

FOPAL
HIGH VALUE OPERATION
Board Retreat January 8, 2014

At the end of December 2013, FOPAL had about 6400 books listed on Amazon with an average listed value of \$38.78, compared to San Francisco's reported 7000 volumes averaging \$40. We have one half time employee running our operation and San Francisco has one and a half time FTE in their high value operation. Our current listed inventory value is \$248,497.

FOPAL should not try to be San Francisco; our operations and demographics are very different, but the numbers indicate how much we accomplish with limited resources.

Here is a numerical recent history of Amazon sales in fiscal years:

2008 \$ 9,660
2009 22,837
2010 29,535

2011	74,143.64
2012	60,198.74
2013	75,674.62

The number of listings and value of listings could be increased with more manpower. K.C. Sarr estimated in December that we have about 500 banker boxes of books that need the next level of high value research. These are books that have been sent to High Value mainly by section managers. Conservatively there are about 20 books per box, or another 10,000 books to be researched and listed (if valuable), twice our current inventory of listed books.

Jerry Stone made the following volunteer comparison:

Main Room - 40+ volunteers; \$11,000 avg/monthly sales = \$275/person

Children's Room = 10 volunteers = \$4000 avg/monthly sales = \$400/person

Bargain Room = 6 volunteers = \$2500 avg/monthly sales = \$416/person

HV Sales = 5 vol.s (and me) = \$6000 avg/monthly sales = \$1000/person.

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The main staffing needs in high value include research, listing, cataloging and shipping. The requirements are more stringent than in other rooms for a few reasons. The research and listing requires considerably more training than other aspects of FOPAL volunteerism. High value volunteers should be able to learn how to identify a valuable book. Incorrect listings or shipping could lead to Amazon sanctions on our Grandma Betsy store. Cataloging and shipping require dedicated commitments to work at certain times consistently. Books must be correctly cataloged in order to be shipped. Some volunteers have been frustrated in the high value shipping job because they were having difficulty finding the books sold. Jerry now spends too much of his 20 hours a week filling orders, a task that should be done by a reliable volunteer so that Jerry's expertise can be used more wisely. A chronological numerical system such as Seller Engine might solve some of this problem, but only if the person putting the book on the shelf follows the system correctly. Ideally we would have two catalogers and up to five shippers who committed to coming on certain days each and every week.

That kind of commitment and sole activity is very different from what many volunteers in the sales room experience. Some sorters commit to certain days of the week, but if they cannot come others there fill in. Many volunteers work when they have free time without any weekly commitment. When a book order comes in, it must be shipped within two days. The social atmosphere present in the book sale rooms is mostly absent in high value where a volunteer most likely works alone. Thus there is no chatting, review of books, munching cookies together for the high value volunteer.

Concentration on the work is also much more important in high value.

There are many tasks to accomplish to bring our high value sales to a new level. K.C. Sarr has agreed to head a subcommittee of the Book Sale Committee to address these issues. Others on the committee are Dick Grote, Nigel Jones, Nancy Cohen, Ed Walker and Jerry Stone. K.C.'s list of topics for the first upcoming meeting include:

- Steps needed to implement better "intake" of books to the HV Room
- Steps needed to test the Seller Engine software
- Steps needed to integrate Seller Engine with our existing tagging and shelving system
- Steps needed to train book listers in the new posting system
- Steps needed to tag and shelve books under the new system
- Steps needed to pull and mail books under the new system
- Ideas for how to access, move, and post old unlisted inventory (at the Annex and in back of H-2)
- Ideas for temporary storage of large donations that come in from time to time (e.g., Xerox PARC)

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Concurrent with that discussion Dick and Jerry will begin a test of Seller Engine.

There must be changes to how we utilize limited space. Look at the picture notebook. The area in front of you as you enter Annex A where most high value work is done needs to be cleaned out and reorganized. The eBay materials could go to Jerry's store while he works on their sale. Additional shelves we have from the Main Library could go in that area and be utilized mainly for books to be listed as well as materials in transition to the Main Room.

The annex hallway is very full, about half with supplies. Current supplies could go in Annex A and storage of others (supplies are cheaper bought in bulk) might go to H3 if we do more reorganizing there. The to-be-listed boxes could go on the additional shelving in Annex A.

Annex B, where Janette's office is, has a number of Children's high value boxes to be evaluated. The Children's Room staff has made the initial sort, but a more knowledgeable person needs to review them and list what should go on Amazon. We also received in December a donation now stored in Annex B of about 84 boxes from Xerox PARC. It appears that about 2/3 of those are high value; Jerry has researched about half of this donation.

Annex B could be used for work stations for more researchers, as well as holding some to-be-listed boxes in the back, leaving open the FOPAL file area.

Manpower – the current crux of the situation. There are a few heavy lifting, one-time jobs to be done. Then there are the ongoing jobs that need commitment. There are about five people who list books now, including Jerry. To increase our listed volume, more are needed. And in order for increased sales to occur the cataloging and shipping personnel must be in place.

A very industrious volunteer during the summer did a great deal of organizing of the inventory. Unfortunately that volunteer also removed books from the shelves that are still listed for sale. A complete inventory needs to be made, in conjunction with a switch to a Seller Engine system. This must be done by an efficient team over about a one-week period during which sales might have to be suspended.

First, we hope to add the shelving to Annex A by the end of January. Seller Engine testing should be completed by the end of February. Assuming a successful test we would try to implement Seller Engine and have a new inventory listing by end-April.

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Then we would set new goals with the known number of committed volunteers.

Ready to sign up?

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The above material was sent to the board before the retreat and formed the basis of the discussion about the book sales. Other ideas emerged at the retreat that are related to the future of the book sales. This material is included below.

FOPAL provides a community service for readers of our books. Different subject areas have varying recycle traits. E.g., Mysteries and fiction tend to be bought, read and donated again. Art is purchased for retention or gifts. Philosophy and religion are usually retained. cookbooks are retained for the length of a particular cooking fad.

- Donations future. the internet introduction in the 90's led to an increasing diminution of the purchase of physical books and thus donations to FOPAL. It was thought that people now in their 40's will have very small book collections when they reach their 80's. But those in their 80s now tend to have larger collections. In the next ten years we should have sufficient donations, but steadily diminishing. The 20-year outlook is dubious.

- Special donations - these should be featured and advertised.

- Advertising to the community. there is a great turnover in Palo Alto. FOPAL needs to keep reintroducing itself to newcomers. Get information to real estate brokers for those selling for donations and for those buying so they will come to sales. Find out if the Library can send email to their patrons re FOPAL. Public schools are already donating to us. What about junior colleges? Stanford faculty seem to know about FOPAL. Seek out closing business libraries. Send information to estate agents, liquidators (estatesales.org), clutter organizers, hospitals, retirement homes.

- Meet again with other Friends groups.