

# Bookshelf

Brian Cox



*Volunteers are always required to review books and serials for this page. Please contact: Alison Whitehorn, UKSG Business Manager  
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## **SuperSearchers Make It On their Own**

Edited by Suzanne Sabroski. *Medford, NJ, USA: Cyber Age Books, 2002, 317 pp., ISBN 0-910965, paperback, US\$24.95*

This book is the tenth in a series of 'SuperSearcher' publications from Cyber Age Books. The series has covered a range of different types of searching, with each book being comprised of interviews with 8-12 top online searching professionals in that particular discipline. This book follows the same format, talking to eleven information consultants/researchers/information brokers who work independently having set up their own businesses.

Supporting the SuperSearcher series is a suite of web pages providing links to the resources that are referenced in the books. The researchers interviewed for *SuperSearchers Make it On Their Own* are all working in North America and many of the resources listed on the web pages are specific to North America. Some of the resources originating in the USA are of value internationally. However, many are more specifically of USA (or Canadian) interest.

Suzanne Sabroski is herself an independent researcher and she provides an excellent insight into the work of independent professionals in the USA. Interestingly, of the eleven researchers interviewed only four have any formal library or information qualification. The others come from a wide range of backgrounds and have drifted (or evolved themselves) into their current roles.

Suzanne identifies two relevant factors in the growth of the independent professional. Firstly

there is the current enthusiasm for people to run their own business with the associated freedom of working for themselves, and secondly there is the explosion of the information age. The Internet, it seems, rather than making information freely available to all and taking away the jobs of information professionals, has served to heighten people's awareness of information and raised their expectations of what it can do for them. Many companies do basic Internet searching themselves (and indeed many of the information consultants interviewed for this book freely offer advice on how enquirers can do basic searching themselves), so that simple pieces of work that might have been bread and butter to information consultants in the past are no longer a part of their work. Most agree that the demand is for more complex searching, often from 'charged-for' databases, and to carry out analyses, adding value to raw results and presenting a professional looking report.

The book has a chapter for each of the eleven independent researchers interviewed. Each talks about the type of work they do (and don't do), the resources that they use and techniques for publicity and client retention. They talk about setting up their business and what professional advice they took advantage of. In particular, legal and financial advice was considered a sound early investment. There are also more personal sections including their professional background, how their work fits with their personal lives, their views on the pros and cons of working from home. (The only rule seems to be – do what feels right for you.) Most have a driving force to succeed – often an absolute financial necessity.

The book will be of most interest to anyone considering (or already) running their own information consultancy business. The practical advice of the range of successful practitioners would be invaluable. There is some doubt in my mind about how closely the USA environment reflects that in the UK

For information professionals working for larger organisations it provides an insight into how other professionals operate, although as the same ground is covered in each chapter it begins to feel repetitive.

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### Scholarly Publishing: Books, Journals and Libraries in the 20th Century

Edited by Richard E. Abel and Lyman W. Newlin.  
New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2002, 318pp.,  
ISBN 0-471-21929, casebound, £22.50

*Scholarly Publishing* is a 'special Millennial Issue' of the American serial, *Against the Grain*, which is not a popular woodworking magazine; rather, it is 'your key to the latest news about libraries, publishers, books, jobbers, and subscription agents' (<http://www.against-the-grain.com/>). This special issue, on the theme of libraries and publishing in the twentieth century, deals almost exclusively with the American experience, is written from an American perspective, and is therefore, I think it fair to say, aimed mainly at an American audience. That said, its themes are sufficiently broad for it to have relevance to the wider information world.

What are these themes? Broadly stated by Peter Booth Wiley in the foreword, the contributors intend to examine the financial and intellectual implications of the ever-accelerating rate of scholarly publishing. Three basic lines of enquiry can be identified: How are libraries to afford this wealth of new material? How is it to be stored? And how is it to be made accessible? I was expecting the editors to expand upon Wiley's remarks, but their preface proved to be a disappointing restatement of the broad themes followed by a lengthy and self-congratulatory explanation of how the book came to be written and the authors chosen. The only useful

information to be gleaned from the preface is that the essays concentrate on the second half of the twentieth century, and are international in coverage. This second parameter is instantly abrogated by the editors' assertion that all events of significance in the information world have happened in the USA!

Following the foreword and the preface are fifteen essays of varying length and depth of coverage. Roughly speaking, half deal with publishing and half with library provision. Both sets of essays focus mainly on science and technology. The launch of the Soviet satellite Sputnik in the late 1950s is frequently cited as the major catalyst to research, without which expansion in scholarly publishing and academic library provision would not have taken place.

I will begin with those essays dealing with library provision. Allen B. Veaner in *From Bibliothèque to Omnithèque* and Ralph M. Shoffner in *Appearance and Growth of Computers and Electronic Products in Libraries* look directly at the impact of technology on the academic library. Veaner's essay is unusual as it focuses chiefly on microforms – film and fiche. He champions the microform as an underdeveloped and still useful means of storing vast amounts of information. He gives a potted history of its development and laments the facts that microform producers never produced personal, portable microform readers, and that insufficient effort was put into the indexing of microforms. However, he is not gloomy about the future of the medium, or indeed the future of other less technological means of storing information. He sees the library of the future as a repository for all kinds of information media – from the book to the online database.

Shoffner's essay is a much more in-depth survey of every type of technological innovation to grace the library scene, both the successful and the less than successful. We learn of the early use of computers in libraries when punch cards and batch processing were the norm. He looks at the introduction of MARC, the creation of Dialog and the various mergers and takeovers that have given us the library systems that we have today. It is fascinating to read about optical character recognition, a development which promised much but failed to deliver, unlike the barcode

which is now the standard method of item identification in the library world. Shoffner shows how useful much of the technology introduced into libraries has been, but he also warns against allotting too great a share of library funding to technology at the expense of other more traditional library materials. Shoffner's essay is a tour de force, well researched and very informative.

