

# Book Review

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Tim Buckley Owen, *Successful Enquiry Answering Every Time* (7<sup>th</sup> ed, Facet Publishing 2017). £54.95 (Paperback). ISBN: 978-1783301935 eISBN: 9781783302154 eBook available at <http://www.facetpublishing.co.uk/title.php?id=301935~about-tab>

In an age of ready access to crowd-sourced content and in stant recourse to social media to satisfy curiosity and find answers, is a book on answering enquiries effectively, still relevant?

Tim Buckley Owen explores this dilemma in the introduction to his 7<sup>th</sup> edition of a now classic text and argues that while technology has greatly improved access to information and added infinitely more to our corpus of knowledge, it has also acted as an enabler of thought processes and skills that information professionals need to use on a daily basis. Librarians now use the same tools as their customers and so need to use those tools more effectively, to find quality information and to add value. Whether that value is added through the answer to the enquiry itself, through information literacy skills for students or in presenting findings to serious researchers, those skills are all the more important today; indeed new technology has not rendered the information professional irrelevant but has in fact, raised the skill stakes.

So what exactly are these skills?

The first three chapters look at how we use our analytical thinking skills to 'diagnose' an enquiry, understand what is being asked and determine what is really needed. Imaginative thinking helps us to get started in answering enquiries by encouraging us to imagine what the final answer will look like and to identify the sources we could start with. A chapter on handling remote enquiries teaches us to think empathetically with our enquirers, to anticipate problems and avoid misunderstandings; hazards that are compounded by working with enquiries received by phone, email or text.

Later chapters deal with other skills used in the information search process. 'Smarter searching' demands we

think more systematically, to develop efficient search strategies that make the most of electronic search tools, Boolean searching, printed indexes and thesauri. Lateral thinking can help to prioritise enquiries, to find alternative sources and to 'frame' an enquiry differently, to come up with a compromise solution when there is no readily-available answer.

The final chapters provide advice on how the information professional can really add value to our answers; to present our findings effectively, in the most useful format and in the right quantity. By applying our critical thinking skills, we can select, reject and prioritise information to be included in our findings or to analyse, manipulate and present data in more visually meaningful ways that can cajole our data into presentable reports.

Value is also added by actively promoting the enquiry service, discovering our user's information needs and acquiring relevant resources that meet those needs; and then making best use of them through services that supplement the enquiry answering process; news alerts, feeds, blogs, discussion lists and so on. The important role these enquiry-related services play in enhancing the information professional's role is amply covered.

The new edition of this now classic text is testament to its continuing popularity both as an introduction to reference enquiry work for library students and those recently graduated to the profession; and as a reference work in itself for the more experienced professional. The step-by-step approach uses worked examples that lend themselves to a public library context but which are entirely suitable for the novice with limited knowledge of more academic or specialist library services.

In an age of new technology, information overload and 'fake news', the skills it analyses remains as relevant to our profession as ever and a refreshing reminder of what the information professional's role is ultimately all about.

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