

Book Reviews

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LANCASTER, F.W. *Indexing and abstracting in theory and practice*. 3rd edition. London: Facet Publishing, 2003. ISBN 1-85604-482-3: £39.95. xix, 451 p.

One of the 2003 *Private Eye* Christmas cards had a scruffy oik crossing out the word “fir” and substituting “spruce” on a Christmas tree, while watching out of a near-by window a woman was saying “Yonder pedant, who is he?” I was reminded of this when I read the introduction to this book, in which Professor Lancaster wrote, “A word I have some difficulty in accepting is ‘mining’ (as in ‘data mining’, ‘text mining’, ‘speech mining’) which is often used as a synonym for ‘knowledge discovery’ or, at least, the central operation of knowledge discovery. My father spent many years as a hewer in a coal mine in the north of England. He worked long hours . . . he hewed coal in a ‘wet seam’, lying on his back or side in water in a passage with a very low ceiling. I’m not sure that this type of laborious extraction in semi-darkness is the analogy that ‘data miners’ really want to use.” I have to admit, however, that the craft known to librarians of a certain age as “cat and class” has spawned a plethora of jargon, turning our much loved indexes into “databases” and the process of indexing and abstracting has metamorphosed into “knowledge management”.

No-one will argue that information plays a much more important part in everyone’s lives than even 10 years ago, and as a result it is incumbent upon information professionals to be aware of the techniques available to them for the organisation and dissemination of information in every conceivable format for use by companies, public bodies and individuals. To address this need Professor Lancaster has produced a work which offers guidance to teaching indexing and abstracting in information studies departments, and is also compulsory reading for those developing information resources or wishing to publish a bibliographical database, or just wanting to improve subject access in online catalogues. Since the first edition of this work in 1991, the information environment has changed out of all recognition, and this is reflected in this third edition. The basic principles remain fairly constant, and many of the authorities cited will be familiar to those of us who qualified as librarians “some years ago”, such as Ranganathan and Cutter.

While the function of this edition is to address changes since 1998, particularly in the spheres of multimedia sources, text searching, automatic indexing, and the internet, it is still a valuable tool in the wider field of indexing and abstracting. It sets out the basic principles and introduces a new generation of information professionals to the world of precoordinated indexes such as KWIC (key

word in context) and KWOC (key word out of context) and the variations on these, and stresses the importance of consistency and quality in indexing. A significant portion of the book relates to abstracting – the types and function, and how to write an abstract – always having in mind the goals of brevity, accuracy and clarity.

The subject of evaluation is treated in several chapters and shows what to look for with regard to coverage of a database; ease of retrieval; predictability in how a user can judge which items will be useful or not; and the element of timelessness in that recently published items will be retrieved in preference to older ones.

The book examines the approaches to indexing and abstracting services; how indexes can be enhanced by a process of “weighting”; and how the basic principles can be applied to non print media.

The final 110 pages are devoted to the application of computers to information retrieval, dealing with topics such as the consideration of the use of natural language against the use of controlled language, and automatic indexing and abstracting. The work concludes with observations on searching and retrieving data from the internet, and the use of metadata. Future prospects for indexing and abstracting are explored, focusing in particular on access to the internet which is becoming so vast that a great deal of thought and research needs to be undertaken to find a suitable form of indexing to enable a more useful approach to be made to this vast store of knowledge.

While this is not a book to be taken on holiday for light reading, it is a valuable tool for those who are expected to produce an organised database without having had the benefit of a formal course in librarianship or information management. The indexing exercises are particularly useful, as are the majority of the 115 illustrations throughout the text.

If the reader wishes to pursue the subject further, there are over 40 pages of references. Finally, as one would expect, there is an excellent index allowing one to dip into the book for the topics required.

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CRUICKSHANK, E., ed. *Women in the Law*. London: The Law Society, 2003. ISBN 1-85328-822-5 (pbk): £29.95. xvi, 352 p.

Women in the Law is divided into three distinct parts. Beginning with a brief history of women in the law

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which details the progress that women have made in the legal profession from when they were first permitted to become solicitors, barristers and magistrates in 1919, the first section then directs attention on entry into the legal profession. What sets this publication apart from other works on consideration of the law as a career option are the focus on women and the inclusion of pragmatic advice in addition to general information for career progression. That this publication does not restrict itself to traditional career paths is a welcome step in recognition of legal research and teaching as potential and viable career options. This publication adopts a novel and original approach to developing awareness of the options available for those wishing to pursue a legal career, and for highlighting the transferability of skills acquired.

