

## Reviews

Meadows, Jack

Innovation in information: twenty years of the British Library Research and Development Department.  
London: Bowker Saur, 1994. £25. (ISBN 1-857-391004).

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Professor Jack Meadows has produced an impartial and revealing study of how “a single organization, not over generously endowed with funding, has managed to have a major impact on the development of library and information work”. This does not seem to me to be an overstatement and I know of no comparable organization in this field and in any other country that has succeeded in surviving twenty years in such a rapidly changing technological, social and political environment. By most contemporary measures this book has been researched and written, edited and published, very quickly. Consonant with the interesting times in which we live, it was - as Brian Perry (the Director of BLRDD) notes in his Foreword - “the thought of the possible demise of the British Library Research and Development Department that led to the commissioning of this work”. Much posthaste and rummage had been occasioned at Sheraton Street by the proposal of the Secretary of State for a new “Library and Information Commission”. Ensuing discussions envisaged that the whole Department might be transferred to the Commission by April 1994. It would be fascinating to know by whom, and to what end, such a translation was proposed. Nonetheless the heat - for the time being, perhaps - was turned down and at least one valuable outcome has been the speeding of the production of this book. The author, editors and publishers all deserve congratulations.

Like a parliamentarian, I ought to declare an interest. I have been, off-and-on, in receipt of support (financial, moral and other) from BLRDD and its predecessors since 1964. For this reason I am glad that Jack Meadows has traced in his chapter on “origins” the ancestry of BLRDD from the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research (DSIR) by way of the Office of Scientific and Technical Information. Lacking this lineage the course of BLRDD’s development might have been very different, if indeed it had been conceived at all in its original role. Meadows points out that OSTI experience had shown that it was difficult to expend all the available research funds by relying solely on unsolicited proposals and this explains why BLRDD has played a more directive role in its field than that required by some of the research councils. He suggests that “the prime reason was the absence of a clearly defined library and information research community, in the sense that there are research communities in chemistry and physics”. Much of the traditional approach to library research was bibliographical which came to be regarded as “antiquarian”.

One of the themes that might increasingly unify research efforts in the field could be discerned by the time BLRDD started: "that computer developments would lead to stronger links between investigations into information retrieval, databases, thesauri, indexes, abstracts and library automation". Because computers were regarded as "sexy" this emerging field might prove attractive to prospective research workers. Meadows apparently believes that "anything less sexy than an early computer is difficult to imagine" and here, I dissent. An IBM 7090 with all its lights flashing and tape capstans spinning could be a real turn-on compared with the rather mousey (if powerful) PC on which this review is being prepared.

The first two chapters "Origins" and "Influencing research" - are particularly interesting as they use internal BLRDD documents and articles published by BLRDD staff as sources with which to trace the development of trends such as the concept of research priorities. Chapter 3 ("Libraries and users") gets to grips with the way in which support has been provided to fund work (mainly developmental) relating to libraries. Regionalism has been an important factor in this area, hence the appearance of BLCMP, SWALCAP, SCOLCAP and LASER. More recently the Public Library Development Incentive Scheme (PLDIS) has succeeded "not only in putting public library research and development firmly on the government agenda: they have also brought it to the attention of elected members and senior administrative officers in local government". BLRDD has supported user research in a wide range of areas including disadvantaged groups such as the elderly, those living in rural areas and schools. In this chapter the rise and subsequent fall of three specialised research centres is also noted: the Centre for Research on User Studies (CRUS), the Centre for Library and Information Management (CLAIM) and the Aslib Research Department.

The chapter on "Automation" indicates how, by the 1980s, "it became more and more difficult to treat library automation as a single entity. ... Library automation was becoming subsumed in the general development of information technology in the library and information world". BLRDD had funded early demonstration projects on stand-alone housekeeping systems but by the late 1970s and early 1980s support declined when such activities were coming to be seen as routine applications. Technological developments in storage media and telecommunications networks shifted the emphasis towards the exploitation of these facilities and improvements in "human-computer interaction". With respect to the latter, the Department decided that the design, implementation and evaluation of OPACs was a key area of library automation to explore. Which of the various competing forms of storage would win widespread acceptance was for a time unclear, but when the compact disk for use with text and multimedia emerged, BLRDD was quick to produce a demonstration disk. Meadows uses the example of work at Bath University over the past two decades to chart the change and broadening of BLRDD-supported research. Initial studies at Bath compared different types of catalogue and the costs of cataloguing. The currency of the UK MARC service was then monitored. Later work reflected the way in which cataloguing was being merged with other related activities, under the impact of new technology. Effort was put into OPAC development. In 1989 a UK Office for Library Networking was set up at Bath which subsequently merged the above activities into a wider programme addressing all types of information provider and network user support service.

