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From the Reference Desk: Reviews of Reference Titles

Tom Gilson
Against the Grain, gilsont@cofc.edu

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From the Reference Desk

by Tom Gilson  (Associate Editor, Against the Grain, and Head of Reference Emeritus, College of Charleston, Charleston, SC 29401) <gilsont@cofc.edu>

Published by IGI Global, the Encyclopedia of Business Analytics and Optimization (2014, 9781466652026, $2695) is a five-volume reference edited by John Wang, professor in the Department of Information & Operations Management at Montclair State University. Not the typical A-Z encyclopedia, each volume offers chapters/articles that cover distinct elements of key topic categories related to the optimal use of “big data” in business problem solving and decision making.

In his introduction Mr. Wang acknowledges the incredible growth in the amount of data being gathered, noting that “approximately 90% of all the world’s data has been created in the past two years.” He also emphasizes the need for sophisticated “technologies, methodologies and strategies” to harness the analytical power of all this captured data. So it comes as no surprise that identifying, defining, and explaining these new and emerging technologies and methods make up a great deal of his Encyclopedia. In all there are 243 chapters/articles in this set that can stand alone or be seen as part of an overall encyclopedia approach. These individual chapters/articles fall into a number of larger categories that range from tool-based concerns like algorithms, data mining and models, and simulations to more practical applications like decision support, knowledge management, and process and project management. In addition, the Encyclopedia chapters/articles cover industry specific categories like banking, finance and economics, and manufacturing as well as those focused on education and medicine and healthcare administration. Many of the chapters/articles follow a similar structure in providing an introduction, background information, discussion of the current main focus of the topic being covered, future trends, and a conclusion. A list of key terms and definitions is also often included. The writing is scholarly and technical with citations throughout that are collected in a thorough list of references at the end of each chapter/article. As you would imagine, numerous chapters/articles are replete with formulas and statistics as well as tables, graphs, and charts. All this adds to the obvious scholarly nature of this work, as does the international makeup of the contributors and the institutions they represent.

Given the above comments, it should be apparent that the Encyclopedia of Business Analytics and Optimization is not intended for a student or reader with a passing interest in the uses of big data in business. Rather it is a sophisticated and highly technical work that would be best utilized by advanced students, research faculty, or the professional analyst with a specialized concern about the current and future use of business analytics for sophisticated problem solving and decision making. In many ways it is structured like a multivolume handbook offering both theoretical and practical information and guidance. In any case, with the ever-growing capacity to gather and use big data to meet the challenges of modern business, this reference should be seen as a timely and useful tool by both serious researchers and practitioners.

However, while libraries supporting such complex needs and concerns should give it serious consideration, the set is not cheap. The list price for the five-volume print edition is $2,695.00 while perpetual access to the online version lists for $4,045.00, and combined Print + Perpetual access is $5,390. Fortunately, there is another option for cost-conscious libraries or those with the occasional request for this type information. Individual chapters can be purchased for $37.50 and a full list of chapters/articles is available on the IGI Global Website at: http://www.igi-global.com/book/encyclopedia-business-analytics-optimization/90651.

Many libraries may find this an attractive alternative to full purchase. In a number of instances patron needs may be met by the creative use of library budgets or interlibrary loan funds to acquire copies of chapters/articles for interested students and faculty.

Early this year Salem Press released the seventh edition of its standard Magill’s Medical Guide (2014, 978-1-61925-214-1, $425). Comprising nearly 1,200 articles with numerous sidebars, photos, and illustrations, this five-volume set continues to be designed for high school, public, and undergraduate libraries. Although accessible to the general reader, the contents are intended to be authoritative and comprehensive enough to be of value to students new to the topics covered or those doing basic research.