Moving on to scholarly publishing, Albert Henderson's *Diversity and Growth of Serious/Scholarly/Scientific Journals* is a very enjoyable essay, combining as it does much erudite comment on the current state of the scholarly journal with an informed history of journal publishing. We learn the origins of such household names as the *Reader's Digest* and how serial publishing expanded to cater for new markets, defined by both gender and ethnicity. Henderson describes how in the 1950s television developed into a real threat to the popular magazine and how, ironically, the most prolific new type of serial publication of the twentieth century was the TV guide.

His history of serial publishing leads into an examination of scholarly serials and here he echoes the findings of many of the other essayists, pointing out the influence of Sputnik and the Cold War in fostering scientific research in the USA. Like the other essayists he too identifies the USA's involvement in Vietnam and the energy crisis as bringing an end to the research bonanza. His final points are more thought provoking. He identifies a potentially serious problem for American research, arising from the reduction in the number of non-American serials being purchased by cash-strapped American university libraries. The absence of non-American scientific serials has led to the worrying situation of researchers in the USA being potentially unaware of research already carried out in Europe and elsewhere.

*Textbook Publishing*, Robert J.R. Follett's contribution, looks at the provision of textbooks to schools and colleges and the relationship between publishers and education authorities. It is very different in both depth and style from Henderson's essay. Follett's writing leans a bit too far towards the reminiscent and he is prone to making sweeping generalisations which cannot be supported. For instance, he writes "Schools

and colleges, teachers and professors all resist change" (page 95). A good sound-bite but too general a statement upon which to build an argument. The world of textbook publishing is unfamiliar to me but even so, many of Follett's comments seem unreasonable, such as his criticism of the fact that in the USA, textbooks are chosen at a district level on the grounds that the chosen textbook might not suit the teaching style of an individual teacher!

An honourable mention must go to Barbara Carol Dean for her short piece, *Development of Public Libraries*, which could be seen as a little anomalous in this collection but is nevertheless an informative and readable essay which highlights the role played by women in the creation of the first local libraries in the United States. In the early twentieth century, women's clubs organised the first travelling libraries, ostensibly to offer women access to educational materials. Later the women's clubs helped in the formation of permanent local libraries for the use of the whole community. Dean also makes an interesting connection between Andrew Carnegie and Bill Gates. These two men, at almost opposite ends of the century, injected large amounts of money into public libraries and in both cases their donations were queried on moral grounds. A good sign indeed!

In conclusion, this is on the whole a worthy attempt to show how publishing and library provision were affected by the technological innovations that characterised the information world in the second half of the twentieth century. It concentrates on the American scene, where probably to a greater extent than in Europe, ideological forces played a major role in driving forward scientific scholarship. I think it would have been an interesting and useful exercise to compare the American and European experience, but then we would have been looking at a completely different book. This one works well, within its self-imposed limitations. Most of the essays are interesting, some are exceptional. Whether it is as good as the editors claim, only time will tell.

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**Building An Electronic Resource Collection:  
A Practical Guide**

By Stuart D. Lee

*London: Library Association Publishing, 2002, 147 pp.,  
ISBN 1 85604 422 X, paperback, £24.95*

When first asked to review this book, I thought that I was in for some heavy reading with a spattering of practical advice. I was very pleasantly surprised and found the book very easy to read. Stuart Lee (Head of the Learning Technologies Group at Oxford University Computing Services) has taken the mystery out of the field of electronic resources, and set the book out in a logical progression, leading us from explanations of basic terms through to practical considerations illustrated with real-life examples.

The first chapter takes us through the historical developments in electronic material and the need to develop an electronic collection alongside the traditional print-based collection. It was comforting to me to find that I was actually more 'in touch' than I thought and the book helped me to consolidate what I knew and to put the information into a more logical and meaningful order, and I am sure that many other readers already in e-journal administration will find the same.

The second chapter deals with how to look into what products are available and the main issues that arise when exploring ways of how to access and exploit them. This includes interface issues, authentication questions, archiving and abstracting and indexing services. The third chapter examines the similarities and differences between e-journals and e-books, and then goes on to look at options for purchasing and using both products, the implications for us as collection

developers, and some possible future trends in the e-publishing of journals.

The final chapters offer more practical advice – Chapter 4 suggests that you set up a collection development policy, establish a budget, evaluate the material, look at access issues and investigate the administrative implications. The chapter includes a useful evaluation checklist which can be used to ensure a standard approach to all electronic products. Chapter 5 looks at the next stage in the process – cataloguing and delivering the material, and the ongoing tasks of advertising, collecting usage statistics, identifying the user base and ensuring that everyone involved in the whole area of digital resource provision continues to be kept informed about changes in the collection.

The book lives up to its claim to be a practical guide and I recommend it to anyone involved in the development of electronic resources. Well worth its £24.95 price tag.

*Sandy Forster  
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**PUBLICATIONS NOTED:**

**Information Management for the Intelligent Organisation: The Art of Scanning the Environment.** Medford, NJ, USA: Information Today Inc., Third (expanded) Edition, 2002, 325 pp, ISBN 1-57387-125-7, casebound, US\$39.50

**Web of Deception: Misinformation on the Internet.** Edited by Anne P Mintz, Medford, NJ, USA: Information Today Inc., 2002, 275 pp, ISBN 0-910965-60-9, paperback, US\$37.95