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From the Reference Desk

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From the Reference Desk

Subject Encyclopedias

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While cyberspace has become a major compartment in the reference toolbox, the printed page, assembled in bound volumes, remains vital to our work. However, the future seems fluid and the signals mixed. *Encyclopedia Britannica* has laid off most of its home sales force and is re-evaluating its publishing strategy, pushing an online version. At the same time, Grove has invested hundreds of thousands of dollars in a new 30 volume *Grove's Dictionary of Art* (priced at around \$8000). Catalogs of multimedia reference CD's clutter mail boxes, while printed reference works arrive daily. What is a confused and harried reference librarian to do? The answer. Rejoice!!

In the information arena, as in most others, competition is a blessing. The emergence of one format does not necessarily mean the end of another. From the reference perspective, it means more options, harder choices and newer ways of getting our users to the information they need.

In the middle of this information frenzy, we should not only rejoice, but also, try to relax. Many of the "tried and true" ways of finding and presenting information are still good, and in some cases getting better. And in the view from this reference desk, subject encyclopedias clearly fall into this category. Subject encyclopedias deserve continued attention from publishers and librarians and, from all indications, they are getting it.

In the last issue of *ATG*, this column discussed the publishing of a major subject encyclopedia, the *Encyclopedia of African-American Culture and History*. (*ATG*, v.8#2, p. 54) There are a number of recent subject encyclopedias which should also be mentioned as worthy additions to any reference collection.

Oxford University Press has recently published two sets which deserve mention. The *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation* (1996, 0-19-506493-3, \$450) and the *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World* (1995, 0-19-506613-8, \$395) are publications which fill obvious voids. The sixteenth century Reformation was a pivotal time in Western History, not only from a religious perspective, but from the broader historical view. It was a time of nascent capitalism, the emergence of the nation-state and the beginning of New World exploration. The four-volume *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation* takes this broad view and in very scholarly fashion, presents the events and people which combined to make the Reformation such a critical era. The articles are well written and the bibliographies are highly selective, listing what the editors consider the "best available literature."

The *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World* is an equally impressive work. From the Iranian revolution in the late 1970s, to the war in Bosnia, to the current Mideast peace process, Islamic peoples have increasing occupied center stage in world events. This four-volume set is the first reference to concentrate on the resurgence of Islam in the modern times, and to do so from a worldwide perspective. Starting from the end of the eighteenth century and through to the current day, this encyclopedia offers insights into the basic tenets of Islam, as well as addressing its political, social and cultural impacts. This encyclopedia, while accessible to the general reader, is scholarly in nature and provides bibliographies of varying lengths for each article. Both of these Oxford encyclopedias are well indexed and contain good cross referencing.

Scribner's has also weighed in with a one-volume *Encyclopedia of the Vietnam War* (0-13-276932-8, 1996, \$99). This book offers basic facts about the events, major players and policy issues, as well as "interpretive essays" covering major topics related to the war. Bibliographies follow each entry. In addition, there is a bibliographic essay at the end of the volume pointing out selected readings in certain areas. The full text of the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution and the Paris Peace Accord are also included at the end of the book. Add to all this a solid index and you have a one-volume encyclopedia worth the cost.

The *Encyclopedia of Drugs and Alcohol* (0-02897185-X, 1995, \$290

) is another significant set. Published by **Macmillan**, this encyclopedia, while intended for the non-specialist, has value for students and scholars in need of facts or a background understanding of drug or alcohol-related issues. Many of the articles in this four-volume set deal with the physiological effects of drugs and alcohol. But many others cover the broader social, economic and political ramifications of drug and alcohol use and abuse. In a sense this encyclopedia is two references in one. Volume four is actually a collection of directories offering listings for poison control centers, government drug agencies, and most impressively, a 412-page directory of drug and alcohol treatment and prevention programs. Naturally, the set is fully indexed.

Facts on File also has a few subject encyclopedias worthy of mention. *The Encyclopedia of American Religious History* (0-8160-2406-5, 1996, \$99) is a reasonably priced two-volume reference. While the entries are concise and to the point, the breath of coverage is noteworthy. Obviously, the heavy emphasis is on Christianity and the various Christian denominations. But other religions like Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Native American Religions are covered. There are also articles on topics as diverse as the Electronic Church, the Vatican Councils and Feminist Theology. Short bibliographies follow each entry and there is both an alphabetical general index as well as a synoptic index by major category.

The Encyclopedia of the Middle Ages (0-8160-2456-1, 1995, \$45) is a one-volume encyclopedia which does not confine its scope. Traditionally the emphasis has been on the European medieval experience. But author **Matthew Bunson** attempts to give important non-European cultures their due. The influence of the Islamic dynasties, the Byzantine Empire and the Balkan empires are all noted in this work. The book is cross-referenced and contains a chronology, glossary of medieval terms, listings of rulers, a suggested readings list and a general index.

Finally, there is **Facts on File's Mark Twain A to Z** (0-8160-2845-1, 1995, \$45) by **R. Kent Rasmussen**. This book provides over 520 pages crammed with facts about the great American author. Analysis of Twain's work is not the goal here. This volume concentrates on factual information of the "who, what, where and when variety." The author does include synopses of most of the major works, both fiction and non-fiction. Many of Twain's fictional characters also have their own entries describing them and placing them within the works they appear. The book is arranged

continued on page 44

Book Reviews from page 41

nial period to the development of the major U.S. legal publishing houses of the late nineteenth century. The historical section concludes with an explanation of the pricing trends over the last twenty years. Although Mr. Svengalis could not have covered the most recent takeover of **West Publishing** company by the Canadian mega-publisher, **The Thomson Company**, he has written an article on that event elsewhere (see *Rumors*, page 10). After providing the historical background to legal publishing, Mr. Svengalis introduces the voluntary **Federal Trade Commission Guides** for the law book industry finalized in 1976 in order to promote better communication between librarians and publishers of legal materials. The guides, as Mr. Svengalis indicates "have helped eliminate most of the nuisance violations in legal publishing." (p.15) and provided librarians with a basis for enlightened self-advocacy. Common problems such as unsolicited shipments have largely disappeared as a result of the **Guides** and the work of advocacy groups such as the Committee for Relations with Information Vendors, American Association of Law Libraries. Mr. Svengalis's concept of "write-for-order" program, has solved the problem of costly, frequent and in some cases unnecessary supplementation and has literally changed many of the business practices of many legal publishers.