Support for electronic publishing research has involved a number of projects whose success has perhaps fallen somewhat short of total. Meadows describes a synoptic journal experiment, and Knowledge Warehouse ("whose failure was instructive") the BLEND experiment and project Quartet. These involved a lot of money and though lessons were undoubtedly learned from them, the price was high. I am reluctant to comment further on them for the reasons given in the second paragraph of this review.

Chapter 5 deals with the support that BLRDD has given to fairly large-scale state-of-the-art reviews in various areas of information research. Some of these have been aimed at specific types of research - such as user education - but the most influential have been subject based. They have all had the prime objective of describing the current research into the production, handling and dissemination of information in a particular field. Reviews have been conducted in the fields of chemistry, physics, biology, agriculture and medicine. The Department has also been the joint sponsor of reviews on the humanities (with the British Academy) and on science and technology (two with the Royal Society). The latest major review supported by BLRDD was, of course, the forward-looking "Information UK 2000".

Under the chapter heading of "Only Connect", Meadows describes the various approaches that BLRDD has used to promote and encourage the dissemination of research findings. He notes that for the most recent method tried - that of BLRDD Open Days - a subsequent survey showed that nearly all of the participants thought that it had been successful "but their answers betrayed considerable confusion concerning the role and activities of BLRDD". A wide dissemination of this book should certainly help to reduce this confusion.

The title of the final chapter is "Urbi et Orbi". The significance of this papal allusion rather escapes me. As far as the wider world is concerned, BLRDD has always been active internationally and becomes increasingly so. Since 1986 the Department has had the responsibility for international liaison on behalf of the British Library as a whole. The chapter soon returns to more local preoccupations, particularly the Department's relationship to its parent body (the City?). As Meadows points out there was a strong suspicion in the early days, when OSTI was absorbed by the new institution, that the Department's aims would become subservient to those of the British Library as a whole and that it would be unable to maintain that sturdy independence OSTI had enjoyed in financing wide-ranging research. It is fair to observe that there is little evidence of this happening to any significant extent so far, although that is not to assume that other departments have looked enviously on the resources that R&DD controls. Meadows quotes, but does not enlarge on, the most recently (1993) published strategic objectives of the British Library:

"the achievement of the Library's strategic objectives will clearly depend on a strong internal research programme which will enable it to develop and harness technology effectively and to respond to the changing needs of its users. We shall therefore establish and support a programme of corporate research and development aimed specifically at the Library's own needs."

Various charts and tables included in this chapter show clearly how while BLRDD's responsibilities have grown in its 20 years, the staffing complement has decreased and the available funding has dropped quite drastically in real terms. Meadows gives a thoughtful analysis of what the effects of these trends have been, and their implications, which I shall not attempt to summarize. He also questions some of the changes envisaged in the consultation paper on the proposed new Library and Information Commission. Perhaps the most ominous of these is that the body should exercise a research council function and should supervise overall R&D policy.

"Taken to its limit, this could leave BLRDD as simply a conduit for funding and a monitor of expenditure. Looking back over the history of BLRDD, it is the department's ability to operate at a variety of levels - from details of funding to general policy - that has helped it to advise and assist the library and information community in a flexible way. If we accept that nurturing an integrated library and information research community has been BLRDD's unique contribution, anything that affects the integration requires very strong justification. Otherwise it seems reasonable to insist that BLRDD has

become part of our national heritage: as a listed monument, only limited reconstruction of it should be permissible.”

