Letters to the Editor

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It's hard to believe but this is the eighth year in a row that ATG has dedicated our September issue to reference publishing. However, this year we have decided to throw in a new wrinkle. Because databases have become so much a part of reference work, we have expanded our coverage to include their place in reference publishing. In fact, Fran Wilkinson's and Linda Lewis' annual front page interview poses a number of probing questions to six academic librarians to get their opinions on "the rapidly changing world of reference databases." Today like selection criteria and who does the selecting as well as current budget allocations, the impact on collections, and the future of open access all weave their way into the discussion. This issue also finds Choice's Irv Rockwood following through on his promise of a follow up article to last year's "Reference Publishing: The View from Middletown." In that piece Irv talked about the obvious decline in the number of print reference works, the increasing consolidation among publishers and a perceived movement to Web publishing. This time Irv offers an update by concentrating the publisher's perspective on electronic reference publishing. Using data from a Choice online survey of reference publishers, he documents a "steady if at times hesitant and uncertain shift to electronic materials." We also have an insightful interview with George Machovec, editor of the The Charleston Advisor. TC4 is one of the few journals dedicated to reviewing databases for the library market so George sees the industry from a unique vantage point. He sheds light on the current status of database publishing and offers some interesting ideas about the future.

Of course, we have a number of articles that focus on the traditional print part of reference publishing. Karen Christensen, co-founder of Berkshire Publishing offers a personal recipe for quality in a reference book publishing that stress three main ingredients: vision, validity, and voice. Karen's fresh take on quality makes enlightening reading for librarians as well as publishers. You won't want to miss it. Sylvia K. Miller, Publishing Director of Reference at Routledge/Taylor & Francis offers a publisher's prescription for useful reference book reviews. Having done a few reference book reviews myself, I found Sylvia's critique both reassuring and challenging. Readers of reviews will find some valuable tips on what make a good review. Never one to avoid controversy, Dave Tyckoson will jolt a few people with his contention that print and electronic reference works are being replaced by the Web. Dave does a source by source countdown of titles once thought essential that he no longer uses at the reference desk. He and his staff are tuning to the Web. While Dave still sees a future for reference librarians, he is not so sure about reference publishers.

Last, but certainly not least, we offer an article by Bob Houbeek, Director of the Frances Willson Thompson Library at the University of Michigan, Flint. Taking the administrative slant, Bob asserts that it is no longer sufficient to build good collections. New accreditation criteria call for linking library materials to student needs and this, Bob says, requires increased cooperation among reference, acquisition and collection development librarians. We are being called on to assure that students integrate library resources into their learning experience and not only that, we are being asked to assess their effectiveness. It's a big job and Bob feels that it takes everyone from administration on down to make that happen. We are proud of this issue and have put a lot into it. Provocative interviews coupled with engaging and enlightening articles argue to make this the best reference publishing issue yet. So sit back with your favorite iced beverage and enjoy.

From Your (water-logged) Editor:

I now own a waterfront property. My front yard is a lake. It has been raining in Charleston non-stop since the first of August. This means that I had lots of time at home inside the house to play with my computer, clean up my house, and avoid hurricanes and power outages. Fun and games.

This issue of Against the Grain is full! We have all the fabulous feature articles our guest editor, Tom Gilson, talks about above plus more special reports on acquisitions and ILL. Guest edited by Michelle Flinchbaugh and Robin Moskal. Interviews include Jim Stephens and George Machovec with profiles as well from four of our special report authors. Stephanie Kozek discusses "Preservation Woes" while Anthony Ferguson talks about "Patriotism." And there's much more I don't have room to mention, so read on and enjoy!

Well, I hear there is a tornado watch in the area so I have to shut off my computer and take refuge in the bathtub or in a ditch. Can't remember which. This weather will be better in November! See you at the Conference.

Yr. Ed.  

Letter to the Editor

Send letters to <kstrauch@comcast.net>, phone or fax 843-723-3536, or snail mail: Against the Grain, MSC 98, The Citadel, Charleston, SC 29409. You can also send a letter to the editor from the ATG Homepage at http://www.against-the-grain.com.

Dear Editor:

Thank you for making this conference happen. It has been the single greatest asset for me in learning and keeping up with things I have needed to keep working on in this field.  

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