

Reviews

Sumsion, John, Berridge, Pamela, and Creaser, Claire.

LISU annual library statistics 1994: featuring trend analysis of UK public and academic libraries 1983-93. (LISU Public Library Statistics Unit Report 8). Loughborough: Library and Information Statistics Unit, Department of Library and Information Studies, University of Loughborough, 1994. £24.00. (ISBN 0 948848 65 0; ISSN 0967-487X).

IAN WINKWORTH

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This publication offers an excellent, well-presented one-volume compilation of statistical data which is otherwise scattered through more than a dozen sources, many of which are further split into in ten or eleven annual volumes to cover the period reported here. The presentation is enhanced by useful explanatory and interpretative commentary covering both the quirks of data collection of particular series and the broader trends which become apparent when ten years data is presented. In some cases the data sets have been enhanced or made less incomplete by detective and persuasion work from LISU.

The 1994 volume covers the statistical period 1982-83 to 1992-93. To the established coverage of academic and public libraries is added a modest but growing set of statistics and estimates relating to special libraries in industry, government and the health service. The library statistics are supplemented by useful contextual data such as statistics of population and inflation indexes, and by book trade data, Public Lending Right statistics and a concise summary of the results of the special survey on the state of UK higher education libraries carried out for the Follett Committee in 1993. The volume is divided into seven chapters. It includes in total 139 tables and 47 figures.

There are few surprises in the trends revealed by the data, but this volume provides an invaluable quantification and scaling of even the most expected outcomes. The trends presented are, of course, limited by the data which has been collected. There is, as always, a preponderance of input data: pounds spent, numbers of books, staffing ratios, numbers of libraries. But the tables are also able to reflect the slowly growing trend in library statistics to give more prominence to measures of output. Maybe in next year's volume John Sumsion will feel able to progress a little further towards trend series (however short) which represent a rounded picture of library performance.

Martin, Murray S (Editor)

Library Finance: new needs, new models Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1994 Library Trends vol 42, no 3, Winter 1994. Approximately \$33.00.

GEOFFREY SMITH

Consultant

The theme of this issue of Library Trends, reprinted as a monograph, is the experience of librarians in the United States in meeting the twin challenges of financial constraints and changes in the management styles of the organizations that their libraries serve. It maintains the high standards of this journal, with sixteen papers brought together by the issue editor, Murray S. Martin, providing librarians outside the United States with valuable insights. There are many similarities but some revealing differences from the UK.

It is of interest to librarians in academic and public libraries, to researchers and consultants, and is a rich quarry of shared information and ideas from leading specialists in the areas of management, funding, financial analysis, budgeting, accounting, communication, library planning, automation and collection development. The articles are supported by extensive references to other literature.

Many of the challenges addressed are familiar to libraries and librarians outside the United States. The place and role of the library in the academic establishment, the role of the public library in the community, the management of change, budget allocation to fund electronic information - equipment and running costs, the need for investment in research and development, changes in library automation provision and priorities, and the service and cost implications for library cooperation and coordination of access and interdependence strategies rather than holding strategies. Interlibrary cost comparisons in public and academic libraries, and the questions that they raise, and changing approaches to personnel management, are also examined.

I found particularly relevant the informed views of the theory and practice, and the costs, of outsourcing of services; the coverage of the relationships which develop from the interdependence of libraries with the suppliers of goods and services (illustrated in a paper by one of Baker and Taylor's Collection Development Specialists analyzing the provision of approval services); and the implications of strategies of buying (or borrowing) just in time to meet demand rather than purchasing to anticipate demand.

Pervasive themes are analysis of the costs and benefits of resource sharing and other collaborative activities for all kinds of libraries, the relationship of the library with other parts of the institution, and ways in which budgets and costings can change to reflect user focused library services.

American librarians are facing some hard decisions - this issue of Library Trends gives valuable information on the context in which they are making them.

Pullinger, David

The Super Journal Project: electronic journals on Super JANET. (British Library R&D Report 6126). Bristol: Institute of Physics Publishing, 1994. (ISBN 0-7503-0102-3).

CLIFF MCKNIGHT

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In the introduction to this report, David Pullinger makes the point that the project in question was not a research project, rather it was a demonstration of technical feasibility. The report, therefore, 'is a simple account of what was done and the decisions that changed the final system' (p.vii)

Following the introduction and acknowledgements, the report is divided into five chapters:

1. The genesis of the project on electronic journals
2. Specifying the electronic journal software
3. Experience of the viewing interfaces
4. What has been learned from the project?
5. Discussion.

