

Public Libraries Briefcase

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No. 20, October 2008

A publication of the BRASS Business Reference in Public Libraries Committee

Top Ten Best Business Reference Sources, for the non-business librarian

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Many of my colleagues, perfectly competent and creative information searchers, report feeling lost and anxious when faced with business reference questions. With that in mind, here is a short ready-reference list of resources that can be used to answer all manner of business-type information requests.

#10 Strauss's Handbook of Business Information : A Guide for Librarians, Students, and Researchers (Rita W. Moss, Libraries Unlimited, 2004).

This book is a great place to start to orient yourself about business reference information. It is arranged in two sections: by format (encyclopedia, directory, periodicals, electronic information, etc.) and by field or topic, such as marketing, accounting, banking, investments, etc. Within each section, there are general overviews of the types of sources and short bibliographies of good sources to consult. The book concludes with a series of appendices of business acronyms and abbreviations, government and independent agencies that are related to business, business information published by state governments, key economic indicators, and a list of web sites that include business information.

#9 Business Statistics on the Web: Find Them Fast, at Little or No Cost. (Paula Berenstein, CyberAge Books, 2003)

One of the challenges of conducting business research on the internet is that so much of it is fee-based. The book has compiled a good list of sources for business statistics that are reliable, but may not cost anything. It also covers a wealth of information about how to search for statistical information, the types of statistics that are available, where to look for them, and what to do if you cannot find any relevant figures. It also supplements the web resources included with a number of case studies that suggest the types of statistics that you will be asked to research. It also offers some techniques for finding elusive information and for successfully estimating figures for statistics that are simply not available. Also look for International Business Information on the Web: Searcher magazine's Guide to Sites and Strategies for Global Business Research (Sheri R. Lanza, CyberAge Books, 2001).

#8 **ReferenceUSA**, U.S. Businesses module. (www.referenceusa.com)

This power-packed electronic database can provide detailed information on specific companies and demographic information on industries. InfoUSA provides access to this database, among many others, that allow librarians and library users to search for company information in a variety of different ways. You can search by company name, or you can search for types of companies that meet your specific criteria in a

geographic area. One of the best features about ReferenceUSA is that the information is updated weekly and they pull information from as many sources as they can find such as, Chamber of Commerce directories, business directories, annual reports, and data from public records.

On the down side, their searching functions are not initially intuitive, but with some practice you can easily learn how to maneuver. Also, you are able to download, print, email, and export records, but you are limited in the number that you can retrieve at a time.

#7 Carnegie Library Business Plans and Profiles

Index (<http://www.carnegielibrary.org/research/business/bplansindex.html>)

This index is one of the features available from the business and finance tools page of the website maintained by the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh. I learned about this jewel of a resource when taking the BRASS Business Reference 101 course last fall (another great resource for non-business librarians!) For anyone who has ever attempted to help someone start a small business, you inevitably get the question about where to find sample business plans for free. This clear and functional index is the first place to look. Not only does it index sample business plans you can find in books, it also includes any business plans that are freely available on the web. Along with the index, they include a bibliography of all of the print materials that are included in the index, as well as a list of websites that are included. Also provided is an overview about business planning and suggest some small business websites for further assistance.

Another related site that I learned about from looking at the index is Reference for Business (<http://www.referenceforbusiness.com>). This publisher site provides several business reference titles full-text in electronic formats free of charge. It includes: Encyclopedia of Small Business, Encyclopedia of Business, Business Biographies, Business Plans, Encyclopedia of American Industries, Encyclopedia of Management, Company Histories (part 1 & 2), and Leading American Businesses. Take advantage of these reference titles here and it could save you from having to buy and update these sets.

#6 J.K. Lasser's Your Income Tax (prepared by the J. K. Lasser Tax Institute, 2008). Published annually. This is our best ready reference tool for answering questions during tax season each year. Since we supply tax forms, we do get questions about which forms to use, etc. and this book with its thorough index and explanations in layman's terms is ideal. The almost 50 chapters are arranged by tax topic. It also includes sample forms and tax tables, as well as a glossary. This book is complemented with a website (<http://www.jklasser.com>) where you can go to retrieve supplements to the printed editions back 8 years). The website also provides worksheets, checklists, and other useful tools for free, such as a charitable donation tracker and current tax news stories.

#5 Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2008-09 edition (Claitor's publishing division for the U.S. Department of Labor, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics). Published annually.

This reference provides current information about a wide variety of different occupations, including nature of the job, training required, employment and job outlook, average salaries, related occupations, and sources for additional information. It also begins with a summary of the fastest growing occupations, suggested resource for career information, sources for education and financial aid, and some job seeking and application tips. The index allows you to easily search for specific careers, keeping in mind that the job you're looking for may be listed under other more general fields or in a different category altogether. You can also access the same information on the web at: <http://www.bls.gov/oco>. The online version also allows you to look up information about the job market in each state.

#4 Standard & Poor's Guide to Money and Investing (Virginia B. Morris and Kenneth M. Morris, Lightbulb Press, Inc., 2005)

The Guide to Money and Investing provides very clear explanations about many common investing topics, such as stocks, bonds, mutual funds, options, futures, and alternative investments. This guide is especially helpful because it is supplemented with color graphs, charts, and other diagrams that add to the

explanations. The topics also have very brief and concise explanations, so it's perfect if you're looking for a quick reference guide to the complicated world of investing.

#3 Yahoo! Finance or Google Finance (<http://finance.yahoo.com> OR <http://finance.google.com/finance>)

You are probably very familiar with both of these sites, but for quick stock quote information (even historical quotes) these are ideal. They are both very easy to use and have graphs, charts, news stories, as well as other features that make them very valuable free resources. Google finance is especially nice because of its interactive graphs that you can literally move through.

#2 Guidestar.org (www.guidestar.org)

If you need quick information about nonprofit organizations or charities, this is a great place to start. You can search for basic information or more specific financial information and this database can lead you to it. You can conduct basic searching for free, but to get more detailed reports you will need to purchase a subscription. The information that they provide is solicited from the organizations themselves and there is a feature where organizations can update their information from the site as their situation changes. As part of its mission, Guidestar strives to "advance transparency" for the organizations and to "encourage charitable giving". Because of its missions, it is a versatile tool appealing to researchers and the general public as well.

A companion site to this one is provided through the Better Business Bureau (www.bbb.org/charity). You can search for specific charities and they are assigned a rating similar to the system that is used for businesses. There is no charge for searching, but their database is not as complete as that of Guidestar's because they rely upon consumer reports being filed with their organizations. It is a comparable and acceptable alternative to Guidestar's basic search feature.

#1 Collaboration and Referral

The number one best business reference tool for a public librarian is...your co-workers! Each person you work with has different interest areas, and may be able to provide you with a different perspective that will assist you in successfully answering that "stumper" business question. If your co-workers are also stumped, keep in mind that there are agencies and organizations in your community (Chamber of Commerce, United Way, etc.) that have access to information businesses in your community that a public library will not have. Also, you can utilize the larger library community and subscribe to the BUSLIB listserv. To subscribe to this group, send a message to LISTSERV@LISTS.NAU.EDU and in the text of the message type in SUBSCRIBE BUSLIB-L and then type your name. You will have access to an entire community of experienced business librarians and you don't have to be a business specialist to participate! On a final note, when you have exhausted all possibilities, there is such a thing as a business question that cannot be answered, so don't let yourself become too discouraged!

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