According to the publisher’s introduction the majority of entries from the 6th edition have been updated and there are 69 entirely new articles. Coverage of neuroscience and issues related to aging and genetic diseases have all been expanded. Naturally, the physical aspects of health and disease take precedent; however, there are also discussions of the psychological and emotional impacts experienced by those dealing with various conditions and disorders. Entries range from shorter 500-word definitions to full, in-depth essays of 2,500-3,000 words. They also follow a general format starting with basic information about the type entry being presented, the anatomy or body system affected, the specialties involved, and a short definition of the topic. Longer entries will also have a brief glossary of key terms. In the numerous entries that discuss diseases and disorders, subcategories like causes and symptoms, treatment and therapy, and perspective and prospects are covered. Entries on other topics are similarly divided and information presented under relevant subcategories.

The articles are authored by both medical scholars and physicians and reviewed by a panel of experts. More than offering self-help advice, these entries are scientifically ground-ed, fact-filled but to-the-point, and contain little or no jargon.

The finding aids are well designed and helpful. Each of the five volumes has a full table of contents listing entries alphabetically with the relevant volume and page numbers. In addition, each volume reprints two very useful topical guides. The first of these guides organizes entries under “anatomy and systems affected” while the other organizes them under specialties and related fields. The last volume of the set has a general index.

Purchase of Magill’s Medical Guide is a no-brainer for libraries that have found past editions valuable and it should find a new home in other academic and public libraries looking for a basic but authoritative medical reference. As is the practice with Salem Press, the purchase of the printed set entitles a school or library to free online access to the Medical Guide’s content.

Grey House has also released a new version of a popular and useful reference. First published by Gale in 1994, the Value of the Dollar 1860-2014 (2014, 978-1-61925-254-7, $155) is in addition to each volume author Scott Dirks does his best to maintain the research value, not to mention the fascination factor that has marked past editions.

Section one, the main body of the book, is divided into eight chapters that, with two exceptions, cover 20-year time increments. Each chapter starts with a background introduction as well as a currency conversion table relevant to the years covered. The chapters are then divided into short five-year subchapters that include a historic snapshot of key economic events, selected incomes, consumer expenditures, investments, standard job salaries, the cost of a food basket, and other selected prices. The data here is as fascinating as it is specific and it is well worth spending time examining it to get a sense of the economic and social environment of the years discussed.

A second section is new to this edition and covers pricing trends from 1910-2012. This continued on page 43
The Medical Library Association in conjunction with Neal-Schumann has also released a reference work with a solid reputation. Medical librarians will have no doubt welcome the new edition of *Introduction to Reference Sources in the Health Sciences* (2014, 978-0-8389-1184-6, $115). Compiled by Jeffrey T. Huber and Susan Swogger, this reference work has been revised and updated since last published in 2008. New chapters on point-of-care and global health sources as well as an opening section on health information-seeking behaviors are included in this new version.

The majority of the book is still devoted to discussions of bibliographic and informational sources that the authors feel are basic to providing quality reference service to medical staff and students. Coverage includes discussions of bibliographic sources for monographs, serials, government documents, conferences, and reviews as well as digital database resources. Informational resources focus on topics from medical terminology and statistics to drug information, consumer health, medical history, grants, and global health. There are also chapters covering formats like handbooks, manuals, directories, and biographical sources. All of these chapters come across as discussions, not merely annotated lists of relevant medical resources. Chapter authors provide context by offering an overview of the literature as well as descriptions of the specific sources being highlighted, and many of the chapters end with reading lists and/or references useful for further exploration.

*Introduction to Reference Sources in the Health Sciences* serves as an expert guide to specific sources but it also helps describe the medical reference literature as it continues to evolve. Not only are new issues and topics covered but a look at the sources listed confirms the obvious growth and expanding reliance on electronic tools, despite the number of useful print titles still being included. This book itself is available in an eEdition as well as in paperback. (See http://www.alastore.ala.org/detail.aspx?ID=10970)

This latest edition is a helpful reference in the world. An authoritative resource consisting of tables of data and current international recommen-

dations on nomenclature, symbols, and units, its usefulness spans not only the physical sciences but also related areas of biology, geology, and environmental science…"

**Salem Press** has a standard title of its own that has made a recent appearance:

- **Cyclopedia of Literary Characters**, 4th ed. (978-1-61925-497-8, $455, 2014) now totals five volumes and "examines more than 29,000 major characters from 3,500 important works of literature. New to this edition are 245 characters published in popular works of fiction from 2000 to 2012…"