Mr. Svengalis begins the next section with the topic of what materials constitute a core law collection and the problems and strategies surrounding the budgeting for annual supplementation, business practices of legal publishers, alternate strategies such the buying of used book and multi-volume reporter series. At this point, the focus of the text shifts to an examination of the different types of legal materials from statutes to regulatory materials to legal treatises. It must be noted that almost all of the entries could be classified as "practitioner-oriented" being designed for use in the actual work environment rather than in an academic educational environment. With each entry, Mr. Svengalis describes the publication, gives information on frequency of supplementation, and the breakdown of the supplementation over a several year period to allow for budgeting and cost analysis. This resource would be especially valuable to the attorney who functions without a librarian for whom selecting legal materials are not a primary responsibility. Svengalis also adds descriptive

information and cost-saving tips such as what titles may be substituted should the budget allow for the purchase of only one title. He also analyzes the cost effectiveness of CD-ROM and CALR (**Computer Assisted Legal Research**) resources such as **Lexis** and **Westlaw**.

The appendices include background information on major publishers and distributors describing major product lines along with historical background information on the companies' business practices. In addition, Svengalis gives a thorough listing of company addresses and telephone numbers, a selective listing of major looseleaf services by publisher and an extensive bibliography for further reading.

I recently encountered a comment on a listserv commenting that while some of the information in this book is available in other sources, no other title has offered a single resource for the information in one location. I might add that I personally have not encountered the type of cost-conscious analysis in any other publication of this type. So it is without reservation that I would recommend the **Legal Information and Buyer's Guide** to any professional working in collection development and/or acquisitions who selects and/or purchases legal materials. I would also recommend this book to anyone who simply wishes to become better informed with regard to legal bibliography.

To order this title contact your regular vendor or write to the following address:

Rhode Island LawPress; 17 Mosher Drive; Barrington, RI 02806. FAX orders may be sent to: (401) 247-2163.

The American Forecaster Almanac,
by **Kim Long**, American Forecaster,
1459 Ogden St., Denver, CO 80218.
Softcover, 244 pages, indexed.
ISBN: 0-9644540-2-5. \$18.95.

Must order direct or through the **Tattered Cover Bookstore** WWW order service, Denver, CO. Also available on disc in ASCII or Adobe Acrobat formats.
World Wide Web site: <<http://www.ReadersNdex.com/americanforecaster>>

Review by **Linda F. Crismond**
(Professional Media Service)

What a find! I was able to read **Kim Long's American Forecaster Almanac** like a book, from cover to cover. You will discover the latest trend, the most popular, the best public opinion, the state-of-art, etc., in this annual

publication. The goal is "to provide information about changes in society without criticism or favoritism." The forward acknowledges the help of librarians, publishers, and professional/trade associations.

There is something for everyone in the almanac, including eclectic topics like dog sports, the latest in hair styling, garden trends, and auto technology. Several sections are right up librarians' and publishers' alleys. **Internet trends** predicts that businesses will provide the greatest opportunity for Internet growth in 1997. **Online books** contends that like most things digital, the promise of online resources so far is greater than reality. The English-speaking consumers outside the U.S. will use book databases as they have little access to American books through their local booksellers.

According to **Mailing Trends**, in 1994, about 60% of the Postal Service mail stream was barcoded. The goal for 1997, is to have the technology fully implemented, with an estimated 80 percent usage rate. In the **Digital Documents** section, an estimate from Xplor, the trade association for the electronics documents industry, holds that information in the business community may be 30 percent paper and 70 percent electronic by the year 2004. In 1995, the ratio is 90 percent paper, 10 percent electronic. The problem remains: the percentage of paper may be shrinking, but the amount that is generated continues to grow so fast that shifts to electronic formats don't seem to shrink the pile.

The **Almanac** can be used for fast facts and speech quotes. Each section has a "resources" list which points the reader to market research organizations, reference works, WWW pages, trade, consumer, and professional associations, product manufacturers, governmental agencies, and reference publications. An appendix supplements these lists with books and journals in general subjects and the major demographic and statistical resources in the 50 states. Finally, a detailed index leads you to more esoteric facts. Why not look up some of these topics: stir fry, check-clearing, help desks, HDTV, and information overload.

They also began publishing in 1996 the **American Forecaster Newsletter** which contains regular features such as "Frequently Questioned Answers", new phrases and words, short items of interest, recently issued patents, and significant anniversaries. To keep up with publishers, consult <http://www.ReadersNdex.com/americanforecaster> or e-mail <klong@netway.net>.

From the Reference Desk from page 39

alphabetically but has a general index and is cross-referenced. The entries do not contain bibliographies but there is a "suggested read-

ings" list at the end of the volume.

It seems obvious from this short list that subject encyclopedias are alive and well in the world of reference publishing. They serve the purpose of providing thorough information about specific subjects, and usually at reason-

able cost. In many cases, new electronic formats create profound changes in the way we provide information. But as a total replacement for printed sources like subject encyclopedias the evidence suggests that print still has a significant role to play.