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Letters to the Editor

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From Your Guest Editor:

As in past September issues of *Against the Grain*, Fran Wilkinson and Linda Lewis get us started. As usual they tackle the most pressing issues facing reference librarians and publishers. This year, the spotlight is on reference budgets. Academic and special librarians from a number of institutions reflect on the level of financial support for reference purchases, both print and electronic. Not surprisingly, few budgets are growing, but support is there, especially for buying electronic sources. Print remains viable, at least for smaller, specialized works, but with the unrelenting move to Web resources, CDROMs are fading from view.

In another centerpiece article, Irv Rockwood, editor and publisher of *Choice* offers his personal insights and impressions in "Reference Publishing: the View from Middletown." Irv points to the difficulty in coming to a clear definition of reference publishing and then begins creating one of his own. Using data culled from the Reference Section of *Choice*, Irv discusses the obvious decrease in print reference titles, as well as a suspected growth in Web-based sources. He then comments on reference publishing's changing lineup of publishers and its increasing consolidation of imprints. By combining these observations, Irv gives us a clearer picture of reference publishing evolving landscape, and as he says, "a justification, if there ever was one, for a follow up article." (Needless to say, we hope to run that article in an upcoming issue of *ATG*.)

We also have interviews from two leaders in reference publishing. Ron Boehm, Presi-

dent and CEO of ABC-CLIO, shares his insights about a family run publishing house that has emerged as a major force. Discussing their start with A&I services, their expansion into print encyclopedias, and now, their move into the eBook market, Ron sheds light on the development of ABC-CLIO. He concludes the interview with his personal vision for the company's future, as well as for reference publishing.

About three years ago Sage Publishing took the plunge into reference publishing. It was a decision that many wondered about. Rolf Janke, Vice President and Publisher, Sage Reference talks about that decision and why it has worked. Rolf talks about their expanding line of reference titles, as well as the positive market response, and then hints at possible moves into electronic publishing.

We also have a feature article from Alis Whitt noting the possible impacts of virtual reference on collection development. Besides stressing the need for more reliable online reference sources, Alis makes some strong recommendations to electronic database publishers on how to improve their products to be more relevant in the virtual reference environment. In addition, we feature a review article from Phil Powell of a classic reference resource that has admirably adjusted to changing times. With the sixth edition of the *MLA Handbook*, Phil finds this venerable tool breaking into the 21st century more relevant than ever.

Tom Gilson, Guest Editor 



ATG Retraction and Apology

The "International Dateline" review of *Online Information 2002* (*ATG* February 03) contained a number of factual errors and misleading comments from which incorrect conclusions may have been drawn by our readers. *Against the Grain* would like to correct some of the information contained in its article as follows:

1) The article referred to the show as "Information Online." The correct title of the event is "Online Information." Online Information, which is organized by Imark Communications/Learned Information, is a respected, long standing exhibition which has been in the marketplace for nearly 27 years. The event attracts over 11,000 international visitors to London's Olympia, offering visitors the chance to meet over 240 exhibitors, attend the conference which runs parallel with the exhibition, and attend over 80 free educational seminars on the exhibition floor. It is an annual pilgrimage for many information professionals and all those interested in the online information industry.

2) Martin White is not the organizer of the conference, but Chairman of the Conference Committee. The conference is developed by an international committee of around 15 professionals representing a wide range of interests on the basis of submitted and reviewed papers, and on invitations to specific experts. The conference attracts around 700 paying delegates excluding speakers (of which there are around 70 in total). To state as the article did that the conference is only attended by speakers, is incorrect.

3) The article referred to the organizers as "mysterious." In fact, the show's Website and all documentation surrounding the event make it very clear that Imark/Learned Information organizes this show and have done so successfully since 1976 when Learned Information founded Online Information.

4) The article analyzes the exhibition on the basis of the categories in the exhibition catalog and from this draws conclusions about the overall health of the show and by extension, the market it serves. This is an unscientific approach since the exhibitors themselves select which categories they wish to be listed under, usually allied to their current marketing strategy.

5) The article comments that "librarians do not make up a large proportion of the delegates." In fact, the actual percentage of library and information professionals attending the Online Information conference is around 40% which is most certainly a large proportion. This group makes up the largest single conference delegate group. Information professionals are also the largest single exhibition visitor group (at 47% of visitors). Librarians and information professionals continue to be the core attendee group for the event.

6) The article comments that "the event should be an opportunity for publishers, librarians and subscription agents to get together and discuss the problems of the digital environment — but it does not work like that." In 2002, the conference included a 90 minute panel session with representatives from the Berkeley Electronic Press, Institute of Physics Publishing, the University of Southampton, the International University, Bremen, and Swets Blackwell, as well as a 90 minute session of contributed papers entitled "E-journal management: new approaches and best practice" — both sessions had a substantial number of delegates present.

Against the Grain would like to apologize to Imark Communications, organizers of the Online Information exhibition, for these errors.

For readers interested in the 2003 exhibition and conference, please log on to www.online-information.co.uk.

Letters to the Editor

Send letters to <kstrauch@comcast.net>, phone or fax 843-723-3536, or snail mail: *Against the Grain*, MSC 98, The Citadel, Charleston, SC 29409. You can also send a letter to the editor from the *ATG* Homepage at <http://www.against-the-grain.com>.

Dear Editor:

As a great fan of Laura Gasaway's columns, I have a suggestion. Ideally, I'd love to be able to search an archive of the columns. As an acceptable alternative, I'd find an index of the columns exceedingly valuable. On a number of occasions, issues have arisen (I have one now) that I know Laura has addressed but I'm befuddled as to how to find the specific column.

This really deserves to be an electronic knowledge base.

Kent Mulliner
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Editor's Note: Thanks for the suggestion Kent. This is coming soon. — KS



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Event	Issue	Ad Reservation	Camera-Ready
Charleston Conference	November 2003	09/17/03	10/08/03
ALA Midwinter	Dec. 03/Jan. 04	10/29/03	11/19/03

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