

---

## Book reviews

**WEBB, Trevor J. RESEARCHING FOR BUSINESS: AVOIDING THE 'NICE TO KNOW' TRAP.** London, Aslib. 1998. 57 pages, paperback, 21 cms. ISBN: 0 85142 408 2. Price: £12.50 (£10.00 Aslib corporate members)

The businessmen and women who lost billions in the hedge fund crisis of 1998 should have read this book, or at least given it to their researchers. They were victims of what Trevor Webb would call the "nice to know trap", that is, they had read research - popular at the time - which confirmed what they wanted to hear: those fat juicy fruit were the thing to grow.

This book is aimed at experienced business researchers who are charged with explaining the behaviour of such areas as markets or product patterns, under different foreseeable conditions. It sets out a disciplined, scientific approach to research in order to avoid the assumptions and intuition on which many businessmen and women base their decisions.

Webb believes that there are two main skills a researcher needs: the ability to provide reliable knowledge on which to base a decision, and a means of assessing the quality of opinion surrounding a subject.

The practical means of using these skills is the model. This is a replica of a situation (such as a market for razor blades) in which the researcher sets out the range of events (for example, interest rate changes, legal developments or population shifts) which would change the behaviour of the research object. One of these variables at a time is introduced to test the reaction of the object so that eventually the researcher could present the businessman or woman with a predictable pattern of behaviour.

The book assumes a degree of previous experience in modelling since it does not give the reader an indication of what the model should

contain (this is dependent on the researcher's particular resources and time limits). It does, however, give tips on procedure - such as checking the behaviour of the object at different points in time (which is simply a random way of checking your predictions) and not relying too heavily on one source of information - so that the generalist manager who is likely to read the final report does not need any specialist knowledge.

The information which is gathered to put in the model should be selected against a number of criteria, or quality control points. Webb warns against falling into the trap of using simplistic number crunching methods such as aggregates and residuals, and advises that the researcher is alert to bias when using research previously produced by others. He comes up with some useful mental tricks to make the process more efficient: by formulating a null hypothesis, that is, instead of researching whether profits would go up if there were a change of chairman one should look instead to see if not changing the chairman would increase profits. In this way the researcher guards against providing the answer the managing board is hoping for.

The research cycle is completed by an audit of the procedure after the decision has been taken to see what predictions failed to materialise, and why the researcher did not accurately predict it.

*Researching for business* is unusual in its field in attempting to supply a comprehensive framework for business research. Most studies are produced by business people themselves and are inherently subject-specific or padded out with descriptions of the person's heroic past. The book needs to be read several times over, and in conjunction with real research, because the language used is often abstract and sweeping with a lack of examples. This is not a book for use on an enquiry desk but contains a solid mental framework for established researchers.

**STEVEN DUROSE**

Assistant Librarian

Nicholson Graham & Jones

e-mail: SNDUROSE55@aol.com

**OWEN, Tim SUCCESS AT THE ENQUIRY DESK: SUCCESSFUL ENQUIRY ANSWERING - EVERY TIME.** London, LA Publishing. Second revised edition 1998. 84 pages, paperback, 22 cms. ISBN: 1 85604 309 6 Price: £13.50

Enquiry work is an extremely high profile part of an information service. Potentially, the reputation of the whole service can stand or fall on the quality of its enquiry points. It is thus vital that the staff involved in this kind of work have the necessary skills and knowledge to answer enquiries successfully. Such skills and knowledge need to be continually revised as more and more information sources become available and in a variety of different media.

Owen's book is a step-by-step guide through the stages of answering an enquiry. He starts by covering basic reference interview techniques. Hypothetical enquiries are used to illustrate how asking questions can help to avoid misunderstandings. Owen recommends keeping good records and an example of an enquiry form is included.

A separate chapter covers the issue of information overload, stressing the importance of determining the amount and level of information needed. The author then concentrates on the search process itself. It can be difficult to know where to begin searching and there is a chapter covering techniques for getting started. Owen also helpfully includes a list of 25 multi-purpose sources which he recommends as part of a core reference collection, useful for answering a wide range of enquiries. Another chapter is devoted to a discussion of how to select which medium to use. Owen then looks at efficient search strategies, recommending a systematic but flexible approach.

The last three chapters are concerned with presenting the answer to the enquirer. Owen covers techniques for ensuring that deadlines are met and addresses the issue of what to do when an answer cannot be found. The final chapter discusses how value can be added by providing information selectively and enhancing its presentation.

