

# Trends: Textbook Selection

CONNIE MUTHER

## How to Obtain the Best Textbooks for the Best Price

Publishers are in business to stay in business. The only way to stay in business is to produce what sells. What sells textbooks today? "Guestimates" by six publishing executives are that between 20 and 70 percent of selection decisions are swayed by "the best deal."<sup>1</sup>

It is widely accepted that publishers offer free items to "sweeten" sales, but these items have escalated from supplementary materials to entire programs provided free of charge. Known to publishers as "illegal pilots," "the 50/50 split," or as the "unadvertised specials," these deals could further erode the quality of textbooks, for whatever sways purchase decisions clearly tells publishers what consumers will buy. If consumers want something for nothing, someone has to pay. In this case, it could be the kids.

Every district wants the most for its money, and if publishers are going to offer free enticements, each district should get them. But how can you obtain the best quality textbooks for the best price?

Begin your textbook evaluation by informing sales agents that you are evaluating for quality, not price. When you request samples, include a letter to this effect. You may also stipulate that any publisher who approaches anyone in your district with offers of free materials will be eliminated from consideration.<sup>2</sup> Sales agents will probably respect you for this, and so will colleagues, board members, and parents.

Focus your evaluation on what you most want a new textbook program to accomplish. Screen all programs to see if they meet that goal. When you've narrowed programs to a manageable number, perhaps two or three, ask those publishers' agents for a sealed bid. Eliminate all other publishers.

Continue to evaluate the final candidates, opening the bids after you've identified the best program to meet your needs. Ideally, your district will purchase this program regardless of bid results, but if financial constraints require purchasing the second or third best program, at least it too will have been selected because it most closely met your goal. You will also have handled the decision openly, honestly, and professionally.

This method keeps negotiations professional, focuses on selecting the best quality materials to meet the specific needs of students in your district, and secures each publisher's best offer. □

<sup>1</sup>Six publishing executives with national sales perspective provided this guess to in a telephone conversation (exact figures cannot be determined).

<sup>2</sup>Due to a "favored nation" clause in most adoption states, publishers cannot reduce the prices. There are no restrictions on reducing the total purchase price by including items free of charge or by giving away entire programs.

Copyright 1985 by Connie Muther. Please send comments and suggestions for forthcoming columns to the author at the address below.

**Connie Muther** is director, Textbook Adoption Advisory Services, 25 B Esquire Drive, Manchester, CT 06040.



Copyright © 1985 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.