

Bidding and Pricing: As Always, “It Depends”

Jan Wright and Janet Perlman



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As we find ourselves seemingly a reasonable distance from the economic collapse in 2008, we hope enough time has allowed for a firmer idea of what sort of economic picture indexers fit into. In Minneapolis, *Jan Wright* and *Janet Perlman* expanded on a salary survey to help frame some of those current economic realities, along with an idea of how indexers can market themselves in an environment that is still regarded as unpredictable. Between the two of these indexers and their collective decades of experience, the hope was their perspectives could shed light on the current industry climate, eliminate any vapor trails of hubris, and help bolster attendee efforts in building and sustaining their businesses.

The survey in question was sent out to ASI members prior to the Minneapolis conference to get a read on the current makeup of the industry and try to capture any emerging patterns. The handout from the session indicated that out of 775 ASI members, 223 completed surveys (a 29% return). The hope is that the data could provide a clearer read on the realities being faced by our colleagues in the industry. In this spirit, the seminar began with attendees completing an anonymous questionnaire about rates.

Janet indicated that recently more work is coming from book packagers (agents) than from publishers. In an interesting note, she added that they are finding her—she is not seeking them out. Jan concurred with this notion, that in her business dealings with small presses and work from packagers keep coming, while she notices larger software companies are typically the ones closing their doors.

The discussion then shifted to payment and dollar figures. Janet indicated that at one time

she had difficulties getting paid by packagers, who are typically in the situation of requiring payment from publishers before they can pay indexers—however she is not having difficulties now. She added that while more clients are appearing, they tend to return less frequently. Think tanks, foundations, and packagers are increasing as an emerging client base while publishers are falling off. In the interest of cutting costs, more publishers are putting the onus of finding and paying for an indexer on their authors.

Jan mentions that despite a slightly more challenging year in 2009, she has not raised rates. She added that late payments are more common; with two clients extending terms from thirty to forty-five or sixty days. When it comes to declining projects, it was mentioned that one approach might be to state: “Unless I’m misunderstanding this project, this rate is not going to work.” Another thought was to mention in negotiations (if an indexer feels they are being “lowballed”) that they should hold their ground and insist that the rate is simply unacceptable and not fair market value. There was also an expressed concern on handling “tire kickers;” clients who call and pressure indexers about rates aggressively, prior to the presentation of an actual bid and typically in an initial phone conversation. An offered suggestion for that situation involved responding with the question: “What is your budget for this project?”

When asked how indexers are handling the recession, responses included:

- Taking on books in new subject areas
- Taking up proofreading and editorial services
- Various non-indexing projects for publishers, such as book design and layout

Some highlights of the pre-conference survey for the ASI membership include the following: *

- When asked about length of time indexing, it’s spread out rather evenly amongst six ranges (less than 2 years, 2-5, 6-10, 11-15, 16-20, and 20+ years).
- 47% of indexers are full-time, working more than thirty hours per week.
- Most companies (78%) are sole proprietorships.
- Nearly all companies (96%) do not employ other individuals.
- Repeat business is still the number one source of business.
- Approximately 86% of indexers are female, with the average age falling in the 50-69 range.
- 78% of indexers work in either urban or suburban areas.
- For company owners, 60.6% reported earning under 50K in 2009 while 23.9% reported falling into the range of 50–100K.

*A comprehensive account of all statistics from the 2010 pre-conference survey can be found at <http://www.asi.org/2010/04/22/2010-pre-conference-survey/>

— Submitted by *Beth Nauman-Montana* and *Paul R. Sweum*



Fred Leise welcomes new members at the orientation session