The software specification could not be met by any existing software and it would have involved considerable programming effort to produce such software. The decision was therefore taken to use four different packages which between them allowed a range of possibilities to be demonstrated. The four were: AT & T Right Pages; EBT's Dynatext; Oracle's Book; and some software referred to as Telepublishing which was developed as part of an EU RACE project.

Chapter 3 contains many colour screen shots which give a reasonable impression of the different interfaces. There are also useful summary tables of the different data requirements of the packages and the extent to which their features fitted the requirements. However, no formal evaluation of the interfaces took place.

In view of the lack of formal evaluation, Chapter 4 is necessarily restricted to impressionistic discussion of end-to-end speed, font handling, hypertext links and article design. The important point is made that publishers will wish to retain a house style even in the electronic domain.

The final chapter discusses some of the issues again (eg. network speed) and some previously unmentioned topics - will there continue to be a need for print-on-paper? The final conclusion is that many of the remaining unresolved issues are not technical but rather political, economic and organizational. It is a conclusion I would have to agree with, having arrived at it myself in several papers!

As someone who is involved in electronic journals, this report was an essential piece of reading for me - if I had not been asked to review it I would have bought a copy. It documents an important project, one which will undoubtedly lead to further avenues of investigation. In this sense I can recommend it. For readers with background knowledge of the context of electronic journals the report is nicely self-contained. The (self-admitted) lack of reference means that newcomers to the field should preferably start somewhere else.

If I had to criticize the report (in the time-honoured tradition of reviews) most of my comments would be relatively trivial.

The report would have benefited from a technical proofreading in order to eliminate some errors. For example, on p.27 mention is made of an electronic form called 'Quark' whereas I suspect this should have been 'Quark Xpress' or even just 'Xpress'. Similarly, readers rushing out to obtain a copy of 'Common Ground's No Hands' software (p.36) will discover that they are really looking for 'No Hands Software's Common Ground'. I could also have survived without a full page table of dissemination activities (p.43) but since the report was written for BLRDD I can see why such a table might be included.

This is certainly one of the most stylishly designed R&D reports I have encountered - lots of white space, grey side-bars with cross-heads and summary points off them and so forth. However, I do wish it had been printed in a larger typesize. I would guess it is set in 8 point, which in my advancing years I find difficult to read for any length of time (yes - I have had my eyes tested very recently and I don't need spectacles). For this reason (and because of the lack of an index) I would have preferred an electronic version.

When will BLRDD publish their reports electronically, I wonder ...

Penn, I.A., Pennix, G. and Coulson, J.

Records management handbook 2nd ed. Aldershot, Hants and Brookfield, VT: Gower, 1994 £55.00. (ISBN 0-566-07510 5).

DAVID HAYNES
Consultant

This is the second edition of a key reference work for records managers. Until 1989, when the first edition was published, there was a paucity of reference material in this area. That year three different reference works came out, reflecting the renewed interest in records management. The Records Management Journal was launched by Aslib in the same year.

The handbook is North American in emphasis, reflecting the authors' backgrounds as records managers or consultants there. The emphasis is very strongly on physical rather than electronic records. The latter is such a large subject that it would warrant a title of its own and the authors were probably quite sensible to do no more than pay lip-service to the issue.

For an information professional new to the records management field this would be an invaluable guide. It is especially strong on the methods and techniques of records management, although there is a tendency to produce checklists for people to work through.

The book is divided into three main sections. Part I provides an introduction to records management and some of the key concepts in the area such as records life-cycles and retention schedules. It also provides an introduction to different storage media such as microfilm and optical disk. Even in the introductory chapters it deals with "how to" - in this case how to evaluate the technological, economic and operational feasibility of the different media.

Part II - Records Management Improvement Strategies deals with methods for data gathering. This is the section which is most likely to be of interest to LIRG members. It describes the methodologies for conducting a records audit, including techniques for conducting records surveys. The reader is taken through the decision-making process to set the scope of a survey, establishing methodologies and assessing whether the research should be done by an external consultant or kept in-house.

The two chapters which focus on research techniques are: Chapter 6 - Management analysis Part One: preparation, projection management, and data collection; and Chapter 7 - Management analysis Part Two: analyzing, drawing conclusions, evaluation, and implementation.