The main section of the book is described by Elizabeth Cruickshank herself as 'a celebration of what women of various ages who qualified as solicitors and barristers have achieved since they qualified'. The second section is a fascinating read for anyone already within the legal profession, those undertaking legal studies and for anyone contemplating a career in law. The inclusion of interviews with women from all levels of the spectrum is informative, insightful and inspiring. For prospective entrants into the legal profession, details of the experiences outlined demonstrate the vast scope of options available post-qualification for career development. One of the many commendable aspects of this book is the selection of solicitors, barristers and judges, and the inclusion of those who hail from overseas jurisdictions as interviewees. The twenty-eight interviews are notable for the frankness of the interviewees as they bring to life the reality of the legal arena, with each interview enabling the reader to gain a sense of the challenges faced by women within this traditionally male-dominated profession, and underline the difficulties women still face balancing work commitments and family life. A recurring theme in the experiences of many women working within the legal profession is the need for change in the organisation of legal work to facilitate all working parents.

It certainly would be erroneous of male readers to ignore or dismiss this publication as having no relevance to them because of the focus on women in the law. The third and final part of *Women in the Law* concludes with a number of chapters containing advice from experts on how to acquire key skills that will enhance a legal career. This advice is beneficial to those at various stages of their career. Effective presentation skills, negotiation techniques, rainmaking, networking and leadership skills are important in any professional career. The only aspect of this publication that warrants criticism is the advice given on personal grooming when preparing oneself for networking opportunities, albeit that this advice is practical in many ways smacks of the pervading attitude held by men of women that they must spend a certain amount of time titivating themselves to give the correct impression, and somewhat sullies the achievements of those women interviewed in part two.

Women in the Law is a welcome addition to existing literature on the legal profession. It is an excellent guide to the intricate nature of qualification, and revealing in its consideration of post-qualification experiences. It is recommended reading for anyone with an interest in the legal profession. Its usefulness lies in the coverage of all dimensions of legal training and the legal profession. The overall structure of the text is user-friendly, allowing for this publication to be read in its entirety to be referred to when necessary.

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XREFERPLUS: A Review

Two things strike you when you first access this internet based reference product:

- **How large and comprehensive it is**

This product gives on-line reference to over 150 reference books and includes 1.5 million individual entries.

- **Its simplicity of use**

All the subjects covered are listed clearly (direct links to their databases). You can either enter your search term in the main SEARCH BOX, or go directly to the subject area of interest. This is clear from the outset.

Exploring the database:

- In order to understand the scope of the database, I completed the 'Starter Quiz' which gave me further insight into the volume of information available. By the time I got to question 2. 'What is the spanish word for 'worthog'? I clicked straight on the specific database: '**dictionaries**' and it was simple to scroll down to the appropriate source to find the answer. I managed to find the other answers quickly which gave me confidence in using the system for more 'complex searches'
- It is very helpful that the reference books indexed are listed within the subject that you are searching. A general or specific search can be undertaken.
- The cross references in the form of 'hotlinks' to other related parts of the database are helpful in expanding your search.

Summary of the database on Law:

Comprises the following sources:

Collins Dictionary of Law

Dictionary of Dispute Resolution

Dictionary of Law

Encyclopedia of EU Law

The strengths of the two law dictionary sources within the law database are its broad and comprehensive coverage with 'hotlinks' to related subjects. It is an excellent source for definitions. It is easy enough for the law student to use but comprehensive enough for the practitioner. The *Encyclopaedia of EU law* would satisfy the practitioner or academic initially, but it is a very broad rather than detailed database which gives summaries rather than the full text. A fee earner looking for the full text of the Treaty of Rome for example would only find a summary of this on the database. It is a very good source for those researching a topic where not too much detail is required, and should be used as complementary to other sources that treat a specific subject in more depth.

Who would use this database?

It is very clear that a large reference library would find this product invaluable. It would also be very useful

for academic (university/college/school) libraries. There would also be a market in some special libraries serving businesses and other research organisations. Medical libraries, for example, would find the medicine section very helpful as quite a number of reference tools are indexed. However, it would not be a viable option for the commercial law library as only three reference books and one encyclopaedia are indexed. Law by its very nature has a very detailed subject area and most law libraries will already have hard copy dictionaries in their stock and would feel that they could not justify the cost of this database. There are other online products on the market that more specifically suit the needs of a law library.

To conclude, as an on-line reference tool it is an excellent database, easy to use and very comprehensive. It would find a natural home in large public reference libraries as well as academic libraries.

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