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2001

### Review of *Unobtrusive Evaluation of Reference Service and Individual Responsibility: The Canadian Experience* by Juris Dilevko

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#### Recommended Citation

Mitchell, W. Bede. 2001. "Review of *Unobtrusive Evaluation of Reference Service and Individual Responsibility: The Canadian Experience* by Juris Dilevko." *College and Research Libraries*, 62 (5): 486-488. doi: 10.5860/crl.62.5.486  
<https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/lib-facpubs/19>

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cess of moving two major history databases, *Historical Abstracts* and *America: History and Life*, from CD-ROM to the Web. Perhaps the most valuable point raised by Speck is the importance of user input in the process. Academic libraries and librarians that become Web publishers would do well to follow a similar user-centered strategy.

In "Road to Papermoon," Brian-John Riggs describes how he set up his personal online bookstore, Papermoon Books, with the aid of ABE (Advanced Book Exchange), a Canadian online company that serves as an intermediary between sellers and purchasers of out-of-print titles. In "21<sup>st</sup> North Main, Inc.," Jeff Strandberg, a representative of the corporation by the same name, documents his company's business plan. Using ABE's database as a resource, "21<sup>st</sup> North Main" focuses specifically on the library market, acting as Web-based intermediary connecting libraries searching for out-of-print books with independent booksellers who carry the title. Some readers might find that this chapter comes close to free advertising, however, the notion of using commercial companies as intermediaries might well be useful in certain non-profit Web-publishing ventures.

The next two chapters explore Web publishing from a user's perspective. In "A View from the Other Side of the Reference Desk," Anne T. Keenan makes an impassioned plea for Web publishers to consider the needs of the typical public library patron. She emphasizes the importance of making database interfaces as simple as possible, with an emphasis on keyword searching. In "What Price Simplicity: A User-Centered Mediation," Laura Spencer expresses similar concerns from the perspective of the academic library. Her plea to Web publishers to create search interfaces that assist users in focusing their search is especially powerful.

The final chapters focus on two related issues, the importance of metadata and the use of standards in creating Web databases. In "Data and Metadata: An Overview of Organizations in Searchable

Full-Text Databases," Aurora Ioanid and Vibiana Bowman persuasively argue that controlled vocabulary still has an important role to play in searching full-text databases. The volume concludes with "XML: A Way Ahead for the Library Database?" In this chapter, Richard Gartner discusses the importance of standards, and his argument for XML as perhaps the best standard for Web publishing might well become required reading for any librarian interested in creating Web-accessible databases.

In conclusion, Julie M. Still and Information Today are to be commended for the high editing and production standards exhibited by this useful volume. One should note, however, that the latest print resource cited in any of the chapters is dated 1999, suggesting a rather long gestation period for the collection. Also, some readers may be uncomfortable with the personal, almost pleading nature of the writing in some chapters. But these are minor issues that do not seriously detract from the usefulness of this volume.—*Wade Kotter, Weber State University.*

**Dilevko, Juris.** *Unobtrusive Evaluation of Reference Service and Individual Responsibility: The Canadian Experience.* Westport, Conn.: Ablex (*Contemporary Studies in Information Management, Policies, and Services*), 2000. 220p. \$69.50 cloth (ISBN 1567505066), \$24.95 paper (1567505074). LC 99-058739.

Unobtrusive testing of reference service, wherein reference librarians are asked to answer questions by a researcher's "undercover" employees or proxies, is a technique that has been hotly contested in the library profession, especially since the controversial studies of Charles McClure and Peter Hernon in the 1980s. Those studies reported accuracy rates of barely more than 50 percent, which led to considerable debate about the efficacy and fairness of the methodology. Now, Juris Dilevko, a faculty member in Information Studies at the University of Toronto, has utilized unobtrusive testing to devastating effect in an examination of the inability

ity—and in some cases, unwillingness—of some Canadian librarians to answer certain factual questions.

One of the objections to unobtrusive testing has been that in most libraries factual questions make up a relatively small percentage of all reference inquiries, and therefore poor performance in answering such questions, though lamentable, cannot be taken as an adequate assessment of overall reference service. Although acknowledging that this argument has some validity, Dilevko points out that it does not excuse inadequate performance of a service that librarians claim to provide. Further, librarians cannot afford to take comfort in the higher scores that tend to be found in patron satisfaction surveys because these rarely document the kind of enthusiastic endorsement of library services that indicate a desire for a continuing relationship with the services. Dilevko goes on to marshal several arguments and research studies to justify his contention that accuracy is an essential component of a broad-based service assessment program.

