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A Guide to Excellent Creative Business Libraries and Business Centers

Adriana Trujillo Gonzalez, Vincci Kwong, Julie Strange, and Julie Yen, Guest Columnists

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I had the opportunity to view the work produced by the American Library Association's (ALA) Emerging Leaders at the 2008 ALA Annual Conference in Anaheim. While I was impressed overall with the quality of work produced by these rising stars, I was drawn to the research that one group presented as a poster session. This project related to identifying best practices of innovative business libraries and business centers. Since I believed that these findings would be of interest to a broader audience, I invited the group to submit an article on their project for this occasional column.—*Editor*

Leslie Burger, 2006–07 American Library Association (ALA) president, initiated the Emerging Leaders program. This program provides an opportunity for new librarians to serve the profession in a leadership capacity. Emerging Leaders participate in problem-solving workgroups, network with peers, and gain an inside look at the organizational structure of ALA. Beginning in December 2007, our workgroup from the 2008 Emerging Leaders program took on a project sponsored by the Business Reference and Services Section (BRASS) of RUSA. The goal of the project was to create a guide to excellent creative business libraries and business centers to provide examples of innovative and best practices. To better understand the current practices of business libraries and business centers, we conducted a Web-based survey to identify innovation and best practice. The findings from the survey are discussed in this article. Note that we have used the term *library* to designate both business libraries and business centers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Given that none of the authors are business librarians and lacked in-depth knowledge about business librarianship, we began with a broad literature review. Our review of the literature on business librarianship expanded to include current practices, innovative practices, marketing, and collaboration. We found a paucity of literature on current practices and nothing concrete on best practices.

Abels and Magi reported on current practices and trends in twenty top business school libraries.[1] While their research focused on academic libraries, their findings apply to other types of business libraries as well. They found that, despite the organizational structure of these academic business libraries, the needs of patrons drive the delivery of services and resources. Listening to patrons' needs and implementing changes to meet those needs are important for continued success. However, budgetary restrictions or constraints may play

an important role in the delivery of services and resources. Abels and Magi identified the following trends:

- Library websites offer access to a variety of services and resources
- Library websites provide access to a variety of commercial online databases
- E-mail reference service is increasing in popularity and use
- User education sessions focus on topics instead of specific resources
- Interactive online tutorials may become more prevalent but will remain as supplements (rather than replacements) to classroom instruction
- Reference desk hours will most likely remain stable in the short term, but will likely decrease over the next five years
- Materials budgets will reflect more spending on serials than on monographs

Abels and Magi also found that a demand exists for in-person reference service. But they acknowledged that the "emergence of new technology will require business school libraries to adjust their practices."[2] A follow-up or duplication of this study would be interesting, since Abels and Magi published their findings in 2001.

The goal for this project was to create a best practices guide applicable to various types of business libraries and centers (academic, public, and corporate). More specifically, the task was to identify innovative practices. The question therein lies, what is innovation and how is it defined? Additionally, definition of innovation is required to analyze our survey data. We used the definitions cited by Olaisen, Lovhoiden, and Djupvik in "The Innovative Library" as a guideline. They cited the following definitions of innovation: "an idea, practice, or object that is perceived as new by an individual or other unit of adoption"; "any idea, practice, or material artefact perceived to be new by the relevant unit of adoption"; "breaking away from the established pattern"; and the "successful introduction into an applied situation of means or ends that are new to the situation."[3]

It is important to keep in mind that there are differing opinions about what is innovative in business libraries today. While one group may consider using e-mail an innovative way to provide reference services, another group may consider e-mail a tool of the past, and instead consider Second Life an innovative practice for reference providers.

Dunsmore maintains that there is a need for continued use of pathfinders or subject guides.[4] Pathfinders and subject guides have been used by libraries for a very long time. Dunsmore's study focuses on the use of pathfinders in a Web-based environment. Subject guides are not the most popular reference tool and therefore tend to be underused. Dunsmore concludes that more research needs to be conducted on the usability and instructional role of pathfinders. This research might help librarians understand why pathfinders are underused. There are several issues this research could address. For example, what is the best way to introduce these guides to patrons during instructional sessions? Do these guides help enhance information literacy skills of patrons? On the other hand, is it innovative to use online subject guides as opposed to print or to use subject guides to begin with?

What have other libraries done to be characterized as innovative? A more recent article written by Janet Williamson demonstrates another way of delivering online services. She explains the need for tailored services by stating that "it is apparent that the proliferation of information on electronic commerce on the Internet is an opportunity for us to foster an increased liaison with the faculty of the School of Business" at the University of Alberta Libraries.[5] The amount of information available on the Internet is greater than any librarian or faculty member could ever keep up with. Consequently, Williamson and her colleagues at the University of Alberta's Winspear Business Reference Library recognized the need to deliver information to the business faculty in a more systematic method. Using a corporate library service model, a collaborative effort was made with the School of Business to create an awareness service called E-Commerce Alert. It was tailored to meet the needs of the business faculty, especially in light of the growth of e-commerce courses. This awareness service helped both librarians and faculty keep abreast of the expansive literature on e-commerce and fulfilled faculty members' expressed need for "readily available quality information on 'hot topics' or current trends."[6] When this value-added service became Web-based in 2002, the number of subscribers increased substantially, resulting in an increased profile for the School of Business and the library. More than ever, librarians need to rethink and reengineer the service delivery model, delivering service in more creative ways. Additionally, service models should not be restricted to a specific type of library; they need to be applicable in various settings.

