Handbook of electronic and digital acquisitions

Ed. Thomas W Leonhardt.
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This indexed monograph comprises seven chapters, most with bibliographies. The twelve contributors and the editor, who all work in academic libraries in the United States of America, are all introduced by short biographies.

Doris van Kampen addresses Acquisitions and copyright. She goes into a fair amount of detail regarding the Digital Millennium Copyright Act and the Technology, Education, and Copyright Harmonization Act (TEACH Act), two pieces of relatively recent copyright legislation in the United States. She discusses various standard clauses (for example, remote access, e-reserves) that one encounters in electronic resource license agreements, relating them to issues of copyright. In Linda Neyer's chapter entitled Copyright and fair use: Electronic reserves, there is repetition of the copyright legislation discussion, but she develops the idea of fair use, focussing on the issues surrounding the provision of e-reserves, or electronic short loan.

For everyone involved in the evaluation of databases, the chapter on Evaluating databases for acquisitions and collection development, provides some very useful guidelines for conducting an objective evaluation process. The theme of evaluation is continued in Collection development strategies for online aggregated databases, where aggregated databases are the focus of discussion. The term "aggregator database" can be used in a few contexts, but in the context of this chapter it refers to what is also called an "unstable aggregator". These are "abstracting and indexing services that contain or are linked to full-text material". During the evaluation of these databases, the following areas should be addressed: "breadth and depth of coverage; quality of indexing; usability, which includes screen design and ease of searching; ability to customize the database; delivery options; accessibility; availability of statistical usage data; quality of support."

Rickey Best discusses Issues on the selection of electronic resources with an exposition of the Research Library Group (RLG) conspectus and the Western Library Network (WLN) conspectus as used in collection development.

Robert Slater and Denise Johnson have written a very useful chapter on Choosing virtual reference software. They cover several features that one might require in a VR tool: chatting; browsing; ability to monitor usage; question management; FAQs; email. Electronic data interchange, or EDI, is the topic of the final chapter of the book. EDI facilitates the automatic transfer of vendor invoice information into the library's accounting system, thereby making acquisitions processes more efficient. The authors offer a cautionary note, however, stating that EDI has "produced an inflexible interdependence between libraries and vendor technical services". After going through the effort of establishing working connections between library and vendor, the prospect of any changes to the systems is, as the authors express it, "unattractive".

While the numerous misprints that I encountered detracted from my overall impression of the book, the chapters generally contain information and guidance that would be very useful to those in the business of acquiring electronic material for libraries.

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New directions in reference.
Ed. by Byron Anderson Paul T Webb.
ISBN 978 0 7890 3089 4 (pbk.)
Price: US$19.95

This monograph has been published simultaneously as issue no. 93 of The Reference Librarian.

This collection of articles represents a variety of viewpoints. Most of the authors, and both the editors, either work in academia, and/or, are academic librarians. There are a couple of articles by librarians employed in public libraries, and one
written by library consultants. Articles by a music librarian and two librarians who work in a medical library, are also included.

The editors have divided the volume into three sections:

- New roles for librarians
- Impact of technology
- Issues in library services

As one reads through the volume such categorisation is not reflected in the articles. Roles, technology and issues overlap.

In the section, New roles for librarians, Michael Duffy writes about Current Issues in music reference, and Byron Anderson provides A primer on copyright law and the DMCA. The other two articles in this section are Virtual reference: A reference question is a reference question… by Mary-Carol Lindbloom et al., and Evolving reference changing culture… by Harry Meserve.

The section on the Impact of technology contains Self-service interlibrary loan: A primer for reference staff by Roberta Bark; From novelty to necessity: Impact of the PDA experience on medical libraries by Peg Burnette and Jo Dorsch, and E-mail reference evaluation… by Leanne M. VandeCreek.

In the last section, Issues in library services, there are three articles: How the GPO got its groove back… by Kathy Hathaway; Golden Rule reference by Chad E Buckley, and Reference services in rural libraries by Amanda E Standerfer.

The articles are either case studies or detailed accounts of American librarians and libraries grappling with rapid technological change. The fields covered include reference, as the title indicates; together with copyright law, government publishing and interlibrary loans. The detail of these articles is very helpful, if you are thinking of introducing email or chat reference, for example, but I got lost in the complexities of US Copyright Law, the GPO and e-government, and was tangled in the technicalities of ILL delivery systems and programs. Although I was fascinated by the article which describes how PDAs are being used in medical libraries, and I enjoyed the idea of the librarian of the future roving the library, a PDA in hand and the world at her fingertips. I do not own a PDA and, therefore, found the many technical references intimidating. I recommend sticking to the abstracts, which do a good job of presenting the basic points of the technically dense articles, if an overview is all that is wanted. The editors have succeeded in showing both the new directions that technological change has opened up and how librarians have engaged with it.

I would not expect this monograph to be read from cover to cover; more likely librarians will select those articles which deal with their specific interests or problems. I have to admit, however, that I have gained much from going through the whole issue, as my attention has been directed to aspects of library services that I would normally pass over. There are plenty of new ideas and a great deal of useful information describing how various libraries have responded to change driven by the Electronic Revolution.

Virtual reference and the digitisation of resources are not the only influences which have left a significant impress on the role of reference librarian. With apologies to John Donne, “no reference librarian is an island”, we are “all part of the main”, the library as a whole, and the world at large. Reference librarians also need to be aware of the ways other library departments have responded to the E-Revolution and how the changes in these departments can re-write the job descriptions of reference librarians.

In examining change, the other side, that some things have stayed the same, is also mentioned. In his article on the Dr Martin Luther King, Jr Library, Harry Meserve makes reference to David Tyckson’s part in RUSA’s The future of reference services papers. (The Papers were reprinted in Reference Services Review, 31, 1, February 26, 2003). Meserve emphasises that:

“The basic functions of the reference librarian have not really changed since the 19th century…What is crucial, Tyckson argues, is to understand that these functions will take place in a context of more sophisticated tools, an increased demand for instruction… and [a] greater outreach function of the librarian” p.38.

The article on Golden rule reference … by Chad E Buckley is a must-read for every reference librarian; in fact anyone who deals with people should read it. I had one misgiving, we have to be careful not reduce empathy to a “Mrs Do As You Would Be Done By” act. It is a reminder of traditional practice and a paradigm for the future.

The editors and contributors have succeeded in jogging our brains and informing us, but the jury is still out as to the long-term outcome of the ramifications of the E-Revolution in libraries.

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