

BOOK *smarts*

A quarterly newsletter from Nebraska Book Company, Inc.

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Reps Are Critical Link Between Customer and Company

AS NEBRASKA BOOK COMPANY (NBC) HAS GROWN

and changed over the years, the role of sales representative has changed as well. In the early days, many NBC employees assumed the role of sales rep along with other operational duties and student buying roles. But the job of sales representative has evolved over the years from that of account maintenance for the Wholesale Division to that of a single point of contact for all the products and services of Nebraska Book Company, explains Jerry Hiller, national sales manager.

“During a store call, the reps now offer the stores so much: extra rebate dollars a store can earn through the NBC Advantage Program; advocacy and savings through being a member of Connect2One; the best e-commerce solution in the industry – CampusHub; state-of-the-art systems in PRISM and WinPRISM; college store design, and the list goes on. When you think of one company offering all of that and more, it’s impressive,” he says.

Hiller says that the one constant throughout all of the change, though, is that each sales rep is a book buyer at heart. “They all realize that the cornerstone of a successful store is a successful used book program,” he says. “And the cornerstone of a successful used book program is a successful student buy. Reps are the industry experts on this subject, and store managers take advantage of their expertise.”

The used book business is also a “people business.” When a rep visits a store three or four times a year and sometimes spends up to a week or two at a time in a store during buyback, it’s only natural for a relationship to develop between that rep and store employees. Many times, a rep becomes part of the bookstore “family.” This strong relationship with store managers is one of the reasons NBC has been so

successful over the years.

“And,” says Hiller, “these are the types of relationships we want to continue to develop.”

Hiller says that sales reps personalize Nebraska Book, demonstrating the personality and character of the company and communicating that NBC is the company with the best interest of the independent college bookstore at heart. Steve Showalter, regional manager for the Midwest region, says, “I consider the sales reps the heart and soul of the whole company. Everything

begins with them. They are responsible for purchasing the product we sell and also generating sales for that product.”

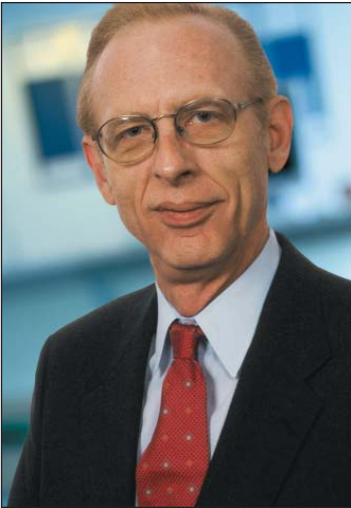
The recent NBC Wholesaler Survey conducted by the Gallup organization reinforced the fact that NBC is the industry’s service leader. “That is a direct reflection on the sales reps along with all the employees of Nebraska Book Company,” notes Barry Major, president.

“Sales reps will continue to play an important role in the future of NBC and the industry,” Hiller says.



Michael Schmidt, CSP, UNO Bookstore Manager, (right) with Fred Daugherty, Nebraska Book Company Sales Representative, in the University of Nebraska-Omaha Bookstore.

Wireless Networking



This is the second part of a three-part series on Wireless Technology. In this installment, Steve Cox, assistant vice president of Research and Development for Nebraska Book Company, discusses research findings and the practical implementation of wireless networking.

CAN WIRELESS NETWORKING DO WHAT IT CLAIMS? In this second article in my three-part series, I'm going to bring you up to date on what our research has shown and what we have established as being the norm in wireless.

Since our last chat about this subject, many hours of research and experimentation have been done – with surprising results. Some of the results are good, some are not so good, but we are now putting brackets around what is really happening.

At this time, we have pretty well established what hardware configurations we will be able to sell and support with the PRISM, WinPRISM and PRISM POS line of products. This could still change as our research progresses, but in terms of performance and quality, one brand seems to come out on top. In almost every test, the Linksys WAP11 Access Point comes closest in actual use to its advertised specifications.

Don't rush out and buy one of these! There is still a lot of research to be done, and we are not yet ready to state with certainty "this or that can or can't be done."

