

# The First BIALL Supplier of the Year Award: a Conversation with John Sinkins of Wildy's

**Abstract:** In June 2010 the first BIALL Supplier of the Year award was made to Wildy & Sons Ltd, following a survey of BIALL members. The chair of the Awards and Bursaries Committee at the time of the award was Susan Scorey. Some time after the event she talked to John Sinkins, Managing Director of Wildy's, about the award and customer relations more generally.

**Keywords:** vendor relations; law booksellers; awards; BIALL; law librarians

## Why do you think Wildy's won this award?

Our ethos is to provide the best customer service and always work hard to achieve that. I like to think that this has been reflected by this award.

## Why are you our "favourite supplier"?

This is due to the personal service we offer to customers, and the relationships we have built up with them.

## What does excellent customer service mean to you?

Always trying to offer high standards, quickly and efficiently, and should any problems arise, seek to resolve them as quickly and efficiently as possible.

## Is it true the customer is always right?

From the customer point of view, yes!

## How do you ensure your staff offer outstanding customer service? What training do you give them?

We work closely together as a team, but our staff can easily work autonomously as needed for each situation. Our staff are very experienced and feel confident consulting colleagues if they are not sure about something. We used to give extensive customer service training, but we are now able to recruit people known to the industry, who are themselves very experienced and knowledgeable and who have pride in offering great customer service.

## Does good customer care cost money and, if so, do you make the customer pay by higher prices/lower discounts?

I do not believe it does. In fact, here at Wildy's we may sacrifice profit for customer service. For example, free courier service within London and by post for the rest of the UK. We do not charge a fee for managing subscriptions, but rather charge the face value. There are no hidden costs, unlike the situation with many other suppliers!

**How do you retain customers in an environment of budget cutting?**

Business is surprisingly buoyant for Wildy's at this time. We have seen some order quantities reduced, but that is more than compensated for by an ever expanding new customer base.

**Why do you think some of the big publishers and suppliers, who have many staff and large budgets to spend on training and customer services, haven't done well in our survey?**

Perhaps because of their remoteness and lack of contact with their customers and their own products, as they tend to work in front of their pc's without physically handling the product itself?

**If you were in charge of these businesses, how would you guide them to doing better?**

Emphasise the importance of the customer and also understand the product better, so they can answer questions quickly and efficiently.

**How do you approach negotiating with your own suppliers?**

We rarely do! We prefer to be customer facing rather than trade facing.

**How do you go about understanding your customers' needs?**

We listen to them! And through our Key Account Managers and our two bookshops we meet them personally.



Figure 1: John Sinkins of Wildy's receiving the award from Daniella King, BIALL President

**How quickly do you respond to customer queries?**

We endeavour to respond to customer queries on the same day or within 24 hours depending on the nature of the request.

**Do you have named individuals as contacts?**

Yes, via our five account managers and also our dedicated sales team in London.

**What happens if my query is urgent and I need to escalate it?**

We consider all queries to be urgent and act upon them as soon as possible!

### **What is your commitment to assisting customers with their financial planning?**

We are always willing to discuss financial planning with customers and indeed happy to evaluate their libraries with possible recommendations for cutting back on duplication and less important titles.

### **Do you always supply an explanation of price increases and do you offer phased increases in pricing as standard?**

Fortunately (unfortunately!) prices are dictated by the suppliers, not by ourselves.

### **What do you do to minimise disruption to service when you take over a title?**

Once we have received a full itinerary of the customers' subscriptions or loose-leaf works, we simply request a letter indicating our authority to act on their behalf. After which, all work is done by ourselves, minimising any disruptions to our customers.

### **What data do you collect about your customers, and how do you utilise it?**

We only collect that which is necessary to service our customers to the best of our ability.

### **Is it easy to find out from your website what is included as part of a subscription?**

Yes, it is extremely easy. The information is on our website and is updated on a daily basis. A full list of subscriptions and updates received in the last 30 days is available via Wildy Book News either online or hard copy.

Even people who do not actually use Wildy's as their supplier (perhaps even other suppliers and agents!), use this information to keep up-to-date.

### **How long do you allow customers to claim for a missing issue/volume before it is declared out of print?**

We have to act within the restrictions of the major suppliers and publishers. This can range within 30-90 days, although we will push on behalf of customers outside those time periods, if it is a genuine case which we can justify.

### **How does the globalised business world affect your customer relations?**

We travel extensively and have recently attended exhibitions in Australia, Canada, Nigeria and the Caribbean. We feel it is important to take business to the customers within their home countries rather than sit back and have them contact us. Our website has grown remarkably in recent years and now customers are approaching us from all over the world. Most business comes from common law countries, but any business is good business and we are receiving increasing orders from Eastern European and other European countries.

### **What's next for Wildy's? How do you improve on 'outstanding'?**

More of the same and try to find the extra 0.2% to get the top mark in the next BIALL survey! Never becoming complacent about our customer's changing needs.

### **What do you think are the three most important ingredients that make a great business and why?**

- Understand the customer
- Understand the product
- Being independent and able to give best advice, not tied to one product