This book is not, nor is it intended to be, a definitive history of BLRDD. The author has wisely avoided issues of personalities and the index reveals very few entries for personal names. Meadows concedes that this may be unfair to “the creativity and influence of leading researchers in the library and information field”. He suggests that insiders will recognize such individuals from references to their institutions, and outsiders won’t care overmuch. Perhaps so, but the “growth and development of BLRDD into one of the most influential and respected organizations in the information world” (publisher’s blurb) has not occurred spontaneously. It has been nurtured by some able people, not least the Department’s two directors. Jack Meadows has provided us with some skilful maps of the historical geography of BLRDD, but history, as many still believe, is essentially about chaps.

Kinnell, Margaret and MacDougall, Jennifer

Meeting the marketing challenge: strategies for public libraries and leisure services. London: Taylor Graham, 1994. £25. (ISBN 0-947568-61-1).

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The context in which this MAPS (Marketing in the Public Sector) research project is placed is that of the so-called “new managerialism” which evolved during the Thatcher years and still continues apace. This new Right ideology within the public services sector emphasizes the importance of market forces, fierce competition, customer-orientation and entrepreneurship. For many local services this signalled a cultural shift towards the private sector model.

This welcome contribution to the debate on the role of marketing in local authority management represents the collaborative fruits of a one-year study (1991-92) involving a group of Loughborough University researchers with a refreshing mix of backgrounds: information and library management, business studies and sport and recreation management. The research provides a snapshot of marketing within public library and leisure services, two services with similar characteristics and problems. Its aims were to gauge the nature and extent of marketing planning activities actually taking place; to find out the managers’ perceptions of the role of marketing and its applications; to identify any obstacles to implementation and, lastly, to identify training needs.

To this end a multiple-method approach is adopted, using a questionnaire survey, case studies and content analysis of documents. Such triangulation not only helps to validate the results of a project but also in this case provides a formidable array of data from which to create a rich picture. From both types of service the survey elicited 512 (78%) responses, representatives from five library and leisure service authorities were interviewed and strategic plans (from 166 authorities) were analyzed.

The ten chapters follow roughly the order of the survey questions. The first explains the historical and political perspectives of the services, including the complexity and confusion of multi-tier government. A question which is posed early on and which turns out to be a crucial theme throughout is, “what business are we in?” Responses range from services to the housebound to writers’ workshops, from

swimming pools to pets corners. This provides a flavour to whet the appetite. Research then focuses of marketing, revealing that libraries and leisure services are at different stages of marketing development, the latter being further advanced. Commitment to marketing strategy as measured by written statements is shown to be lukewarm. The middle chapters provide a rather pessimistic view of progress with marketing plans and information systems. Marketing research, where it exists, is not integrated into any wider planning framework. Chapters 6-8 concentrate on the conventional components of the marketing mix - all the Ps - product, place, personnel, price, promotion. The latter, the most visible and widespread, is deemed to be the least important although this view does not emerge out of the survey. The need for income generation and the pervading ethos of "doing more for less" are addressed under "price". Mention of political influence and accountability together with traditional bureaucratic practices remind us of the constraining and sometimes inflexible nature of much local authority management. It comes as no surprise that there is little training for those responsible for marketing, indeed long-term training strategies generally are few and far between.

The final chapter is a disappointment. It would have been helpful to look forward, perhaps considering the implications of CCT (for libraries) and the impending local government reforms (or any other insights taken from responses to the final survey question about the future). We are told that the requirements are new attitudes, more vigour and commitment, development of marketing strategies. But how? An incremental strategic planning model is the only way forward given local authorities' slowness to adapt, committee systems etc. Some guidelines gleaned from good practice would have been welcome.

A number of themes emerge from the research. One leitmotif which appears or is implied in at least five chapters is the problem of the plurality of services available. This apparent uncertainty of purpose affects all the management functions. Secondly, we are constantly aware of pressure - more and better services, a diminishing resource base, maximizing income within a service-oriented ethos and adapting to changes brought about by short-termism and legislation etc. But the overriding theme is the perceived notion that marketing is a peripheral activity (only 18% of libraries considered it "essential") and, partly because of this, it suffers from a lack of integration into and coordination with other strategic plans.

