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Reference Materials - To Web or Not To Web? Librarians and Publishers Speak Out.

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Against the Grain

"Linking Publishers, Vendors and Librarians"

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Reference Materials — To Web or Not To Web? Librarians and Publishers Speak Out.

by **Frances C. Wilkinson** (Director, Acquisitions and Serials Department, General Library, U. of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM 87131-1466; phone: (505) 277-7219; fax: (505) 277-4446 <fwilkins@unm.edu>)

The book and serials industry continues to witness not only a proliferation of reference materials but a widening array of format choices for these materials — paper/print, CD-ROM, online, Web, etc. Modest (if any!) library budget increases are not keeping pace with the cost of these materials, making prudent collection management more important than ever. Concern abounds regarding how the Web is affecting reference publishing, how to decide in which format to publish or purchase a reference title, what are the benefits and disadvantages of having products in paper and electronic format, the value of electronic product trials, what reference subject fields are not being served by publishing, and what the future trends in publishing reference materials will be. To address these issues, an interview-style joint discussion among librarians responsible for reference collection management (one reference librarian and one

collection management librarian from a large ARL member library, and one library director from a smaller college) and publishers of reference materials (one large publisher, which included responses from ten different staff members, and one smaller publisher, which included responses from two different staff members) was held. Their differing perspectives provide insight about the industry.

How is the Web effecting reference publishing?

The Librarians...

Answer from Christina E. Carter, Head of Reference, Zimmerman Library and Linda K. Lewis, Director of Collection Management, General Library, The University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM:

"As a major means of electronic communication, the omnipresence of the Web puts pres-

sure on publishers to make their products available in this format. This often results in reference titles that are more timely as well as easier and more powerful to search (as has been the case with other electronic formats, such as CD-ROM), and that can be linked to Web-based OPACs and other Web-based resources. On the other hand, publishers also release reference titles in a Web format that may not warrant it, or whose content may not generate much customer interest. Many publishers cease publishing print versions of titles, in favor of Web versions, which

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If Rumors Were Horses

Even during summer, there were tons of happenings out there.

Baker & Taylor has signed a letter of intent to acquire **Professional Media Service Corp.** The transaction is expected to be finalized upon the completion of due diligence and contracts. After the transaction is completed, **Professional Media Service Corp.** (PMSC) will operate as a subsidiary of **Baker & Taylor, Inc.** PMSC is a 16-year-old supplier of audiovisual mate-

rials and cataloging services to libraries worldwide. Based in Gardena, California, PMSC maintains a database of approximately 500,000 bibliographic records of audiovisual, video and CD-ROM recordings.

Julian Blackwell has announced that **Jim Rose**, whom we interviewed in the June issue of *ATG* (pp. 30, 32-34) has left his job as Chief Executive, **Blackwell's Information Services** to take up a new job as Chief Executive of **NOP Information Group**, a global market research company based in London, effective in September. "We are naturally saddened to be losing someone like Jim, but we are equally pleased for him person-

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What To Look For

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often cost more. Many libraries are then priced out of owning the title, or perhaps do not have the technology in place to support it."

Answer from Connie Capers Thorson, Director of the Pelletier Library, Allegheny College, Meadville, PA:

"The Web is affecting reference publishing in a positive way, I think. Many Web reference resources offer an immediacy and imaginativeness and active participation not offered by printed sources. Some are indexes and bibliographies that lead the user to greatly expanded or fulltext materials. Links to relevant and expanded resources allow for broader and more thorough research. At the same time, it seems as if the number of relevant printed reference sources offered has exploded. Marketing is more aggressive. Paper/print makes particularly good sense for specialized materials.

"I do worry about the very large group of 'have-nots' in this information age. I mean the people — and there are many of them — who have no access to what the Internet has to offer and are dependent on their local libraries for information. It is imperative that librarians and publishers remember that not all libraries have the electronic bells and whistles that a Harvard or a Dallas Public Library has. Without paper/print resources, many small college, public, school, and special libraries could not provide adequate reference resources for their patrons."

The Publishers...

Note from R.R. Bowker:

"The staff at R.R. Bowker spends a great deal of time considering the direction of reference materials in an electronic age. Bowker has published library reference materials for 126 years: as a print publisher, a pioneer in CD-ROM, a database vendor, and as of 1998, a World Wide Web reference publisher. Responses to the questions asked by [Frances C. Wilkinson for this] *Against the Grain* [article] were collected from the following staff members: Gary Aiello, Vice President, Information Technology; Angela D'Agostino, Director of Product Management and Development, *Books in Print*; Edward Kurdyla, Editorial Director, Serials; Diane Lewin, Director, Field Sales; David Nazaruk, Vice President, Marketing; Carol Newman, Vice President, Product Management and Development; Judy Salk, Director of Product Management and Development, Serials; Albert Simmonds, Director, Standards Development; Salvy Trojman, Canadian Sales Manager; and Leigh Yuster-Free-man, Vice President, Database Production."