I now have the entire administrative area of the Nebraska Book Company corporate headquarters set up for wireless Ethernet, using the above named Access Points, with several users operating full time on it. What is interesting to note is how many transmitters must be used, their location and their coverage area, and here is where we found some surprises.

The first AP (Access Point) is located at one end of a hall approximately 250' long and 70' wide. The second AP is connected at the opposite end of this long hallway. This comprises the upper floor of the office area of NBC headquarters.

On the first floor, we have another AP in the middle of the corresponding hallway. So, in total we have installed three AP units to cover this entire area of administrative offices.

How well does it work? Here is what we are seeing at this point: coverage of the entire area has been accomplished with these three APs, but there are certain points in this area where the signal is either very weak or drops out completely. Concrete walls and floors are the major problem in our experimental setup.

Inside office spaces, where there is not a concrete or metal wall between the office and the AP, usually receive a full, clean 11-mb signal from their closest AP. If concrete and/or metal does exist between the office and AP, the signal drops rapidly the further one

moves away from the target AP.

Interestingly enough, opening and closing wooden doors into these offices and people moving around in the hallways do not seem to affect the signal to any large degree.

I calculate from my findings that to adequately cover this entire area with clean signals in all administrative areas, a total of six APs would be required. Your heart probably just skipped a beat. But APs are relatively inexpensive at around \$300

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Reality Check

each, and they support up to 32 users each. From a cost standpoint, to cover fairly large areas in a structure similar to ours where there is a lot of concrete and metal, the price is reasonable in my opinion.

If you are in anything but a small, single floor, completely wooden structure, getting by with just one AP isn't going to fly. Most likely, depending how your store is laid out, the structure of your building and the internal arrangement of your offices and sales areas, multiple APs will be required if you intend to go completely wireless, which our studies currently do not indicate would be a particularly good idea. A combination of both wired and wireless networking seems to provide optimal utilization of the infrastructure.

We have also discovered that some types of applications behave differently running wireless instead of wired. We first noticed this when copying files to and from network servers from the wireless PCs.

For reasons not yet known, it appears that an operation such as this can take two to three times as long on a wireless link than it does on a wired link. I have not completed analysis of this behavior, but I believe it to be inherent in the RF technology and the capacity to move large amounts of data at one time.

Most interactive applications, such as talking to PRISM, WinPRISM or using a cash register, seem to operate equally well wired or wireless because relatively small chunks of interactive data are moved at any given time. When large amounts of data are moved, the anomaly becomes noticeable.

Much has been learned, but there is still a lot more to learn. Within the next few weeks, it is my intention

to install wireless networking in a small bookstore and attempt to go totally wireless. This will be a single-floor store with an open sales area and two or three small offices separated from the sales floor by concrete block walls.

Results from this prototype will be studied carefully, and from that we will plan the installation of a wireless network in a large, multiple-floor concrete-and-brick building. At the same time, we will implement wireless on a limited basis in our large open warehouse and carefully measure the results, which I believe will be much different from those shown in confined areas.

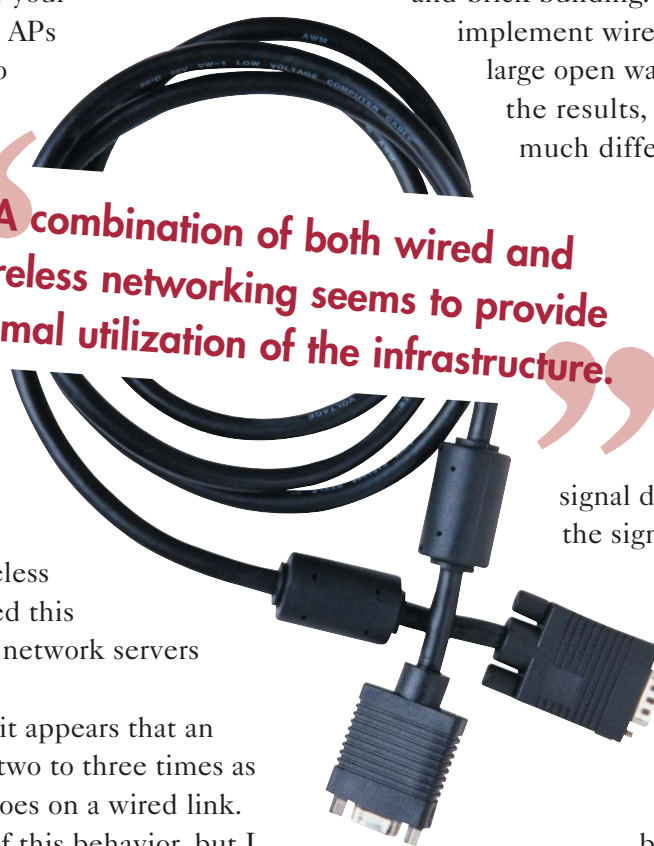
The preliminary research indicates that more transmitters may be required to cover large open areas, such as an open warehouse, than in a confined area because of

