web version of BookManager are automatically appended to your DOS BookManager's Order Processing list of titles.
- ◆ The POS →Misc option has a Date Range totalling report. For example, you can choose January 1st to January 15th and produce a report exactly like the end-of-day report. If you then do the same for the previous year, you will have a nice pair of reports for comparing changes in activity.
- ◆ Extended PubStock: The <Alt><S>etup →PubStock option in BookManager can enable another column of data that will show you're the suggested retail

price comparisons from various suppliers. We use this extensively when quoting prices from US sources because it eliminates the need to guess or do manual calculations. Two things that you must be aware of; don't set your US suppliers' exchange rate to 1.0 (even if the money is even) and, make your supplier codes match PubStock's codes.

- ◆ Bisac Subjects: Access 2)Inventory and <E>dit a title. Move into the field just after the Class field and press <PgUp>. The Bisac Subjects screen will appear. Press <U>pdate and let the system import the full descriptions of several thousand Bisac subject codes. Your Inventory screen will now show the book's full Bisac subject description. You can also use the Bisac screen to create a relationship between the Bisac codes and you own Class names. Then, whenever you import a title from TitleLink, your Class field will be automatically filled in.
- ◆ To deal with supplier pricing issues, the 0)Reports area has a new Supplier Reports menu that many stores use to create reports needed for obtaining rebates from publishers.
- ◆ Printing reports to a file: A number of on-screen reports in BookManager could only be printed to your printer. Most of these now have extended printing options, allowing you to send the report to a file or email address.
- ◆ We are always making changes to BookManager. You can get updates as often as once per week if you wish, but I recommend that you get an update at least once per year. Now would be a good time.

Website development

We anticipate that many of you will soon start using the BookManager.com website as part of your DOS BookManager. Originally the site was useful mostly to bookstores not using BookManager (eg. for TitleLink and PubStock access). We have since added a host of features that become available when you use your store's SAN and BookManager password to login. As well, you will need to add your SAN to the end of www.bookmanager.com/ in your browser's address bar, so that your own store's data and private reports will be available. You will then either bookmark this page or place a shortcut to it on your desktop for easy future access. Put a note on each of your store's computers that will remind staff of the store's username and password, even though the site usually remembers this information.

Once logged in, you should see a Setup → Permissions menu. If not, you are either not logged in, or you need to call us to give us your store's SAN. To experiment, you should enable all of the features on the Permissions page. When you want to start ordering for the store from your site, you will need to spend a little time with the PubStock setup page and enable the suppliers you deal most often with.

Sales Comparisons - Every Tuesday morning I use the Sales Comparisons link to see how sales at my store compared to the rest of the country. There are many ways to view the information, so take some time to explore this report.

Title Browser - The Title Browser link is very powerful and extremely flexible. Last night I used it to order \$5,000 worth of gardening and outdoor books. The jackets, annotations, sales history, stock and orders already placed by other independents gave me plenty of information to make reasonable choices. As well, I could see my own store's on hand and sales history.

When you find a book you want to order, click on the Order Qty box and then select the supplier you want to order from. Then to the View Cart screen where you submit

all of the orders (ISBNs from 10 different suppliers) with a single click. This step transfers the orders into your DOS BookManager's Pending Orders area. From there, you only need to review the items and then send them to your suppliers along with other orders that were created in your DOS BookManager.

It's a lot to learn and digest in one sitting. Over time though, I have become quite comfortable with it, and depending on what I am trying to accomplish, I much prefer using the website to place orders than working in DOS BookManager. I also use the Windows <Alt> <Tab> keys, allowing me to switch easily between the web and BookManager.

You should really make an effort to learn more about ordering online. We are working with some suppliers to provide ways to quickly order frontlist titles and take advantage of special offers. Carley & Kellynda are gathering 2009 Calendar data that we plan to make available online so that you can click your way through a supplier's offering, and do things like check last year's sales before deciding what to buy.

A few areas need some polishing and tweaking to make it truly beneficial, but I really want everyone to get some experience so that when we have something like calendars ready for ordering, you will not be overwhelmed with too much at once.

Customer ordering online

Our original experiment with the BookManager website was focused on providing a place for your customers to order with you. So far, it's proving to be used on a very small scale by only a handful of stores. That said, we will continue development in this area because there will be benefits once we make the experience better.

Having said that, Mosaic's annual school business has grown to over \$100,000 (from about \$10,000) and we got there by working with teachers on a one-to-one

basis to show them how the website works. 90% of their orders are for books that we do not have in stock. What this tells me is that the serious book buyer will appreciate how it works, but the casual book buyer will prefer to just come into your store (or order from Amazon!).

What will probably happen is that you will first become familiar with the online ordering for the store, and then you will be inspired to teach your customers to also use it.