Answer from Angela D'Agostino, Bowker:

"The Web poses a significant challenge to reference publishing. On the positive side, it has raised the bar on the quality and timeliness of the data customers expect and demand

to see. It has become a convenient research tool, providing access to information many consumers never knew existed. However, on the negative side it has created a false perception that this information is a commodity and therefore should be available for free. There is little to no comprehension of the amount of resources it takes to maintain and continuously update a reference database — *Books in Print*, for example."

Answer from Gary Aiello, Bowker:

"The publishers' timeliness and accuracy of the information is more important than ever. The Web essentially moves what were in many cases yearly data release schedules to almost daily release of data."

Answer from Ed Kurdyla, Bowker:

"In general, the Web is making more information more available to more persons. However, with so much information available from so many different types of sources, the authority of scholarly and reference publishing could be undermined. For the vast Web community, in general, including large student populations and other library-using populations, Web sites may be judged authoritative or good on the basis of presentation rather than content. There also seems to be a greater acceptance of the anonymity of the publisher or source of information of material on the Web. This diminishes a valuable asset of traditional reference publishers, that is, scholarship, data integrity, authority. This also increases the amount of misinformation which eventually will assume the status of fact."

Answer from Carol Newman, Bowker:

"The Web itself serves as a library ... albeit an unruly one. It is most powerful when it organizes reference information on either end of the spectrum: information selected and organized into very fine slices for specific needs, and information selected and aggregated into a cross-searchable tool for overall reference needs. Happily for researchers, the Web has revolutionized the way we can instantly pursue related sources of information ... the verb 'link' has an exciting new function. The Web is also unique in that it can marry reference selection, purchase, and delivery as part of one process."

Answer from Cris Maloney, Vice President of Media, and Jay Johnson, Vice President of Editorial Development, Peterson's, Princeton, NJ:

"The Web gives reference publishers wonderful new opportunities for providing information to an expanding number of interested individuals and organizations in new and exciting ways. Technology advances are completely changing the way we live and publish. Print reference publishing will always meet a need for portability and focused perusal of a targeted research task. The Web can take you all over

the map on any subject and sidetrack you on amazing and sometimes fruitless tangents.

"If you're disciplined, you can focus on tasks or specific target reference subjects on the Web without the help of a reference publisher. Reference publishers are serving the evolving Web user by providing professionally organized access to information which brings the power of the medium without subjecting users to worthless detours that an over-hyperlinked Web provides.

"At Peterson's, our customers rely on our print materials and use the companion CDs to jump to our Web sites. We rely on the electronic counterparts of our print materials to provide reader updates, add content which helps readers gain more information, and provide special services. The Web is an essential part of the whole 'content' picture in reference publishing today."

Some predicted that the Web would mean the end of significant reference sets being published in paper/print format; however, a number of these sets were published in the last several years (i.e., *Dictionary of Art*, *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, *International Encyclopedia of Dance*, *American National Biography*, etc.). Their numbers seem to be increasing rather than decreasing. Is this a trend that will continue? Why; why not?

The Librarians...

Answer from Christina E. Carter and Linda K. Lewis:

"It does seem that there have been many significant print sets published recently, and more are forthcoming. Such sets usually provide current and historical background, give the scholarly context of the area, and do some critical analysis. These are all things that the majority of Web resources currently do not do well. These print sets often function as a bridge between the patron's need for basic introductory information and advanced research in a field.

"Libraries have traditionally purchased these sets; they have been used as introductory summaries in areas where the library did not have extensive collections, and as places to begin more extensive research when the library collections were large. Librarians have taught their users about them, and relied upon them heavily. Now limited budgets are forcing libraries to be increasingly selective about which sets they purchase. Will more users skip this type of resource completely as they rely more on the Web to supplement the information

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tion from their teachers and colleagues? If so, then the predictions that the Web would mean the decline of these sets were only slightly premature."

Answer from Connie Capers Thorson:

"It is hard to predict what will happen in the future, but some things are obvious. Not all libraries have access to electronic resources, though many who have purchased or will purchase these sets do. Reference sets need to be available for decades to come. Will the Web databases available today be accessible a hundred years in the future as will the printed sets? Mergers, the expense of archiving information indefinitely, decisions to delete an old database in order to save space, replacing a first edition with a second, the demise of an electronic publisher — any of these would terminate access. In my opinion, paper access remains imperative, especially for the serious researcher. CD-ROM publishers could meet the same fates. I wonder whether CD-ROMs are good investments for the long term."