The content of this edition is substantially the same as that of the 1997 revised edition. However, references to sources have been updated and there is more information about the Internet and its use in enquiry work. The book is clearly laid out, with headings and subheadings to break up the text. Each chapter begins with a list of what is covered and concludes with a list recapping the main points. As the author refers to the same set of hypothetical enquiries throughout, the complete process can be followed - from initial enquiry to presentation of the answer. There is an index and an annotated list of the 25 recommended basic multi-purpose reference sources .

This is a useful book full of practical advice and tips. Its brevity and lively style make it quick and easy to read. Suitable for anyone needing to brush up their skills in enquiry work, it would be particularly helpful for newly qualified information professionals.

**LORNA DUKES**  
Assistant Information Specialist  
Cardiff University

**Megill, Kenneth A. and Schantz, Herb.**  
**DOCUMENT MANAGEMENT: NEW**  
**TECHNOLOGIES FOR THE**  
**INFORMATION SERVICES MANAGER.**

London, Bowker Saur, 1999. 191 pages,  
hardback. ISBN: 1 85739 246 9. Price: £ 30.

Part of Bowker Saur's series *Information Services Management*, Megill and Schantz have produced a work that takes the information services manager through the many processes of electronic document management. The series aims to give more of a management emphasis to the work of the information professional, and the authors approach their subject in this vein, not merely highlighting the benefits of electronic document management for the information professional but as part of an overall strategy aimed at benefiting the entire organisation.

The book is arranged in well designed sections, meaning it need not merely be a one-time read, but can be dipped into and used like a reference manual as well as an addition to the professional development library. The first section deals with discussing documents in all of their forms. An interesting aspect to this discussion is the notion that the information services manager has to re-evaluate what constitutes a document in their own mind. The expansion of multi-media essentially means that the *virtual document* may actually comprise various files, video, audio and image which only come together in the viewing stage. In essence this new type of document needs the information professional to be aware of the differing needs of each format with regard to storage, indexing and viewing.

The second section deals with the technologies involved in electronic document management, from scanners to optical character recognition (OCR) and electronic document management systems (EDMS). The authors deal extremely well with the complex issue of image storage. Anyone new to the area of scanning would be well advised to consult this section which is illuminating on the intricacies of image file size without getting bogged down in myriad compression algorithms. The detail with which

the authors describe OCR may be excessive for some readers, a full history of the process not being relevant to everyone.

For the information services manager keen to move to electronic document management a number of sections may be invaluable, Firstly, the authors go into great detail about the specifications of the ideal EDMS. In addition, the third section of the book concentrates on the business side of electronic document management, identifying workflow changes that may occur and suggesting formats for a cost benefit analysis.

The penultimate section of the book deals with meeting user needs, perhaps an aspect that can be sometimes forgotten in the rush to embrace new technology. It is in this area that the information professional's skills are invaluable, as the indexing and identification of documents are even more crucial in the digital era to prevent users experiencing information overload. Metadata is briefly discussed, but wisely with the ever changing nature of this topic, the authors merely cover the basics and highlight appropriate web sites for further, more up to date, information.

All in all, Megill and Schantz have provided a useful manual for the document manager thinking of moving to the electronic arena. They deal with electronic document management in both theory and practice, describing the various types of technologies used in electronic document management, providing useful insights into how organisations can best implement this new technology, and how to gauge the effects on your organisation. Finally, they put all of the above in the context of the user, highlighting the need for the manager to keep the user at the forefront in any changes implemented.

**DAVID McMENEMY**

Marketing Officer, The HERON Project  
University of Stirling  
dm6@stir.ac.uk

**MURPHY, Alison, DAVIES, David and COX, Gavin**  
**PUBLIC LIBRARY MATERIALS FUND AND BUDGET SURVEY 1997-99**

Loughborough University, Library and Information Statistics Unit, 1998. 269 pages, covered spiral bound, A4. ISBN 1 901786 06 4. Price: £17.50

This collection of statistics has been compiled and published since 1976 and provides data on the spending outcomes of UK public library authorities, and their budgets for 1998/9. The information is of particular value for benchmarking by local authorities and managers of services, and for library suppliers and the book trade in general. The key components that are affected by budget changes are covered: total library expenditure; materials expenditure; and staff, service points and opening hours. There are three main sections: a commentary, summary tables by theme, and authority tables. Data are given for 1996/7 actual expenditure, 1997/8 original estimates and the actual outcomes, and the 1998/9 estimate. One of the complications of preparing the statistics in recent years has been the effect of the re-organisation of local government. This year the changes have affected the English authorities.

