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Book Reviews

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Book Reviews

Column Editor: **Tom Leonhardt** (Oregon Institute of Technology) <leonhart@oit.edu>

Benaud, Claire-Lise and Sever Bordeianu, *Outsourcing Library Operations in Academic Libraries: An Overview of Issues and Outcomes*.

Englewood, CO:

Libraries Unlimited, 1998.

ISBN: 1-56308-509-7 \$40.00

Reviewed by **Julia Gelfand** (Applied Sciences Librarian & Bibliographer, Univ of Calif, Irvine)

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Considering all the enthusiasm for outsourcing practices in libraries in recent years, and how as of February of this year, *Library Journal* proclaimed, "Outsourcing emerges near top of ALA agenda," (St. Lifer, 1998) it is somewhat surprising that this is only the third book published on this topic (Hirshon, 1996; Wilson and Colver, 1997) addressing the impact outsourcing has had on the profession at large. As the literature broadly states, "Outsourcing was once regarded as an extraordinary measure to use when internal resources were insufficient. Now outsourcing is used to save costs, improve quality, gain access to outside brainpower, and add flexibility to project schedules." (Bragg, 1998)

The early pages of this book place in context how outsourcing in academic libraries evolved. That context is critical to learn what economic measures contribute to determining whether it is a logical response to local problems. Chapter One suggests the economic gains include cost savings, competitive edge, access to experts, flexibility, political and ideological motives. Personnel and staffing, known to be the largest component of a library's operating budget, is reflected in cost savings. By reducing the need for staff to handle a greater workload, and perhaps the work requiring a highly technical and experienced staff, it may be more prudent to explore alternatives. In order to objectively assess whether outsourcing is appropriate, a library must study the advantages and disadvantages and evaluate what impact it may have on the morale of the staff. Benaud and Bordeianu address how important this is to the success of outsourcing.

The traditional functions to be outsourced in the early era of this practice were by-and-large rooted in technical service operations. Higher education as an industry or enterprise has seen many outsourcing practices in ancillary functions such as parking, food services, bookstore, facilities, housing and security/safety. What remains interesting to note, is that in the library environment, "outsourcing has historically been used to

supplement library operations, and today it replaces entire library departments and units." (p. 17)

Chapters Two and Three set the stage for how a library should determine whether it is in the best interests of the organization to consider such alternatives. The three phases of outsourcing--planning, implementation and managing--are critical to the success of any outsourcing effort. Benaud and Bordeianu offer many ideas about how to approach, engage in, and evaluate the outcome of the process and how to consider what would happen if outsourcing was not a viable option.

A strength of this book was to report results of the survey Benaud and Bordeianu conducted about outsourcing experiences in 1996 of the **Association of Research Library (ARL)** membership and an equal number of medium-sized academic libraries averaging collections of 500,000 volumes. In querying the extent to which different functions are outsourced, it is curious to know whether all examples are true examples of outsourcing. As an example, in collection development, the survey asked about using approval plans, blanket orders, bookstore or another method to build resources.

Newer value-added options are now offered by vendors and suppliers, but I believe that it can be argued successfully that the intellectual decisions of book selection are still not performed by an approval plan. One should distinguish between the selection, acquisition, and processing aspects of collection development. Each aspect requires different skills and is performed by different teams today. Due to many changes in the didactic structure of libraries today, local customs, size and resources, we can examine what staffing models are best suited. I would not conclude that the entire field of collection development is best served by more outsourcing.

Rather, I agree that the support industries which serve libraries will continue to expand and diversify. Those that will survive and prosper will continue to hire librarians who know the culture of libraries and can anticipate future directions. The approval plan is and will

be used as a tool to enable librarians to acquire materials in a timely, less cumbersome way, based on the profile established to serve the library.

It was very comforting to read in the chapter on cataloging how fast outsourcing practices have changed in this area. Early methods were to send titles to other libraries that could accommodate extra work or which had special resources for original, nonprint, archival or foreign language expertise. Today, that activity is increasingly handled by commercial suppliers.

Preservation is another activity that relies upon outsourcing for different reasons. Preservation microfilming, photocopying, and conservation efforts are techniques requiring specialized and expensive equipment, space, and personnel. Contemporary approaches utilizing digitization and other technologies are becoming more appropriate ways to respond to preservation concerns, and are likely to be outsourced as libraries learn more about how to handle it. As library resources become increasingly brittle and frail, and the occasional fire or flood damages or destroys collections, preservation and disaster planning must be aware of the potential for outsourcing.

One could easily say that assistance is outsourced, if a library uses voice mail, phone trees, electronic reference, etc. or other communication devices and methods to direct callers to more efficient means of seeking and retrieving information. Another definition which may not be true outsourcing, is collaboration or partnerships. The campus is increasingly a centralized unit, and with most libraries being among the highest consumers of computing, it seems natural that coordination is best served by working together with academic and administrative computing to achieve results. Libraries need to be aware of all the ancillary and additional services which they do outsource in order to keep the properties open.