signal dispersion. By that I mean that the signal generated from the AP is omni directional, or that the

AP transmits with equal power in a 360-degree circle and should tend to actually *decrease* the range from the AP where a wireless device can be located.

This is speculation on my part, based on what I have learned from the AP behavior in confined areas where the hallways and stairwells show a tendency to be a tunnel for the signal from the AP, allowing the signal to remain more cohesive and more directional.

However, as is so many times the case when doing hard research, this may prove to be an invalid assumption. But it is critically important to learn all of these characteristics so that we can make good, solid



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recommendations to you — and to teach us how to properly analyze and support wireless problems when they do arise.

Progress is being made, and, on the whole, I am not surprised by what is being discovered. Wireless networking does have limitations, and every indication is that it currently could be used for portability of certain applications but is probably not suitable or desirable as a *total* solution.

Based on what we are learning every day, I am confident that we can set operational parameters around wireless that will let us quickly and easily determine what is and is not possible in *your* store.

By the time the third and last installment of this series is written, I hope to have most all of the information needed to make informed decisions about how wireless can be most effectively implemented in your store.

I might add at this point that all of us are having a lot of fun with this research and learning valuable information in the process. I still believe that wireless has a place in your store, but it will take more time than we had anticipated at the beginning of this project to properly analyze and plan every

installation. Each and every installation will be somewhat unique and will have to be very carefully planned.

At this time I am willing to take a limited number of questions about wireless technology via e-mail. I really don't know what to expect in terms of the volume of questions you have, but I will make every attempt to answer as many as I can. I can be reached at the following address: scox@nebook.com. If you do send in a question, please put the word "wireless" somewhere in the subject line of your message so that I can filter them and make sure they get to one folder, where I can track your questions and my responses.

I hope this series of articles gives you some insight into how we as developers go about evaluating and implementing new technologies. We try to learn all we can before the fact, so that we don't say we can do things that we can't. This is a key element in the production of all of Nebraska Book Company's technology offerings. Rest assured, wireless is coming, of that I have no doubt.

Here is my last thought for this installment: May the signal be with you!

Rep Critical Link cont'd.

"I anticipate the role of the sales reps remaining essentially the same for the foreseeable future. NBC will always need reps interacting with our customers to deal with the issues of our industry. To do so effectively, they will need to stay abreast of all new developments.

"A few years ago we saw this with competition on direct Internet textbook sales from companies inside and outside our industry, which is still occurring," he continues. "Today, we see it with e-commerce solutions and various bookstore/company alliances. And tomorrow, sales reps and our customers will be dealing with digital delivery of educational materials and other things that haven't even hit the radar screen yet."

And yet even with these emerging technologies, "people have always been our best

asset," says Steve Bartek, Advantage program director. "Customers look to Nebraska Book Company for solutions. Our people have always been a part of these solutions, and they always will be."

As the industry continues to adapt to changing market conditions, sales reps remain a pivotal touch point, according to Hiller. "We rely on them to let us know what problems or issues are foremost in our customers' minds," he says. "With this information we can design products and services that will enhance the position of the independent college bookstore on their respective campuses and hopefully benefit Nebraska Book Company in the process."



