

Whatever happened to good textbooks?

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ABOUT 10 YEARS ago, I left teaching to work in another field. Back then we teachers had what seemed to be good textbooks. There was a comfortable consistency (all the blue covers on the Irwin books, for example) and I don't ever remember one with an error.

The books did not come with all the "aids" now available, but we had what we really needed. That is, there usually was a manual with lecture suggestions and several potential test questions.

This year I returned to teaching. The students looked about the same, the desks were similar, the administrators had their usual priorities, but the textbooks were very different. It was much more than just their cost (although it is hard to think of anything as being much more than their cost).

At first I thought the change was all for the better. We could now get a test merely by calling an 800 number. The company representative would ask how many questions were required from each chapter, whether true/false or multiple choice, and the level of difficul-

ty. Within six nanoseconds the test was in the mail for us to duplicate. Wonderful.

And then the colors in the books. They were bright and cheery with pictures and graphics. Beautiful. We could get videotapes free to adopters that would highlight the books' message. Glorious.

The instructor's manuals had suggestions for everything from guest speakers to how to handle snow days. Exquisite.

So it seemed we were getting a lot more for the money. There was just one problem: the quality of the product offering from the publishers. From books to support materials to response times there were difficulties. Here are some examples:

■ Grammatical errors. These three are from the same page of a widely used introductory marketing book: "Each of these groups exhibit..."; "Consumer research on black buying patterns have..."; "the majority are..."

Yes, the same page.

■ Trademark mistakes. One book talked about American Airlines' "Advantage" frequent flier program but, of course, it should have been "AAdvantage"

■ Test errors. On three different tests ordered from the 800

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number there were mistakes on the answer sheets. That is, what the publisher said was the right answer was in fact a wrong answer. On one test, of the 50 questions, there were three which had the incorrect "right" answer.

■ Delayed support materials. On one book, I asked for the third edition. I was told that I had to accept the new fourth edition, so I did. What I was not told was that the support package for the new edition was not available at the same time as the book. Despite multiple letters and phone calls to the publisher and the author, the support materials did not arrive until a week after the semester ended.

■ Incorrect manuals. For a case book in its fifth edition there was an instructor's manual. It seemed initially to be useful, but later the problem surfaced. Some of the cases in the book were not discussed in the notes, and some of the notes talked about cases not in the book. It seems that several of the cases were changed for the fifth edition, but the accompanying manual only had its front

changed to show the new number. The cover said it was for the fifth edition, but inside it still had the notes to the fourth edition cases.

■ Incorrect information. One textbook in its 1993 fourth edition talked about existing federal agencies with whom marketers must deal. One of the agencies on the list was the Civil Aeronautics Board. (The CAB bought the farm in 1978.)

■ Internal inconsistency. This is from the same retailing book on a discussion of whether chairs should be on display. One page said, "Rounding out the setting might be a pair of chairs, not there for the weary shopper, but artfully draped with featured garments." On the next page, "Tables like those found in a home are used to display merchandise, while comfortable chairs invite weary shoppers to rest."

At a time when we should be preaching that quality counts it is not easy when the students see a reference to American Machine and Foundry. For the price they are paying aren't they entitled to a once-through with a spell checker and a glance from an editor?

Is it too much to ask? Shouldn't marketing people know there is no period after the Dr in Dr Pepper? ■