Not surprisingly, outsourcing has not really found many outlets in public or access services, outside of interlibrary lending. Fee-based services and commercial document supply can be defined as quasi-outsourcing methods. Staffing pools and temporary hires

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are utilized to supplement reference desk service, on weekends, holidays, for short term replacements. However, this has not been defined as outsourcing in this volume, when in fact, it is alternative staffing but takes place on-site rather than off-site.

Benaud and Bordeianu have methodically and creatively authored a book that summarizes the status of what we currently know about outsourcing in academic libraries. The book is comprehensive and documents the literature that precedes it relevant to libraries and extends the context to other related aspects from the management literature. The survey data which was the cornerstone of the volume, did not reveal many surprises, but it will be valuable to compare the findings if another survey is administered close to a decade from now. Interpretation was clear and supported. The promotional literature for this book states "as outsourcing becomes more commonplace ... the need for an authoritative guide becomes indisputable." This book does not disappoint. It complements the current literature highlighting trends facing academic libraries.

The bibliography is almost encyclopedic in its coverage of issues such as retrospective conversion and approval plans. Indexing, sometimes an omitted feature in many works, is specific and useful. Librarians will find this work easy to read and use, and probably be encouraged to investigate if there are other ways that they can employ smarter ways to handle a variety of activities. Outsourcing will continue to be a practice requiring careful monitoring and that libraries and their leaders and managers will be guided by in their selection, management and control of important resources. This book does not treat those issues, but with more evidence of outsourcing in libraries, the negotiation involved in it will become skills librarians will need to refine.

Sources

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TestDriving CD-ROMs — Reviews of CD-ROM Products

McGraw-Hill Multimedia Encyclopedia of Science & Technology and Barron's Book Study Notes

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McGraw-Hill Multimedia Encyclopedia of Science & Technology, McGraw-Hill, 11 West 19 St., New York, NY
Internet URL:
www.books.mcgraw-hill.com

\$995 single user; \$1295 LAN (unlimited number of workstations in same building; \$1595 WAN (unlimited workstations in multiple buildings on same site; Annual updates: \$198 single user; \$295 LAN; \$395 WAN
Reviewed by **Norman Desmarais**

McGraw-Hill Multimedia Encyclopedia of Science & Technology corresponds to the 20-volume **McGraw-Hill Encyclopedia of Science & Technology**, Eighth Edition and the **McGraw-Hill Dictionary of Scientific and Technical Terms**, Fifth Edition. It includes over 7,100 articles and more than 122,000 definitions. It also includes biographical sketches for more than 250 important people in the history of science and engineering as well as curriculum outlines with appropriate articles for student instruction in six disciplines: biology, chemistry, engineering, earth sciences, health sciences, and physics.

Multimedia elements comprise 58 animations; almost 1,400 color illustrations, photographs, charts, and tables which include 30 topographic maps and 45 sky maps; and crystalline animations for most chemical elements. Most of the images, including the formulas and 142 photographs, are in GIF format; but there are also many images in BMP format. The first version of the encyclopedia has garnered high praise for its graphics. The astronomical photos are particularly striking. Unfortunately, the CD contains only a relatively small number of the images contained in the print version. This is not to say that the disc is deficient. Rather, it is full to capacity; and the editors had to choose which images to exclude to keep the title to a single disc.

There are two general ways to explore the **McGraw-Hill Multimedia Encyclopedia**: browsing and searching. One browses the contents by clicking the down-arrow button to the right of the Contents box on the toolbar and selecting the resource to browse (encyclopedia, dictionary, biographies, or study guides) and typing a topic of interest in the Find box or using the scroll

bar to move to the desired topic.

The encyclopedia has a very strong search engine that will locate specific terms, phrases, or groups of terms and phrases quickly and easily. Phrases like black hole, internal combustion engine, and high definition television need not be included in quotation marks or any other marks to distinguish them from single word terms. The engine will support up to four terms connected with the Boolean operators AND, OR, and NOT. The engine will search the full text of the encyclopedia; but researchers can opt to limit the search to article titles only. They can also indicate the relationship between the terms—up to fifty words apart.

While the search engine defaults to searching the CD, researchers can opt to search the Web also. The program will let them select Excite, Lycos, or Infoseek as their preferred search engine. If that's not enough, researchers can focus a search on one or more of the ten subjects covered by the encyclopedia: agriculture/forestry, astronomy, biology, chemistry, computer science, earth sciences, engineering, mathematics, medicine/psychology, or physics. Topic filters permit browsing any of 20 major topic areas (and nearly 100 subtopics) in the **Encyclopedia**.

Results display in a large, easily legible typeface and users can enlarge or reduce the size as desired or quickly return to the original size with a single click. Researchers can have the results sorted alphabetically (default) or by relevance. Links open new windows. Users can tile them or cascade them. They can easily forget how many they have open. There's no Back button to return to a departure point. The assumption is that one will close the window. Users can close individual windows at will to conserve RAM; but there's a button on the toolbar to close them all with one click. Some of the icons are not intuitive nor are they sensitive to mouse movement where they would give a pop-up explanation.

A search for "discrete cosine transform" produced two articles but neither had a detailed description. None of the articles on the turbine or specific turbines (gas, hydraulic, steam, etc.) contained any illustrations to show how a turbine worked. Al-

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