The Publishers...

Answer from Diane Lewin, Bowker:

"Many libraries subscribe to a database in multiple formats to fulfill multiple needs. Although print copies may be cut down, often they are not eliminated completely. Librarians feel they need the security of keeping the print copy until they are more comfortable that the Web version can truly fulfill their needs. Also, when a library with branches/campuses subscribes to a database on the Web, the print copy might be sent to one of the branches/campuses that previously did not have it."

Answer from Angela D'Agostino, Bowker:

"As long as there is demand, these works will continue to be published. The fact is that many librarians, library patrons, and average consumers prefer to use print. It's portable, easy to use, and, perhaps most importantly, it doesn't usually require waiting time in the library — both waiting to use an available terminal and then waiting for the retrieval of your

"Few titles are used extensively enough and also priced reasonably enough for most libraries to justify having them in both print and electronic versions."

information on the World Wide Web. In addition, print very quickly gives you access to the specific information you are looking for, without wading through the endless amount of irrelevant material you encounter through Web-based reference tools."

Answer from Salvy Trojman, Bowker:

"There are print reference sets that can't be functionally enhanced in an electronic format. Also, long-standing preferences die hard,

especially when the information involves a reference set that does not lead to some form of commerce. For example, information obtained from *The International Encyclopedia of Dance* will probably not lead to a commercial transaction that necessitates electronic delivery. Information obtained in *Books in Print* usually leads to the purchase of a book and is better able to aid a transaction if it is delivered electronically: succinct, accurate and up-to-date."

Answer from Carol Newman, Bowker:

"New products will continue to release in print formats, perhaps as the initial stage of their product cycles. Bowker will publish a number of new print directories in the 1998-99 time frame, released first in print, with Web versions to follow. One of our newest print directories to be released in 1998 will be kept updated from the day of release through a Web site with the same title. The digitization of data allows us to combine information to create new print products. In fact, we are exploring ways to allow users to create customized print reference materials ... doable only through electronic delivery."

Answer from Cris Maloney and Jay Johnson, Peterson's:

"Reference publishers have long had available to them the basic constructs of what the Web provides users, that is the ability to search large amounts of text using a computer. What the Web provides reference publishers, that other computing platforms do not, is the ability to offer services that people with like interests or related intersections (as in students, guidance counselors, and enrollment managers) to come together in one place from various points on the planet; you just can't do that with a book or standalone software. The Web is an important medium, but it is a different medium than print and software. None of these platforms make the others valueless. Print publishing has strengths that can't be replicated under glass, standalone software runs circles

around the Web in terms of speed and the ability to provide super-complex searching, and the Web kills standalone software in terms of community.

"Peterson's has always been generous on the Web with electronically publishing our content. The objec-

tive in publishing has always been to get the content in the hands of the public. The Web gives many people access to reference content. Printed books give many people access to content if they have limited technology resources. We feel the trend to co-publish print and electronic reference sets is continuing and increasing. We also see the Web facilitating custom printing and publishing; readers will order up pieces of content (electronic files),

order them as they wish, and print out new books that have value for them on time and on demand."

If you are a librarian, how do you decide whether to select a reference title in paper/print, electronic format (CD-ROM, online, Web), or both? If you are a publisher, how do you decide whether a reference title should be published in paper/print, electronic format or both?

The Librarians...

Answer from Christina E. Carter and Linda K. Lewis:

"The main factors are use, value-added features, automation infrastructure to support the electronic version(s), and cost. The first question is: how will the material be used? Many electronic reference sources such as indexes and directories are easier to use, and are updated more frequently, than their print counterparts. Many electronic products have added features over the print, such as: unique search fields, enhanced search capabilities, sorting of search results, and capture of results via email, downloading, and printing. Many reference sources, such as travel guides and educational directories, are enhanced in the Web environment. While much of the print content is retained, with Web versions links to home pages of colleges and universities, or to news wires and current events about a particular region of the world are often added.

"A reference department needs to assess if it has adequate hardware and software to support an electronic version of a reference source. Are the library's and associated computing agency's (computing center's) networking sufficient to support a Web-based product? Are computer workstations beefed up enough to provide sufficient computer memory to run the resource? Is sufficient staff available to manage the electronic product?"

"The electronic version should cost less than the print version, since the costs of printing and shipping are not factors. This is often not the case, though. Many electronic versions of print reference sources are priced out of the range of affordability for many libraries. Few titles are used extensively enough and also priced reasonably enough for most libraries to justify having them in both print and electronic versions."