Each chapter contains a welcome combination of theoretical underpinning for those less familiar with marketing concepts, quotations from case study interviews alongside discussion of the key survey results. These elements are skilfully interwoven with piecharts, diagrams and tables which together with plentiful subheadings provide 160 pages of highly readable material.

This book which will be of interest to practising and aspiring managers in both services, is timely considering recent changes in local and central government. It builds on the evidence for advances in marketing strategies provided by Yorke <sup>(1)</sup>. The authors refer to literature in the field throughout the book, including important work by Kotler, Torkildsen and Cronin. There is also a select bibliography of over 60 titles. However, partly due to the perceived peripheral nature of marketing to these services, very little up-to-date research has been forthcoming. This comprehensive and thought-provoking work will fill this gap.

1. Yorke, D A. Marketing and non-profit organizations. European Journal of Marketing 18 (2), 1984, p17-22.

## **Baverstock, Alison**

Are books different? Marketing in the book trade. London: Kogan Page, 1993. (ISBN 0-7494-0900-2).

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This book is interesting to read. The central question - is the marketing of books really 'different', or is this just a rather refined excuse for failing to tackle book marketing either seriously or effectively? - focuses on the why of marketing rather than the how to. This is a broad topic, and one for which the information could be difficult to harness, but Alison Baverstock appears to be in a good position to offer us an answer. She is, after all, writing about her own profession. However, her approach, (typified, endearingly, by the statement "I thought the best way to start was by asking the opinion of as many people as possible..."p14), lacks a clarity of method. Whilst the resulting findings contain a wealth of facts, anecdotes, statistics and quotable quotes, the overall message in the book is lost in the meandering style of writing.

Some parts are better than others. The first chapter, "Are books different? The arguments for and against", gives a comprehensive and clear reasoning, concluding that "books are a bit different, ...publishers have become so, and ...the major reason for this is the way in which the book trade has grown used to operating, rather than the public perception of what books are for" (p29).

Chapter two gives a concise (12 page) discussion of "what is marketing?". Here the summaries of several marketing approaches are informative and lead well into chapter three, which explores the meaning of marketing in the book trade. This is, to my mind, the strongest chapter. It looks at the problems the book trade faces in trying to introduce a marketing approach. Alison Baverstock neatly sums up the impact of working with inadequate financial systems, inappropriate management structures, noting "the enormous degree of familiarity assumed by the book trade on the part of the general public" (p45), and in dealing with an uninformed and unwilling market, for example, "trying to persuade the general public that dictionary buying is more than a once-in-a-lifetime event" (p21).

She then discusses, with seamless editing, several case studies of marketing in action in the publishing field. These are useful practical examples which draw from her own experience and personal contacts. Unfortunately some potentially very interesting avenues, say, the stock of fiction by supermarkets, are only briefly explored and one is left feeling that little has been added to the knowledge in this area. This chapter is considerably weaker towards the end where Alison Baverstock raises a lot of issues which she does not go on to tackle. For example, "the progressive evolution of large transnational publishing companies" is fleetingly dismissed after only eight lines.

The fourth chapter, dealing with industry structure and reputation focuses on the Net Book Agreement, and the lack of industry cooperation, for example, between the Booksellers Association and the Publishers Association and over generic promotions. Again, I would have thought that more could have been written about the last issue, perhaps drawing from the experience of public libraries in promoting something as amorphous as 'a good read'. In fact useful comparisons could have been made throughout the whole book with the 'non-profit organization' approach to marketing. Incidentally, reference to libraries is most noticeably missing from the fifth chapters, "External attitudes: what the world outside the book trade thinks of books", and, surprisingly, the index.

The following chapter on market research and the book trade takes us off in a different direction. Again, we are given some interesting examples of market research in practice but it is all annoyingly anecdotal. This section in particular highlights the shallowness of the bibliography. References to case-studies are impossible for the serious reader - or indeed student to which this book is also aimed - to follow-up. For example, the summary of the Agatha Christie research is clearly drawn from an article in The Bookseller but no acknowledgement is made of this source. Furthermore a difficulty throughout the whole book for me was that I was not aware of any distinction being made between the marketing of fiction and non-fiction books.