The empirical research reported in this monograph consists of two studies. The first attempted to investigate how well staff in Canadian federal depository libraries answer government documents reference questions and whether they are using Internet-accessible and Web-based sources to do so. In a nutshell, Dilevko found that the questions posed by his proxies, either by phone or in person, were answered correctly in about one-quarter to one-third of the cases. If partially correct answers or referrals that led to partially correct answers are included, almost half of the questions were still answered incorrectly. Dilevko's analysis of the referrals recommended by the librarians who cannot themselves answer the questions shows that only about 40 percent of the referrals led—or would have led—to the correct answer. As distressing as these findings may be, it is equally unsettling to read the assessments of Dilevko's proxies, mostly library and information science students, of the tested

librarians' service attitudes. In a chapter entitled "What the Proxies Said about the Service They Received," we are presented with a rather lengthy litany of "negative closure strategies" that were used by the librarians who were unable, uninterested, or both in helping the proxies obtain answers to the questions. It is a breath of fresh air to also read of the many librarians who strove conscientiously to be of assistance, even when they ultimately failed to find the correct answer. Dilevko concludes his report of the government documents study with an analysis of each question's level of difficulty, and he demonstrates how most of the failures were by librarians who made no attempt to use Internet-accessible and Web-based sources. Use of such sources by someone familiar with them yielded correct answers quickly and efficiently.

The second part of Dilevko's research delves further into one of the findings of the government documents study: proxies were significantly more likely to obtain a correct answer to the questions if they asked them in person rather than over the telephone. Dilevko's proxies telephoned reference desk personnel at the central branch of the twenty most populous metropolitan areas in Canada to ask selected questions from the current news. The success rate was 19.5 percent. As in the government documents study, negative closure strategies, including avoidance and rudeness, were more common than one would have anticipated.

Dilevko's final chapter is a careful review of his research findings and a consideration of the implications for the library profession. He urges several reforms in library management practices, pointing out that continuing professional development is too little emphasized and supported in public and academic libraries. Substantial investment in various means for improving librarians' skills is essential, Dilevko argues, and is not always complicated or expensive. He repeatedly calls for requiring reference librarians to read newspapers as part of their preparation for the kind of questions that arise from cur-

rent affairs and that were used in Dilevko's unobtrusive tests. Although a number of the author's other suggestions for improving reference service, such as periodic recertification of librarians, are strongly resisted by many, if not most, in the profession, they are all offered with well-reasoned justifications that draw on the writings of S. R. Ranganathan, Jacques Barzun, Jerry Campbell, and many others. It is a thought-provoking exegesis.

The author does an admirable job of describing his methodology, and even readers who are unfamiliar with stratified random sampling or bell curve distributions will appreciate how sound and thorough the research design is. The overall tone of his writing is far less negative than one might expect given the nature of the research and the results, but Dilevko is not seeking to tarnish the profession's reputation. Rather, he wishes to point out where we are not living up to reasonable expectations. Budget cuts, overworked library personnel, and other constraints are cited sympathetically, but Dilevko is persuasive in his contention that none of these factors will be acceptable to a populace with new information service options that hold the promise of delivering superior accuracy.

This book is not pleasant reading for anyone who takes pride in the library profession's dedication to service, but if we quibble about details and ignore its well-documented message, we do so at our peril.—*W. Bede Mitchell, Georgia Southern University.*

***Libraries and the Book Trade: The Formation of Collections from the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Century.*** Eds. Robin Myers, Michael Harris, and Giles Mandelbrote. New Castle, Del.: Oak Knoll Pr. (*Publishing Pathways Series*), 2000. 192p. (ISBN 1-58456-034-7). LC 00-058865.

This anthology consists of eight papers delivered December 4–5, 1999, at the 21st Annual Conference on the History of the Book Trade, organized by Birkbeck College, University of London. The focus of

the essays is the changing relationship of libraries with the book trade from the sixteenth to the twentieth century.

Elisabeth S. Leedham-Green, formerly deputy keeper of the Cambridge University Archives, in her essay, "Booksellers and Libraries in Sixteenth-Century Cambridge," clearly documents that libraries had to rely on gifts and bequests for their accessions and that it was not until the seventeenth century that most college libraries set about selecting books for purchase. She also points out the irony that sixteenth-century scholars would more likely find the most popular books they needed in booksellers' shops than in the University Library.

R. Julian Roberts, deputy librarian at Oxford's Bodleian Library, in his essay, "The Latin Stock (1616-1627) and Its Library Contacts," describes how the Bodleian during the seventeenth century purchased books using printed catalogs of the stock available at the Frankfurt book fairs and the help of agents in the so-called "Latin Trade," who traveled widely in search of Latin titles for libraries.

Keith A. Manley of the Institute of Historical Research, University of London, and editor of *Library History*, in his essay, "Booksellers, Puke-Makers, and Rabbit-Merchants: The Growth of Circulating Libraries in the Eighteenth Century," documents how these circulating libraries "helped to fill the gap between the requirements of the ordinary reader and those of the scholarly and professional community, by providing the public with the reading matter it wanted—usually fiction—or, in some cases, with the books it was thought to need, such as sermons and works of self-improvement."

Simon Eliot's essay bears the fanciful title "Mr. Greenhill, you cannot get rid of": Copyright, Legal Deposit and the Stationers' Company in the Nineteenth Century." Eliot, professor of publishing and printing history at the University of Reading, examines the Stationers' Company's records kept by the Greenhills, George (1767–1850) and later his son Joseph (1803–1892), who served as warehouse