Answer from Connie Capers Thorson:

"I often select reference sets in print format even though they are available in electronic format. Buying the same title in two different formats is a luxury many small libraries cannot afford, even though electronic products offer certain advantages: they are often updated on a frequent basis, or they offer access by more than one user at a time. Buying CD-ROMs has always obligated a library to purchase equipment for playing the disk; such equipment is not cheap. The relevant software has to be added to a workstation because there has not been (and I don't

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think there will ever be) standardized software for the thousands of CD-ROMs now available. There is the expense of a printer with paper to consider, too. The other disadvantage of CD-ROMs is that students cannot email the relevant material they find to themselves, unless perhaps the CD-ROMs are loaded on a LAN.

"If we had unlimited resources, I would be tempted to have a print copy plus an electronic copy available on the Web-based catalog. As it is, we have opted for print copies of many reference titles and Web access for a variety of searchable bibliographic databases and fulltext journals. The major exception is the *Encyclopedia Britannica* and *Britannica Online*."

The Publishers...

Answer from Angela D'Agostino, Bowker:

"It depends on the demand and whether the electronic environment will provide you with ways to improve upon the print product and serve your customers better. *Books in Print* was one of the very first reference works available on CD-ROM back in the 80's and customers were in awe of the functionality and speed with which they could now search the database and retrieve information. Going from four access points (author, title, subject, publisher) to over twenty that could be combined with Boolean logic was remarkable for those days. Today, with a database as large as *Books in Print*, we are constantly faced with the space restrictions inherent in CD-ROM technology. The Web has become the logical next step to both provide our customers with all of the data they require and also add content and graphics and enhancements to the database (cover images, links to publishers/distributors, Tables of Contents, etc.) that wouldn't be feasible either in print or CD-ROM. On the other hand, as long as customers continue to purchase the print product in spite of its limitations, we will continue to publish it. We had wondered about the survival of the *Books in Print* set in print, but amazingly it is still our biggest seller. I doubt I will say this in one or two years, though. The electronic versions are growing at a very rapid rate and will soon outpace it."

Answer from Albert Simmonds, Bowker:

"Both is probably a luxury that few libraries can afford. Cost is probably the most important factor. But determining relative cost is not necessarily a simple equation. An electronic version of a journal might cost more but it can also be delivered to many more people. I recently overheard a conversation between two librarians at a meeting. One of them was talking about how much time he was spending on converting to electronic and noted: 'Everyone is always talking about how much Elsevier journals cost, but now everyone on my campus has unlimited access to 1200 journals. The cost is worth it.'"

Answer from Diane Lewin, Bowker:

"If a library has reliable Internet access available, the Web is a preferred option. However, if the database is mission critical, they might want one CD or print copy just in case the Web goes down. In addition, the interface on the Web/CD-ROM is a factor, as is the data included. Different media often have slightly different content. If the library staff are not comfortable with the Web, the library may choose to keep a print copy until staff feel secure with the new form of access."

"As a publisher, the primary factor is how you can serve the information needs of the market. Is Internet access available to your market? What is the preferred form of access in that market?"

Answer from Ed Kurdyla, Bowker:

"The decision to publish a reference title in print or electronic format or both should be based on the usefulness of the format as well as on economic and market forces. Some reference products invite electronic and interactive formats because of the nature of the material. Multimedia applications can greatly enhance a product in ways unachievable with ink and paper. Even more utilitarian data can be greatly enhanced by publication in an electronic format. The sheer size of a data collection or database can make it unwieldy to use in print format, which might require five to ten separate volumes, very thin paper, very small type. It is just difficult to use. It is also difficult to find information in such a book. Due to cost of paper, printing, and other items, there is a limit to the number of indexes and access points available in print publications. In electronic format, with little additional cost, indexes are virtually unlimited and keyword searching provides unlimited access."

Answer from Cris Maloney and Jay Johnson, Peterson's:

"It depends on the services you are planning to offer your customers and the formats in which they want the information and whether the information can be provided in a profitable manner. Does the content facilitate electronic processes like custom searching, calculations, or multi-media dissemination? Then electronic publishing is viable/desirable. Most publishers, however, will look at reference publishing from a profit-and-loss standpoint. What is the economic model to publish in paper/print, electronic, or a combination format? We also look at the added value a CD will give to a book. A wonderful example is *Peterson's Guide to College Visits* which covers campuses around the country and includes a special edition of *Rand McNally's Tripmaker* software program so readers can print out maps charting their trips from home to campus. That is value-added and uses print and

electronic for the best purposes for which each format is designed."

A number of publishers are releasing CD-ROM and/or Web products in tandem with their printed products. What are the benefits of having products in electronic and paper/print formats? What are the disadvantages?

The Librarians...

