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People Profile: Eric Calaluca

Editor

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Reference Universe
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tronic, reference collection would ever be used in a way proportionate to its cost. This is hardly surprising, given that no library has had, until Reference Universe, possessed a tool to actually unlock the reference collection.

However, most on-the-desk reference librarians have been big supporters of Reference Universe. Using this tool maximizes the substantial investment the library has made in high-quality reference; they’ve worked “in the trenches” for years and are grateful to be able to offer more targeted assistance to patrons at the early stages of the patrons’ research. Thomas Mann, of the Library of Congress and author of the Oxford Guide to Library Research, called Reference Universe “a godsend for reference librarians.” That comment sums up the usual reaction of reference librarians to our product.

Print versus Online

I’ve been asked what I would say to a critic who argues that a resource such as Reference Universe is simply preserving an outmoded medium — print — beyond its usefulness. It’s the old question of print or electronic. But to me, that’s not even the right question, at least not in the realm of specialized reference. Rather, the question for serious librarians is: What is authoritative, and what is not? One of the main functions of any library is to help patrons separate the wheat from the chaff, and sometimes print reference works are the finest wheat. It would be a shame not to take full advantage of them. When one considers that there is little chance that the entire realm of printed reference will ever find its way online, an access tool like this becomes the only avenue of discovery. Ultimately, it’s our hope that Reference Universe brings back a little bit of the serendipitous fun of roaming the reference stacks and seeing where the next good notion takes you.

The Good Library Campaign and the Future of U.K. Libraries

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The last ten years in the United Kingdom have been “the Harry Potter” decade. If ever there was a star who encouraged children and reluctant book readers to enjoy life between the covers, it was Harry, in this series of wonderful books whose stratospheric popularity has inspired awe among everyone connected with books or the publishing industry.

So you would assume that public libraries in Britain have been flourishing during that time. What other institution, after all, could better benefit from and encourage the fruits of the craze for Harry Potter than the public library? But you would be wrong. During those years book borrowing from British libraries has fallen from 420 million books each year to 250 million. The decline is continuous and relentless; at this rate, the graph hits zero in about 15 years’ time. By 2020, British lending libraries will be a thing of the past.

Declining Book Collections
How has this come about? Book sales have been wonderful. Market research shows that the number of people reading and enjoying books continues to grow and touches all corners of our society. Magazine sales are also strong — reading is increasing in popularity. But in Britain, a country long admired for its educational system and for its magnificent contributions to literature, library book collections have fallen, over the past decade, from 80 million books to 60 million books. Although funding for public libraries keeps rising, the

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