There is a lot of useful material in the form of checklists which provide a guide to how to conduct a survey. This is not a detailed manual or text on research and for those interested in research techniques there are fuller treatments of the subject in Margaret Slater's book⁽¹⁾, which provides a more rigorous base for evaluating different research techniques.

The third section of the book deals with implementation issues such as retention scheduling, forms management, records storage and archiving. There is also a brief chapter on technology issues. The coverage of technology is very brief and suffers from a lack of illustration. This is an area which the authors are not comfortable with and one which warrants further research and perhaps a separate book. Given that technology is one of the driving forces for record management, and I believe that this is why records management has now become such an important issue, it would have been good to see more reference to DIP (document image processing), business process re-engineering, and electronic document management.

This book is not intended as a research manual and so the coverage of research is very practical and not necessarily very complete. However, in the context of records management and for information professionals faced with establishing or developing a records management unit, this is a useful guide. As an up-to-date manual of current practice in records management I believe that this book is unequalled.

DAVID HAYNES

David Haynes Associates

References

1. Slater, M. (Editor). Research methods in library and information studies. London: The Library Association, 1990.

British Library, Business Information Research Service

Sources of European economic and business information 6th ed. Aldershot: Gower, 1995. £125.00. ISBN (0-566-07487-7).

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Completely revised and updated, this impressive and essentially practical reference work has

succeeded admirably in its aim of providing a list of the major sources of economic and business statistical information for 32 countries. There are two particular qualities which this sixth edition possesses - firstly, user friendliness and, secondly, comprehensiveness. Within any reference text worth its salt the researcher/enquirer should be able to approach from a variety of angles and still arrive at the desired information. A combination of logical sequence of sections and painstaking indexing has ensured ease of access and is a tribute to the editorial team at the British Library's Business Information Research Service. The volume's comprehensive nature extends to three separate levels: macro-coverage ie. international, national and European sources; micro-coverage ie. within each of the 32 countries which forms 60% of the text; and, thirdly, subject coverage, including economic conditions, socioeconomic data, public finance, industry, business and commerce.

The volume consists of eight sections including three indexes. The first 50 pages cover international, European and specifically European Union sources, totalling over 800 entries (with a small number of inevitable overlaps). At the heart of the book is the 200-page countries section ranging from Albania (7 entries) to the United Kingdom (359 entries). Within each country the enquirer is provided with a helpful profile together with a map showing the country's location within Europe, its geographical area and population, capital city, language, currency, national bank and government/political structure. Entries for the first four sections are characterized by being well established and accessible sources. Their inclusion is based upon questionnaires, in several languages, sent to publishers appearing in the fifth edition and other bodies identified by the researchers. Each entry has a consistent format including publishing body, country and subject coverage, language, frequency, number of pages and price.

Section 5 is a useful list of publishing bodies with addresses, telephone numbers, etc, together with cross references to the entries in the main body. This is followed by three indexes to allow searching by title, country and subject. The latter two are particularly helpful for comparative purposes.

My only reservation about this edition - apart from the broken alphabetical sequences on pp.30-31 - is the currency of the information. Like many other regions of the world, Europe is facing dynamic changes which make the publication of up-to-date political and economic data problematic. Therefore, although edited in April 1994 and published one year later, this edition is essentially a snapshot of the position as it was in 1993. Nevertheless, this volume represents value for money given the enormous amount of data made available and the work involved in facilitating the retrieval process for the enquirer.

Basch, Reva (editor)

Electronic information delivery: ensuring quality and value. Aldershot: Gower, 1995. £48.00. (ISBN 0-566-07567-9).

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Over the past decade quality has tended to refer to issues within organizational management, with less emphasis placed on the quality of particular products. This is now changing. When applied to the current and emerging electronic technologies, for example, CD-ROMs, online databases etc,

specific measurable criteria are required to evaluate performance. Recent online conferences have recognized the importance attached to database quality. As the technology develops further and competition becomes more fierce, the need to differentiate objectively between products will become more urgent. Such is the main thrust of this coherent set of fourteen papers.