Answer from Christina E. Carter and Linda K. Lewis:

"The major advantage is the ability to have additional information, whether it is a CD-ROM with the statistical data that is summarized in the charts in a handbook, or a Web site that is updated with current names and addresses for a directory."

"The disadvantages lie in the logistics of handling the items and in leading users to them. When a title comes with a CD-ROM, the library has to decide whether or not the CD-ROM remains with the title when it is shelved, how it is marked, what the circulation policy is, etc. If the book and the CD-ROM are shelved separately, how does the patron learn where the other piece is? If a CD-

ROM requires special software, is that included, and if not, does the library have the ability to load it on its computer equipment? In the case of periodicals, what does the library do when an issue (or issues) of a periodical are distributed on CD-ROM or diskette? Where will these special issues be kept — with the periodical, at the circulation area, or in the reference department? When a title has a Web site that updates the print version, how does the patron find out about it — via the online catalog?; the library's Web page?"

Answer from Connie Capers Thorson:

"The major disadvantage of having products in tandem is the cost, obviously. There might also be the matter of space — on the shelves and for a workstation. The great advantage of electronic products is the frequency and speed with which the information is updated. A paper/print resource is out of date the day it leaves the editor's or compiler's hands — no more can be added until a new edition is published. And, of course, many books never have a second edition."

The Publishers...

Answer from Leigh Yuster-Freeman, Bowker:

"Electronic advantages are: a) more searching capabilities, b) data sorted/reorganized as needed, c) abbreviations are usually fully exploded, d) more up-to-date data. Electronic disadvantages are: a) need searching skills, b) need to know more or less what you are looking for, c) need hardware, d) need software or online connections to get to data

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source. Print advantages are: a) data is physically present, b) customary lookup and scanning, c) data is organized for user, d) can help user identify need through visual clues. Print disadvantages are: a) limitations in print product — cannot search any way you need, b) not updated as often — out of date faster, c) reference works are physically bulky.”

Answer from Angela D’Agostino, Bowker:

“Many of our customers choose to keep the print even though they have access to *Books in Print* through the Web or on CD-ROM. The primary reasons they give: they want to make sure they have back-up in case the technology fails them; they want to give patrons access to the data when they can’t get on a terminal; they find that the multi-volume set allows more patrons to use it at one time than do the limited number of terminals they may have. These are obvious benefits to having both. Other benefits I could foresee are storage space and/or access to infrequently used data — for example, if you had a print product that has the data you need for your everyday work on your desk and had access to an electronic version for other data that you may not need as frequently, or vice versa. The only disadvantages I could envision would be if a publisher forced you to purchase both the print and electronic versions at a premium price when you really only need one or the other.”

Answer from Ed Kurdyla, Bowker:

“Until there are an almost equal number of terminals and patrons, print formats of many reference and other titles must be available. Of course, the reverse of this situation is true also and more persons can have more access to more titles from more, or other, locations. University students, for example, no longer need to frequent the library. Many of their needs can be met from their dorm rooms or homes. For the general public, such a situation is becoming more common as the availability of materials on the Web increases. Many public libraries also make their electronic collections available to users at remote locations.”

Answer from David Nazaruk, Bowker:

“From a publisher’s point of view: Advantages: 1) Customers can access information in format(s) that best fit their needs, 2) Inexpensive entry into another market using the same database. Disadvantages: 1) Cannibalism of existing product, 2) Gauging precise demand for each format is difficult, making determination of optimal print run a tricky proposition (overprinting will lower margins, glut warehouse with excess inventory that will eventually be scrapped; underprinting will occasion need for reprint — higher unit cost than one-time printing, 3) Perception in market that electronic product should offer more and do more, leading to increased develop-

ment costs or customer dissatisfaction.”

Answer from Carol Newman, Bowker:

“It’s been said that digitizing information makes it a liquid, capable of being poured into any delivery format. Bowker is finding that to be a great truth for reference publishing.”

Answer from Cris Maloney and Jay Johnson, Peterson’s:

“Advantages: A bundled CD adds value and function to print products. It adds the ability to offer a wider array of reference material in different media types (sound and images), and significantly more content than can be reasonably distributed in print. Disadvantages: CDs may be expensive to develop. Some readers don’t have access to technology, so print and CD packages may say, “This reference product is not for me.”

How valuable are product trials in promoting/evaluating electronic products? If you are a librarian, what advice would you give publishers about product trials? If you are a publisher, what advice would you give librarians about product trials?

The Librarians...

