

New directions in reference

Ed by Byron Anderson Paul T Webb.

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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. A music librarian and two librarians who work in a medical library, have something to say, as well.

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 and others, 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 finger-tips, 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.

Reviewed by Celia Walter, Senior Librarian, Humanities, Chancellor Oppenheimer Library, University of Cape Town, Rondebosch, South Africa.

Email: *Celia.Walter@uct.ac.za*