BookManager forum

We are in the middle of putting together a means at bookmanager.com to communicate ideas, problems and solutions. During the pricing crisis last fall, I think that a forum to exchange strategies and comments would have helped many of us. The key will be in designing it to be a natural place to visit. Let's hope that my next newsletter will be encouraging everyone to get on board and become vocal.

Heritage Canada's Canadian 2007 Book Retail Study results

Whoa! Now here's a gem of a document that I received in my CBA board package. I am told that the document is to be made available to members soon. Last year, Heritage Canada provided funding to have a research company report on the makeup and state of book retailing in Canada. It's a 105 pager (something I'd probably write!) packed with tons of information that I was always curious about. Reading it on the screen was tedious, so I printed a copy, used a highlighter, and digested it along with two beers. I think that this report should be essential reading for everyone owning a bookstore in Canada. It even goes into some worthy marketing strategies. Knowing where you fit in the market place can help you make good decisions. From the report, I am optimistic for our future, but I think there is some serious work needed to make it happen.

Keep your ears open this year. I think the Competition Bureau is presently evaluating

the impact that Indigo, Chapters and Coles has on the Canadian book industry (retail, distribution and publishing). If they discover a serious problem (duh), the status quo may not continue, and I'm not sure if changes would be viewed as a benefit or disaster for the independents. There are rumblings and arguments being made that could suggest opening up the industry to US competition. If you thought it was tough competing against Chapters, try having Borders, Barnes & Nobel or Books A Million competing in your neighbourhood for dominance. Please communicate to our group anything you may know or learn. I believe that the independents can bring balanced competition without the US giants, but we need to be given the opportunity to present a strategy. I am working with CBA to try and get us connected with the right people in government so that we can discuss possible solutions.

Sharing our financial information

Originally, I thought that the notion of asking booksellers to bare all and provide private information such as sales, inventory levels, rent, staff costs, store size, population and nearby competition would be a taboo subject. However, when I started to open up with some of my own store's experiences in last fall's rants, I started to hear from stores that wanted to do the same in hopes of learning from others. When you think about it, we are too often living inside our own bubble of knowledge and experience. The chains use their diversity of stores (and technology to compile data from them) to identify what works where. That fact alone probably explains how chain operations have essentially taken over the majority of retail business.

The CBA is into its second year with a Canadian version of the US-based Abacus project, which collects financial information and then shares consolidated results with the participants. So far, I've not found the results to be that helpful, but I will continue to participate in hopes of something better down the road.

I want to do something a little different. The key items that I mentioned above are the core to my store's success. I want to invite you to complete a form with this basic information, which will then be presented in an Excel type spreadsheet that shows each store's individual data, but without disclosing the store identities. Rather than look at consolidated numbers (the Abacus approach), we could see how each store is performing and the conditions they work under. Perhaps your rent is too high, or you pay more than the average in wages. Comparing your sales per square foot of space against the amount of inventory you carry could reveal some significant low-risk opportunities. Do you compete with Chapters? Are you in a small town? How many people are you serving? Is your location in a high-traffic mall?

A chartered accountant is collecting the Abacus data, and this person understandably knows nothing of our industry. My bold suggestion is to plainly state that, with your permission, I would be allowed to review your store's incoming data and then use my years of knowledge to identify the data that needs to be verified or clarified. From private conversations I can perhaps learn some essential facts and provide comments that help to explain why one store is succeeding and another is struggling.

My accountant (and probably yours) already does something for me when we meet to discuss our year-end financials. He has a personal and trusted relationship with many other independent business owners in Kelowna, and he is able to make comparisons and then provide comments that help me without ever revealing who he has learned the tricks from. Recently, he said that my rent was way too high but that my sales and gross margin were great. I could benefit a lot more if I knew how my rent compared to other independent bookstores.

For starters, this will be a very informal venture. Contact me if you are interested. It will be my duty to ensure that your information remains disconnected from your store once it becomes visible to the

others who have participated. The goal is to empower you with information that could make your store much stronger.

Canadian Booksellers Association (CBA)

I am on the board of directory for the Canadian Booksellers (year two). We meet every month or so via teleconference and provide direction for the association. This past year was very difficult while we tried to help with the pricing crisis. Some of you were not happy with CBA, as was I at times. Perhaps we could have done more and explained other things better. What I do believe is that without an association, we booksellers are very much alone. CBA is always looking for new board members to help provide direction and focus on issues that matter most. If you are opinionated and passionate, you should throw your name into the hat. Just imagine a teleconference with me on the other end after a few cups of coffee! I have learned a lot from my peers on the board, and that alone has been worth the effort to serve as a director.

This should be an interesting year! If the economy crashes, just remember that books have always been a staple, especially when times are tough. Sell your stocks and expand your store, ha!

Michael