Answer from Christina E. Carter and Linda K. Lewis:

“Trials are invaluable for major expensive titles. They can be the deciding factor when librarians are considering purchasing titles, so publishers should make it as simple as possible for librarians to evaluate their products. The trial period needs to be a reasonable length of time, at least a month. When a trial is only a week, it is very difficult to ensure that all interested parties actually have the opportunity to evaluate a resource thoroughly. The publisher should allow students and faculty to evaluate the resource; limiting the trial to library personnel only eliminates a major source of potential information about the actual value of the product. There should be access to the complete product, not just to a limited portion of the title. Testing a limited subset of the file, with limited functions, does not allow the library to see how it would actually work. The library and the publisher should work together to find the best time for a trial; if student opinions are needed, the trials would be most successful while classes are in session. Make the access as easy as possible; after all, the objective is to let the library see that they need to purchase the title.”

Answer from Connie Capers Thorson:

“I have always been reluctant to indulge in product trials, though we have been involved with a few for large Web resources. Having an opportunity to look at the various facets of an electronic product is good. One does not want to buy a pig in a poke, after all. There is always the feeling, however, that one is being rushed into something. There is always a deadline by which the library has to sign up for the trial or by which the library has to complete the trial. Most of all, the threat of a price in-

crease is always imminent.”

The Publishers...

Answer from Diane Lewin, Bowker:

“Trials are very valuable because they give librarians a chance to assess the usefulness of the product prior to purchase. While they might be familiar with the publication in print or CD-ROM format, the interface (searching capabilities, access points, etc.) on the Web might be different. Librarians need to ensure that staff use the database as intensively as possible during the trial period, and contact the publisher if they have any questions or to request training.”

Answer from Ed Kurdyla, Bowker:

“Product trials often are very useful. Electronic information products are much more difficult to assess than are traditional print reference products. Even if the data are the same, the integration of information manipulation software can radically change the utility and value of the data. The product can be faster to use, easier to use, and even provide much more information because the data are more easily accessible and logically grouped. Product trials for Web-based products should not, in most cases, present any additional work for librarians.

“Certain CD-ROM-based products still have unique requirements and can place a burden on the librarian. If that is the case, I would advise the librarian to be very interested in the product before spending time setting up equipment for a trial. I would advise publishers to standardize and simplify their products.”

Answer from Angela D’Agostino, Bowker:

“Product trials are essential to the sale of an electronic product. Unlike a book that can be easily described in a brochure or by a sales rep, an electronic product needs to be experienced first hand to truly understand its value. Since it typically is a more expensive purchase, a customer should have adequate time to evaluate its usefulness before committing to a purchase. It is also important to get the buy-in of all of the stakeholders before making the final decision.”

Answer from Leigh Yuster-Freeman, Bowker:

“Librarian evaluations/beta testing are very important to publishers as a key way to suggest product modifications, fine tuning, additional searching needs, data needs, etc. Librarians do both publishers and librarians a service when they use the test product heavily and provide HONEST and USEFUL feedback.”

Answer from Judy Salk, Bowker:

“User expectations of electronic products are high. With so many products from which to choose, and so many options and widely varying offerings of content and functionality, it behooves the publisher, perhaps now more than ever, to implement rigorous testing

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and product trials prior to the launch of any product. When librarians participate in pre-release product testing, they are, in essence, working with the publisher to create valuable products — it's a joint venture. Product trials and testing give librarians an opportunity to have a critical impact on the types of products on the market. Everyone wins in the end."

Answer from Cris Maloney and Jay Johnson, Peterson's:

"Electronic products are less tangible in nature than print products and so trials help consumers put their arms around the product and experience its value."

Are any subject fields not being published in the reference literature that should be? If so, what are they?

The Librarians...

Answer from Christina E. Carter:

"Publishers seem to be able to keep up with new subject or research areas that crop up. Language, rather than subject, is more of an issue with reference sources. Often, a heavily consulted portion of the reference collection, such as style manuals, does not exist sufficiently in languages other than English. This can be a problem when libraries have a significant clientele whose primary language is other than English."

Answer from Connie Capers Thorson:

"I can't think of a subject or topic off hand, though those at comprehensive institutions with graduate or research programs in esoteric subjects may have ideas."

The Publishers...

Answer from Ed Kurdyla, Bowker:

"Undoubtedly there are subject fields not being published in reference literature but they are likely to be sub-fields or specialties of very specific fields. These narrow fields, or specialty fields, are well-represented on the Web, often by interest groups, professional associations, universities, etc. The materials are often published informally but by authorities who maintain the intellectual integrity of the material. While part of the attraction of the Web is the vast market and audience it provides, another attraction is the ease with which the Web can address very specific, small niche markets and groups."

Answer from Albert Simmonds, Bowker:

"I think we are just beginning to understand how powerful subject searching will be in the electronic world. Rather than any particular scheme being neglected I think the important point is for publishers to develop subject schemes that take advantage of this power and that librarians need to become better searchers in the electronic environment."

