

Making Sense of Business Reference: A Guide for Librarians and Research Professionals.
Celia Ross. Chicago: American Library Association, 2013. 186 pp, ISBN 9780838910849.

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“No one is safe from business reference.” With this succinct introduction to the preface, Celia Ross plunges into the reality of the modern information provider. Demand for business reference is growing, and the average librarian does not necessarily have the educational or professional expertise to meet these demands. Ross wrote the book because of her unplanned and slightly surreal journey to becoming a business librarian and her desire to help others on the same path whether intentionally or unintentionally.

The book does not assume a business background or experience with business reference. It is written in easy-to-understand language without undefined jargon or acronyms, and the author supplements practical information with real-world examples and business questions. Each of the 12 chapters ends with a section called “Start Making Sense!” that challenges readers to utilize the skills and resources covered in the chapter by doing basic searches at their own institutions.

The first two chapters discuss the generalities of starting the research process by discussing the business reference question and the resources, both free and fee-based, that can be used to answer it. Reiterating the basics of performing the research interview, Ross also warns readers to be aware of the pitfall of business research—sometimes it is just not possible to answer a question because the type of information the patron wants does not exist. She offers practical solutions for dealing with this too-frequent scenario. This is followed by an introduction to business reference databases with descriptions and when to use them.

The next eight chapters deal with what she calls “The Core Four,” the four general types of information for which most patrons are looking. These include (1) Company information, (2) Industry information, (3) Investing/financial information, and (4) Consumer information/business statistics. Chapters three through five study company and industry information, from finding company histories to determining an industry’s classification codes to gathering a corporation’s annual report. Chapters six and seven explore investment and consumer data and provide quality data for investors and business owners who are perhaps not traditional researchers. Chapters eight through ten look at other areas of business reference that are frequently queried by providing details on statistical needs, international companies’ data, and small business questions. These eight chapters are the heart of the book and provide vast amounts of resources in an easy-to-find presentation.

The last two chapters provide a variety of other useful resources, most notably listservs, governmental resources, major libraries, and blogs where difficult questions can be routed to numerous experts for help and advice. Ross provides some key business and reference resources for baseline collection development. Finally, she reminds the information professional to take a moment to really look at a difficult question and utilize the resources and skills provided in the book to determine the proper path for finding answers.

The last third of the book, simply titled “Stumpers,” provides more than 50 pages of sample business reference questions and answers. Eight subcategories break down the questions along similar subjects as chapters three through ten, although the “Company Finance” and “Investment Research” chapters are combined under the heading of “Finance & Investing” and an additional section labeled “Miscellaneous” is added. For added depth to learning business reference, it would be a strategic idea to review each chapter’s Stumpers after reviewing the chapter. This will both test knowledge gained from the chapter and give concrete examples of how to break down difficult business questions. Finally, a helpful index allows the reader to find information by specific database or resource, as well as by subject area.

While an extremely useful tool for new librarians providing either business or general reference in almost any setting, this book also will help experienced business librarians find answers to the increasingly difficult reference questions they encounter. Providing direct answers and resources, as well as search strategies and a variety of helpful hints, this book is a must-have for any information professional needing to navigate through the complex world of business databases, governmental resources, and the Internet.