Contributions are given from a variety of perspectives including publishers, database producers, distributors, consultants, librarians/intermediaries and users. Basch has identified ten broad categories for reviewing database performance. Whilst each individual criterion would not be a surprise, it is helpful to reiterate this set as a framework for future evaluation. The broad categories are: consistency, coverage and scope, timeliness, accuracy/error rate, accessibility/ease of use, integration, output, documentation, customer support and training and, lastly, value-to-cost ratio. Following brief discussion of these criteria the volume is divided into five parts: database production; role of the search intermediary; quality testing; liability issues; and the role of user groups. The first two chapters provide an historical perspective on the electronic information industry and, particularly, on the specific improvements made to the standardization of search software. The views of two publishers are then aired: firstly, a print publisher who is well aware of the problems of maintaining quality during conversion to different electronic formats and, secondly, a CD-ROM publisher who considers maintaining the integrity of source data. Part I is rounded off with a description of TQM in a particular database production environment.

Part II concentrates on the interface between client, searcher and database. For me these two chapters are the most thought-provoking. The brevity of this section is surprising given Quint's plea to remember that 'the user defines the quality of information products' (p.100). Part III provides practical advice on the methods of evaluating databases and the application of the criteria outlined above. They contain copious screen dumps to aid understanding. Part IV covers the liability of independent information professionals when things go wrong and also a view from the UK (by Sandy Norman) on the legal aspects of database quality. The final three chapters have a European focus. A small selection of local databases is evaluated by a group of Finnish researchers; Chris Armstrong describes the establishment of the Centre for Information Quality Management (CIQM) and, finally, Gilchrist provides a European snapshot of database quality issues.

The strengths of this set of highly readable papers lie in its practical application and reinforcement of a suitable evaluative framework together with the diversity of stakeholder perspectives. Anyone with an interest in electronically published information - from producers to information professionals and researchers - would benefit from the stimulating nature of this collection.

Hamilton, Feona

Current awareness, current techniques. Aldershot: Gower, 1995. £35.00. (ISBN 0-566-07626-8).

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The provision of a current awareness service (CAS) is one way of getting to the heart of contemporary customer-oriented (or should it be customer-obsessed?) library and information work. By marrying the needs of the users, the knowledge and skills of the professional intermediary

and adequate administrative support, an effective service could be provided. The benefits will be felt not only by the service's recipients in terms of satisfying information needs but also by the providers in terms of staff development, job satisfaction and enhanced reputation (for the organization rather than the individual). As an illustration, one of the first tasks I undertook as a "wet-behind-the-ears" Subject Librarian in a higher education college was to establish a CAS. It turned out to be a particularly effective vehicle for swiftly bringing together academic and library staff and, in fact, acted as a catalyst for future successful liaison activities.

I would certainly have welcomed this very practical book all those years ago. So who is it aimed at? Its readership includes anyone who runs or is involved in providing a library and information service, part of whose remit is to keep users up to date with developments in their special areas of interest. Its applicability to a wide variety of library and information sectors is one of its strengths. A further strength lies in the practicability already referred to. This guidebook is located firmly in the "how to do" genre.

Each of the three parts into which the volume is divided has a distinct contribution to make to the overall effect. The first two parts - Starting a CAS and Case Studies - take up half the book, with the remainder consisting of sources of information for inclusion in such services.

The first part describes the step-by-step process of setting up a CAS, including user profiling, designing and administering questionnaires, interviewing, analyzing results, designing the service (is it eye-catching, easy to read, standardized and regular?), distributing the results and, finally, choosing and using sources. The use of external services, eg. SDI and press cuttings services, is also covered briefly. Two additional elements would have been welcome: firstly, a section concerning the evaluation of CAS and, secondly, for those interested in reading around the topic or exploring adjacent avenues, a short select bibliography.

The middle section details nine short case studies taken from different sectors eg. an accountancy firm, a charity, a pharmaceutical company, a professional association, a public library. These are punchy descriptions of the CAS provided within these anonymous organizations, which succeed not only in giving readers a good "feel" for the services but also in demonstrating subtle differences between types of service. An example taken from the academic sector is a surprise omission. The third and largest part contains a selective list of sources for use in compiling a CAS. Details include addresses, telephone and fax numbers and descriptions of services (with particularly good coverage of European databases).

I would like to have seen greater discussion of the transferable skills which library and information staff need to develop nowadays in offering such services eg. abstracting, interviewing and IT skills. However, the effect of the convergence of the three sections, coupled with its pragmatic approach, succeed in laying down a solid foundation for the provision of a CAS.