Answer from David Nazaruk, Bowker:

"Multi-lingual, multi-cultural products are under-developed."

What do you feel are the future trends in publishing reference materials? What will future reference collections look like?

The Librarians...

Answer from Christina E. Carter:

"Reference collections of the future will have most serial publications — not just indexing services — available only in electronic format, most likely a Web-based version of some sort. Reference bibliographers will be increasingly selective about both serial and monographic print materials they purchase and place in the collection; duplication of content will increasingly not be supported. These issues have as much to do with declining resources of space, staff to process and maintain collections, and declining use, as they have to do with declining funds to purchase print materials."

"Print reference collections will thus be scaled back dramatically. Reference collections will increasingly be remote collections. As libraries increasingly acquire commercial databases and other resources that are used for reference purposes via consortial licenses (e.g., FirstSearch), reference departments will no longer be the direct managers of these types of resources. They will have less control over adding or dropping a reference database that now may be part of a larger database package negotiated by a library."

"Traditional finding aids and research guides to collections will be 'Webbed,' a welcome conversion, as these print aids have traditionally proved cumbersome to use. Many of these new Web resources will be produced within libraries, guiding users to local collections. Future reference collections will then be even more of a mix of resources produced by library personnel to fit their unique collections and services, and commercial products."

Answer from Connie Capers Thorson:

"I hope that publishers will continue to publish paper/print reference materials as well as resources for the Web. The licensing agreements for many Web products are such that only current members of the campus community may use the product. In order to have materials for others to use, print resources are a must. I am inclined to think that reference collections, even in 2040, will continue to look very much as they do now. There will be a wide variety of resources on a multiplicity of topics in numerous formats. I hope there will continue to be a balance between the instant gratification offered by the Web and the long term investment offered by paper/print resources."

The Publishers...

Answer from Gary Aiello, Bowker:

"What will future reference collections look like? The interface for Web and CD publishing will converge. Online magazines with keyword, theme and index search capabilities will combine the functionality of a CD with

the additional functionality and unlimited content availability of the Web."

Answer from Ed Kurdyla, Bowker:

"With the Internet and, more specifically, the World Wide Web, universities have assumed the role of publishers and will do so increasingly. Much of reference and scholarly publishing relies on academia not only as a market for products but also as a source of products. Contributors, authors, editors are frequently members of the academy. Traditionally they have worked less for money than for the recognition of publication and for the advocacy of their field of study. Those contributors can now become their own publishers, or their university can be their publisher. They can have greater control over the content and distribution and cost of the products. A fine example is the *Online Reference Book for Medieval Studies*. It is hard to imagine a better and more useful source on a subject. It combines original essays written for the site. *The Internet Medieval Sourcebook* contains the fulltext and annotated excerpts of original source documents from the Middle Ages. Instead of relying on a publisher's selection of such sources, a teacher can go to the sourcebook, select the material he or she wishes to use, and download it; or the teacher can just instruct the students to go to the site. There are links to reference materials created by university departments all over the world and to large digital collections of materials, both primary and secondary."

Answer from Angela D'Agostino, Bowker:

"I believe that reference publishing will be increasingly tailored to the Web environment and will evolve into more one-stop shopping communities, so that researchers may have, for example, an art reference supersite that includes dictionaries of art, biographies of artists, links to the artists' works in collections, video and audio clips of the artist herself, reviews of the artists' work, experts lecturing online about the artist, etc. Though some of this is already happening, for these sites to be truly professional research tools will require much more collaboration between reference publishers. Although partnerships and joint ventures are on the rise, the type of collaboration I'm referring to will require an acute understanding on the part of each publisher that one's own information alone is insufficient to serve the market needs and that depending on other reference publishers for complementary data is not threatening, but essential for survival."

"As far as the future of reference collections, I see these supersites having icons on library Web pages, grouped by subject area with brief reviews by the library staff to aid the patron in quickly accessing those most useful. The shelves will still be stocked with some essentials — dictionaries, encyclopedias, *Books in Print* — but there will be sig-

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Bookseller Sales of Special Reference Sets — What's the Story?

by **Matt Nauman** (Blackwell's) <nauman@blackwells.com>

Reference sets — both in book and CD-ROM format — have grown in importance for publishers, booksellers, and academic libraries. This was demonstrated during 1997 by articles in *Publishers Weekly* and *Library Journal* and in presentations at the **Charleston Conference**. In addition, reference publishers say that they see no downturn and expect their production of reference titles to increase. Despite sometime shaky budget situations, academic libraries continue to buy the books (and to a lesser degree, the CD-ROMs). To meet the increased production and demand, library booksellers have greatly expanded the special sales of reference sets.