CampusHub Bucks The Trend

Generating Growth As Competition Consolidates

THE RECENT SALE of certain College Store Online (CSO) assets to Sequoia Peripherals, Inc., is just the latest chapter in the industry trend toward consolidation. But TheCampusHub.com is bucking the trend, citing 18 months of continued growth. According to Mike Kelly, president of TheCampusHub.com, that's a direct result of the organization's focus on serving the needs of the independent bookstore.

"Our model has always been to support the bookstore, rather than going directly to their students. We've spent two years developing what bookstores have been asking us for and continually assessing their needs," he says. That's not only made CampusHub the nation's leading provider of e-commerce technology to campus bookstores, it is also the impetus for conceiving and implementing new ways of addressing the needs of bookstores.

"Our systems are preferred by the marketplace because of our ability to fully integrate existing data and store history into our e-commerce platform. And,

no other technology provider can offer our depth of market knowledge or experience. Plain and simple, we know this industry and we've written our technology to address the issues," Kelly says.

This growth has enabled CampusHub to move into a financial position that allows the ongoing commitment of resources to expand products and services. As a result, CampusHub is launching limited implementation of digital textbook delivery this Fall.

In addition, enhancements to the CampusHub product offering will make medical books and supplies, music and travel available to stores in the coming months.

As for bookstores looking to take advantage of

CampusHub's capabilities and services, Kelly says, "We have the capability, track record and expertise to assure a smooth transition to CampusHub for any CSO customer who wants to be up and running on a fully integrated system in time for Fall rush."

"No other technology provider can offer our depth of market knowledge or experience."

Nebraska Book Company Offers Distance Learning Services

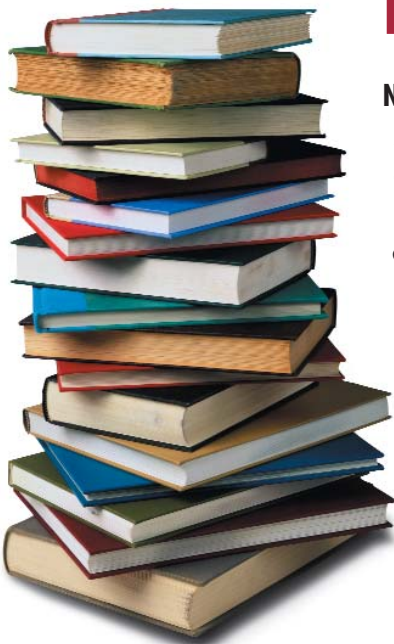
WITH THE TREMENDOUS GROWTH in the distance learning industry, Nebraska Book Company (NBC) is committed to finding new ways to meet the needs of non-traditional students, according to Tom Swanson from NBC.

For more than four years, NBC has offered a full array of services for the distance learning industry through Specialty Books Distribution Center of Athens, OH. Specialty Books, the premier company in distance learning, was founded more than 15 years ago by distance-learning educators who wanted a

better way to serve non-traditional students.

Swanson said NBC works with Specialty Books because of its fine reputation and dedication to institutions and students involved in distance learning. In addition, Specialty Books has been instrumental in making instructional material for distance learning as simple as possible to obtain.

NBC continues to explore options in the distance-learning category in order to stay on top of this ever-evolving industry, Swanson says.



NBC Donates Thousands of Textbooks

NEBRASKA BOOK COMPANY (NBC)

recently donated tens of thousands of textbooks to needy schools and libraries in Tajikistan in west-central Asia.

NBC began donating textbooks to developing countries in the early 1960s as part of the Books for Asia program that was started by the late Cliff Hillegass, founder of Cliff's Notes, and officials at NBC. Since that time, NBC has been donating textbook

overstocks to China, Malaysia, the Philippines, Korea and many other countries.

“Everyone feels a sense of accomplishment in being able to continue the life of these books and further the relationships between America and developing countries,” says Bill Allen, senior vice president of NBC’s wholesale division.

Approximately a quarter of a million books are donated each year as part of this program.

WE WANT YOUR BUSINESS—NOT YOUR CUSTOMERS

- We believe the student is your customer.
- We believe the bookstore is our customer.
- We believe in integrity in business dealings.
- We believe college bookstores should be independent.
- We believe in providing solutions to keep your business independent.



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