Chapter seven, entitled 'Distribution, customer care and other services' finally moves towards some solutions for problems raised earlier. However, by this time the personal tone of the book has become somewhat irritating: "I saw a postcard in someone's kitchen the other day. It showed a woman's face and the thought bubble read: 'I must keep shopping. I know my life will work out if I can just find the perfect outfit.' There seems to be a degree of similar desperation ...about the way some... booksellers, isolate the issue of distribution time" (p123).

The final chapter tackles the question 'Who are the book people?'. This seems an incongruous topic for a last chapter and I did not find the answers, "Carolines (rather) than Kyles" (p139), who are paid "appallingly low" wages (p145), especially enlightening within the context of the rest of the book. Perhaps it would have been more helpful at this stage to have looked at the impact of marketing on readers/consumers. The conclusion is brief, simply along the lines of "books are slightly different, but are fast becoming less so", and appears weaker than it really is because no attempt is made to put together all of the preceding topics and themes.

Overall, this is an enjoyable read but as a researcher in this area I am left with the feeling that despite covering a lot of ground there are no solid foundations to the work. Plenty of interesting points are made, and some good questions are asked, but, I think, had the author utilized her skills and knowledge to give a more in-depth consideration of fewer topics then this would have resulted in a tighter and more powerful book.

### **Smith, John W T (Editor)**

Internet world & document delivery world international 94. Proceedings of the second annual conference, held in London, May 1994. London: Meckler, 1994, £45. (ISBN 088-736-975-8).

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The Internet is growing at a phenomenal rate, some observers estimate by up to 15% a month. With the opportunities offered by JANET, academics have used electronic networking for several years. It is becoming an integral part of scholarly communication. Business users have only recently woken up to the potential of the Internet, and much of the growth in use over the past year has been in the commercial sector. In the rest of society, Internet use has been initially among computer enthusiasts. However, there are pockets of interest in the community sector.

This book is in three parts: business, commercial and professional use; academic, research and information use; and educational, community and home use. LIRN readers will probably find the

second part the most relevant to their work.

The academic and research section begins with developments in document delivery and document exchange. Susan Osborne and Mary Davies of the Imperial Cancer Research Fund assess current alerting services and individual article supply (CAS-IAS). One such service - the Internet-based Ariel - is described by Jim Coleman of the Research Libraries Group. Document exchange is introduced by Anne Mumford of Loughborough University, and covered in more detail by David Brailsford of Nottingham University on Abode Acrobat and Bob Pennell of ICL on the ODA Consortium Toolkit.

Cliff McKnight of Loughborough University reviews models of network scholarly publishing. After outlining early projects such as BLEND and later ones like CAJUN and ELVYN, he pays tribute to Ted Nelson and his Xanadu system. He then looks at economic and psychological issues that may limit the growth of the networked electronic journal. Issues of electronic copyright are discussed by Charles Oppenheim of the University of Strathclyde and Sarah Keates of the Document Supply Centre.

The final papers in the academic and research section are concerned with organizing and retrieving information on the Internet. Frances Blomeley of King's College writes on HyperText Markup Language and the World Wide Web; George McMurdo of Queen Margaret College looks at indexing the Internet; and Traugott Koch of Lund University Library considers experiments with automatic classification of WAIS databases and indexing of the World Wide Web.

In the business section, Joan Lippincott describes the Coalition for Networked Information's activities in promoting partnerships between universities and commercial enterprises in the dissemination of scholarly information over networks. Apart from three papers on teleworking, the other contributions in this section are mainly concerned with what's available on the Internet for commercial users.

The third section includes a variety of topics from European networking activities through education and training to home access. Nat Lievesley of the University of North London provides an overview of networking in the community and voluntary sector. John O'Hara outlines the work of the South Bristol Learning Network - a project that sets out to build a community information infrastructure using the skills and commitment of local people who were previously unemployed. David Barry describes the Open University's experience of education through computer mediated communication, and Andy Sloane of the University of Wolverhampton reports on a project investigating the home cyberspace.

The value of this book lies in the wide range of topics covered (34 chapters in 168 pages). It provides an interesting and useful account of the current state of information networking.