So what is happening to public library expenditure? For the UK, as a whole, actual expenditure in 1997/8 was only slightly up on 1996/7, but if the estimates are accurate a 2% increase will emerge in 1998/9. The Welsh authorities appear to have had the highest increases although this is based on a 55% response rate. The overall trends for spending on materials are significantly below those for total expenditure, and are accounting for less and less of the library budget. There is speculation whether this results from the lifting of the Net Book Agreement or the establishment of purchasing consortia. The reduction in the number of loans, particularly fiction loans, possibly accounts for the change in expenditure patterns. Loans to children and of audiovisual material have increased, and non-fiction loans have held up well. Staff reductions that were foreshadowed have taken place, and the main reductions affected

professional staff, particularly in London, the Metropolitan Districts, and Scotland. There has been a reduction in the number of service points, with a modest reduction in the hours open, considering the funding problems in local authorities.

The situation continues to be a cause of concern when the government is placing emphasis on the national learning grid and on improving educational standards within schools. It is also disappointing to see how few authorities are recording expenditure under the heading of CD-ROM and other services.

This is a useful gathering of statistics, and perhaps a copy should be displayed prominently at every service point to inform the public and encourage them to lobby for increased funding. If the public isn't told about the problems, they can hardly be expected to be ready to be advocates for the public library service in the UK. And there are many users who value their public library service.

**PATRICIA LAYZELL WARD**

Editor and Consultant

Minffordd, Gwynedd

e-mail: layzellward@celtic.co.uk

**CREASER, Claire and SCOTT, Janet LISU ANNUAL LIBRARY STATISTICS 1998.**

Loughborough University, Library and Information Statistics Unit, 1998. 214 pages, covered spiral bound, A4. ISBN: 1 901786 10 2. Price: £27.50

This useful volume brings together key statistics for college, national, public, special, schools and university libraries in the UK, together with a selection covering the book trade, reader characteristics, prices of materials and popular books and authors.

In the case of public libraries real expenditure has been falling consistently since 1993, except for staffing where most years have recorded a small increase. Income is being generated at a higher rate, with fines and fees bringing in the largest element. There has been a decline in fiction issues, but an increase in children's and non-fiction borrowing over a ten-year period. Overall the number of service points open to the public has increased over the past ten years, but this has been in bulk loans to residential homes rather than traditional service points. Despite some concern about their accuracy, it appears that the annual visits per capita have fallen steadily from 6.9 in 1992-3 to 6.3 in 1997-8 (which interestingly compares with 7 visits by Americans to their public libraries in 1998).

In academic libraries the increase in expenditure has been much greater for the new universities than the old; but for the old universities, expenditure increases have exceeded inflation. The old universities had recorded a steady increase in library staff between 1993-4 and 1995-6, but this was followed by a sharp fall of 10% in 1996/7. The number of users per staff member has risen sharply. In the new universities the number of professional library staff has risen by 7% in the current year, in line with previous increases, and the number of users per staff member has fallen. Staff numbers have increased slightly in the HE colleges.

There have been major changes at the British Library and the interesting statistics lie in BLDSC requests. Amongst UK customers the academic

libraries dominate the picture with 54% of the loans, whilst from overseas industrial/commercial customers dominate with 41% of the requests. Postal requests have fallen dramatically whilst computer to computer rose, and then from two years ago when email was established 23% of requests are now received by this means.

Statistics for special libraries have only been collected recently hence no trend analysis is possible, but it appears that the number of posts is increasing in the fields of finance, law and the pharmaceutical industry.

In school libraries there was a mean of 8.5 books per pupil borrowed. A librarian or teacher, working either part or full-time, staffed most secondary school libraries. A mean of £10.16 was spent on the school library per pupil and 90% of the school libraries provided access to CD-ROMs, and 54% computer software.

The number of new titles published increased to 101,504 in 1996 but fell to 100,029 in 1997. The most borrowed authors in 1996-7 were: for contemporary adults - 1. Catherine Cookson, 2. Danielle Steele, 3. Dick Francis; for contemporary children's - 1. R.L. Stine, 2. Janet and Allan Ahlberg, 3. Roald Dahl; for the classics - 1. Beatrix Potter, 2. Daphne du Maurier, and 3. Jane Austen.

A fascinating collection of statistics, which is well presented and has a good commentary.

**PATRICIA LAYZELL WARD**

Editor and Consultant,  
Minffordd, Gwynedd  
e-mail: layzellward@celtic.co.uk