H.W. Wilson has a new title in print and one in the offering:

- **World Authors 2006-2013** (978-1-61925-467-1, $195, 2014) "presents biographical articles on over 350 critically acclaimed novelists, poets, dramatists, essayists, social scientists, and biographers who have published significant work from 2006 to 2013…"

- **Famous First Facts** (978-1-61925-468-8, $195, Dec. 2014) is now in its 7th edition and is "updated and expanded with new entries reflecting the latest developments and discoveries, and newly organized for easier access to information. The seventh edition includes more than 8,000 firsts, with more than 1,000 that are new to this edition…”

**Oxford University Press** just released a second edition of one of their respected multivolume encyclopedias and has plans to release a completely new work:

- **Encyclopedia of Aesthetics** (9780199747108, $1195, Aug. 2014) was "originally published in 1998 in four volumes. Now revised and expanded to include over 800 entries (in six volumes), the Encyclopedia surveys the full breadth of critical thought on art, culture, and society, from classical philosophy to contemporary critical theory… Featuring 815 articles by distinguished scholars from many fields and countries… Over 250 new entries have been added altogether…"

- **Oxford Encyclopedia of the Bible and Ethics** (9780199829910, $395, Dec. 2014) "explores the intersection between biblical sources and ethical issues, both historical and modern, through extensive analytical and constructive treatments of a wide range of topics by leading biblical scholars and ethicists… The two-volume Encyclopedia contains over 180 entries ranging in length from 1,000 to 7,000 words. With bibliographic references and suggestions for further reading…"

**Extra Servings**

**CRC Press** has released the newest version of a perennial classic:

- **CRC Handbook of Chemistry and Physics**, 95th Edition (ISBN 9781482208672, $169.95, June 2014) "continues to be the most accessed and respected scientific reference in the world. An authoritative resource consisting of tables of data and current international recommen-

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section is revealing in that it not only allows the reader to track specific prices as they have evolved over the years but perhaps more importantly shows how those prices compare in 2012 dollars. For example, an electric washing machine that cost $84.75 in 1920 would run $899 in 2012 but that same $84.75 is actually worth $972.90 in 2012 dollars. According to those figures, an electric washing machine is actually cheaper now than it was then.

But that new Harley you may have been eyeing is more expensive today than it was in 1915. It would have set you back $290 which is valued as $6,725 in 2012 dollars but the price your dealer was asking in 2012 was more like $7,999. Aside from being fascinating in its own right, this section helps readers analyze long-term trends offsetting criticism that past editions were organized in segments too small to enable such analysis.

As far as value-added features go, the chapter introductions and "miscellany" sidebars are fascinating and helpful. Specific price sources are listed throughout the book and there is a list of the general sources used in each of the five-year subchapters as well as general bibliography. There is also a list of sources used in the pricing trend section at the end of the book.

Future editions might consider providing direct references to these sources in the pricing trend section itself as well as offering more specific bibliographic information about each source. The black-and-white photos that illustrate the book are not of a particularly high quality but are generally adequate. The index is somewhat lacking and could be improved. For example, there doesn’t seem to be many references to the specific products in the pricing trend section at least the index was of no help when trying to retrace the steps taken to locate the information on Harley Davidson motorcycles mentioned above.

As author Scott Dirks notes in his introduction, pricing is an inexact science so the data here should be taken with that in mind. While the historic prices are gathered from specific sources, customer demographics as well as a number of other factors can cause "widely varying prices" for the same item. That being said, Mr. Dirks has done yeoman’s service in researching salary data for numerous occupations and the selected prices of a myriad of products and services, not to mention the values he lists for various investment options.

But perhaps equally important to providing a valuable chronological perspective on prices and incomes, Mr. Dirks and his new edition of *Value of the Dollar 1860-2014* give the observant researcher valuable insights into the economic and social changes experienced in the United States for more than 150 years. (Value of the Dollar 1860-2014 is available digitally from a number of eBook vendors. For a complete list see: http://www.greyhouse.com/ ebooks.htm.)
CQ Press continues to publish wide ranging policy related works:

- **Historical Guide to World Media Freedom: A Country-by-Country Analysis** (978-1-6087-1765-1, $150, Aug. 2014) offers “comprehensive historical data on media freedom since World War II,” providing “consistent and comparable measures of media freedom in all independent countries from 1948 to the present.”