The following paragraphs reflect Blackwell's experience and are also indicative of other library booksellers' efforts. Blackwell's began offering special sales of expensive reference sets to libraries in 1982. Until recently, only a few expensive titles were handled each year, usually in science and technology. However, as more titles appeared and demand increased, Blackwell's and other booksellers expanded the number of titles of-

fered and included titles in the softer sciences and humanities. CD-ROMs, either standalone or combined with books, were added in 1995.

While only six titles were offered in 1993, the total increased to 29 titles in 1997 and sales continued to increase dramatically. The total is sure to increase in 1998. During this period of growth, the basic criteria for coverage have remained the same — a pre-publication list price of \$300 or more, plus a publisher discount. These criteria ensure that special promotions do not interfere with Approval sales (due to cost) and that the best price possible can be offered to libraries.

As recently as 1994, all special offers were made by way of North American mailings of publisher brochures and Blackwell's offer sheets. Since then, mailings have expanded to international markets and many markets are now serviced by email announcements. Titles were also offered via Blackwell's World Wide Web homepage. Web sales have now been made interactive. What was once a simple listing now includes an order icon and wherever possible, a link to the publisher's Web site. Not surprisingly, sales made via the Web have in-

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Today Blackwell's is poised for another large expansion of special reference promotions. In the past, all titles have been handled from the Lake Oswego, Oregon Office. Offers are now being made from the Oxford, UK office as well. This provides access to more titles and allows Blackwell's to offer the best world price for reference works that fit the criteria for coverage. In addition, Blackwell's specialists, both in the US and UK are working with publishers to get access to more titles. There are still a few reference publishers who do not want to sell through library booksellers. But we are all steadily chipping away at their numbers. The success of selling other publishers' products has not been lost on the last holdouts. The ability to offer the best available price to libraries is an important option for library booksellers and the libraries they serve.

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nificantly fewer of them. The books will also need cross-references to electronic products for more complete information."

Answer from Diane Lewin, Bowker:

"One of the trends is to become more consumer oriented (see *IAC's LifeCenter*). Another is to offer 'one stop shopping' — search a citation database, retrieve the fulltext article, receive notification on a regular basis of new articles of interest to you (user profiling), chat with a specialist re any questions you may have. In addition, end-user customization is a trend certainly evidenced with ISP's, and starting to happen more in the publishing industry."

Answer from David Nazaruk, Bowker:

"CD-ROM usage will dwindle in favor of the Web alone (or a combination of static information on disc and updated information via the Web). Enhancements will be more forthcoming as information expectations (accuracy, currency, etc.) continue to be higher. Fulfillment of those expectations will be key to publisher survival in the face of increased traditional and non-traditional competition. Future collections will archive paper (or fiche), but the majority of research will take place electronically."

Answer from Salvy Trojman, Bowker:

"Future reference publishing will be mostly Web-based, with the best information still at a premium. Video streaming will allow us to see and hear reference material rather than just viewing it in a compiled format."

Answer from Cris Maloney and Jay Johnson, Peterson's:

"Reference users will want more power over their materials in the future, ushered in by the freedom of surfing the Web for information. Students and adults will want access to a lot of pieces of information and will want to arrange them in formations that meet their needs. This means giving reference users the tools to customize and the library information in interactive formats. In a library, this may mean technology access to subscription online services that allow users to search for content, rewrite it, link it, illustrate it with anything from a chart to a photo, mainstream text with multi-media (including their own voice-overs), and printing or delivering the end product to their homes, teachers, family in far-off places, offices, or friends.

"Print, however, is here to stay. Print will always be a reliable user-friendly storage device for reference materials — easy on the eyes, portable, immediately accessible without added cost, and tactile. Many end-users only trust what they can touch. And when it

comes to narrow-interest titles that don't warrant big development budgets, print will accommodate the complete gamut of individual reference users and their needs and tastes. That kind of open access of information for all is the cornerstone of our library system and the foundation of reference publishing."

Summary from Angela D'Agostino, Bowker:

"The electronic environment is a natural for reference publishing. The challenge to librarians and publishers is to differentiate between true reference material, which requires significant resources on the part of the publishers to collect and maintain (and therefore requires payment on the part of librarians or consumers), and the 'fluff' data posing as reference material which is free because it is supported either by advertising or product sales.

"If we want to maintain the editorial integrity of reference works, I believe we need to avoid the trap of relying on sources of income other than subscriptions in order to support our reference publishing. Ultimately, I think the onus will be on the professional librarian to discern the differences between true reference material and 'fluff' and guide patrons to the legitimate resources. Otherwise, much incomplete information or misinformation could find its way into research work."