- **Guide to U.S. Economic Policy** (978-1-4522-7077-7, $175, Aug. 2014) “explores the development of U.S. economic policies from the colonial period to today” and “delves into the federal agencies and public and private organizations that influence and administer economic policies…” The book’s 30 chapters, which can be read sequentially to provide a comprehensive overview or separately to look at specific eras and topics, are organized into these five major sections…”

- **Science and Politics: An A-to-Z Guide to Issues and Controversies** (978-1-4522-5810-2, $150, July 2014) details health, environmental, and social/cultural concerns while looking “at the issues and controversies at the intersection of science and politics and investigates how historical and contemporary events, along with government regulation, have affected the practice of science.” This reference “covers this nexus of politics and science in 118 . . . A-to-Z entries.”

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**Bloomsbury** publish a new four-volume set:

- **Food History: Critical and Primary Sources** (9780857854230, $890, Sept. 2014) is “… a four-volume reference collection which focuses on the widest possible span of food in human history, to provide a comprehensive survey of problems and methods in the field of food history. Bringing together over 80 high-quality essays drawn from journal articles, book chapters, excerpts, and historical documents and supported by introductory essays and a wealth of contextual material, this … new reference work combines contemporary scholarship with selected primary sources…”

- **Tolkien and Lord of the Rings** fan, Martin filled a void that had been empty in my literary life since high school, when I read the Lord of the Rings series a dozen times. My adult self really appreciates Martin’s R-rated writing, and his willingness to kill off his main characters in order to keep the plot moving and interesting.

By the time I finished the first four books in A Song of Ice and Fire it was 2006. I had a grueling four years to wait until Martin would publish the fifth installment in the series, A Dance With Dragons, in 2011. Fortunately, while I anxiously waited for Martin to publish the next book, I had HBOs television adaptation of the series, titled Game of Thrones.

Valerie Estelle Frankel has written a book on this television series, titled Women in Game of Thrones: Power, Conformity and Resistance, which examines femininity and the portrayal of women in the series, while sometimes drawing on Martin’s novels for comparison and analysis. While the television series, for the most part, stays true to the novels, Frankel argues women’s roles are more one-dimensional in the show, especially when compared to most of the men’s characters. Frankel’s makes her argument by breaking her text into three sections: the first, dealing with the controversial issues in the show; the second, examining and analyzing female characters and historical tropes found in the series; and third, which deals with the gender roles in Westeros, the fictional land where the series takes place.

From the onset of the text, I must admit I was a bit off-put by Frankel’s suggestions. Being a huge fan of the novel series and the show, I had never thought of the series as being sexist. Yes, there are many nude scenes of women, but there are quite a few nude scenes of males as well. Yes, some female characters are treated as lesser beings compared to their male counterparts, but this series is supposed to take place in a medieval-like time period where women were, for the most part, with the exception of royalty, treated as property. Saying the show is sexist is pointing out the obvious about the time period in which it takes place.

But then, after some consideration and discussion with my wife, I tried looking at Frankel’s text from a different point of view and I found she makes several great points that are, depending on your stance, quite appalling when it comes to the way women are portrayed in the show, especially when you know the great lengths Martin takes in the novels to empower women and make them dynamic characters. For example, as Frankel points out, the directors of the show do often show female nudity for no other reason other than showing female nudity. Many scenes where females are nude are not in the novels and do not seem to further the plot or character development, where the scenes with male nudity often have a purpose, such as showing a male character’s homosexuality. Frankel goes on to make several other eye-lifting points with her poignant analysis in this text.

Women in Game of Thrones is a thought-provoking read. Anyone who is a fan of the novel series or show should read it to get an interesting perspective that is backed up with convincing evidence. You do not have to be a feminist to buy what Frankel is selling.