Academic libraries are similar to science laboratories—both are open to experimentation. Another example of innovative work is the creation of the Virtual Business Information Center (VBIC) at the University of Maryland (UMD), a collaborative effort by the College of Information Studies, the Robert H. Smith School of Business, and the UMD Libraries. The VBIC is a website that provides "one-step access to both electronic and print resources, along with guidance in selection of databases, general and specific search strategies, and links to e-mail and chat reference."[7] The UMD Libraries recognized the value in collaborating with others outside of the library, since "no single unit on an academic campus can claim sole responsibility for developing and insuring information literacy among its students and faculty. This situation argues for exactly the kind of collaboration and cooperation among interested academic units to develop specialized sites that is seen in VBIC."[8] Not only did students and faculty benefit from better service as a result of the VBIC, but the VBIC resulted in cost savings (both in resources and staff time) as it eliminated the need for expensive, parallel systems.

Similarly, the Lippincott Library (one of the nation's premier academic business libraries) of the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania devised an online knowledge database called Business FAQ. This database "contains hundreds of questions and answers and thousands of links to resources."[9] While technical expertise is required for initial setup, and maintenance of the database is labor intensive, it has proven to be a very effective and efficient way of service delivery, especially if a librarian is not available. The University of Pennsylvania is not the only beneficiary of the online knowledge database model. The software was offered to Columbia University's Watson Library of Business and Economics in 2004, and nine other academic libraries adopted the software between December 2004 and March 2006.[10] Anello and Bonfield reported that nineteen business libraries were participating in the Business FAQ project as of October 2006.[11]

While the above examples demonstrate different innovative approaches taking place in academic libraries, it is important to point out that innovation has been happening in other types of libraries and outside the United States. For example, the services of the British Library have evolved to meet changing patron needs. The Business and Intellectual Property Centre (BIPC), a unit within the British Library, was created to provide service to businesses throughout the United Kingdom.[12] In her account of the development of the BIPC, Jackie Marfleet wrote, "The future provision of information services within the British Library will ultimately be determined by the needs of our user population and our response to providing products and services which meet that need."[13] At that time, the collection was undergoing transformation as electronic resources were being expanded. Services like Ask an Expert and Information Advice Service were developed to provide consultation services. In addition to workshops, evening events were hosted for business entrepreneurs. To accommodate remote users, online reference services were expanded and the library website was redesigned to improve usability. The British Library did not stop there. Two years later, Neil Infield wrote that users of the BIPC had evolved from being "readers to customers to clients."[14] As the needs of patrons changed (and their knowledge base grew), librarians at the BIPC had to grow with them. These librarians equipped themselves through continuous professional development. Some business librarians accomplished this through six months of specialized external training to become Business Advisors. The goal, as it is for libraries throughout the world, was to better serve their users. This example demonstrates that innovation does not necessarily mean the development and implementation of high-end technology, but rather an out-of-the-box approach to serving users.

METHOD

A Web-based survey consisting of nineteen questions was conducted through Survey Methods (www.surveymethods.com). The survey, which ran from April 11 to April 25, 2008, was distributed through several electronic mailing lists, including the following: buslib, libref, Web4Lib, digref, CALA, libadmin, lita-l, mars, and ilf. All BRASS-L members were encouraged to participate as well. A total of 141 responses were collected from librarians working at academic, public, and special libraries. Follow-up interviews, either by phone or e-mail, were conducted with librarians who identified their availability in the survey.

RESULTS

Of the 141 survey respondents, more than 60 percent identified their type of library. The surveyed group was made up of

Table 1. Importance of Business Background for Business Librarian by Type of Librarian Responding (selection frequencies given are percent of total responses)

Importance Rating	Public Librarian	Academic Librarian	Special Librarian
Very Important	20.69	25.00	11.11
Important	44.83	27.27	33.33
Somewhat Important	27.59	31.82	44.44
Not Important	6.89	15.91	11.11

Table 2. Top 3–5 Business Needs of User Community by Library Type

Academic Libraries	Public Libraries	Special Libraries
Database access	Company information	Research support
Business program support	Business plan writing	Employee training
Curriculum support	Funding/grants/loans	
Research support	Business start-ups	
Company information	Industry information	
Industry information	Marketing research	
Datasets	Job-seeking	
	Technical standards	
	Business management	

Figure 1. Top Ten Resources Recommended for Business Collections for Academic Library

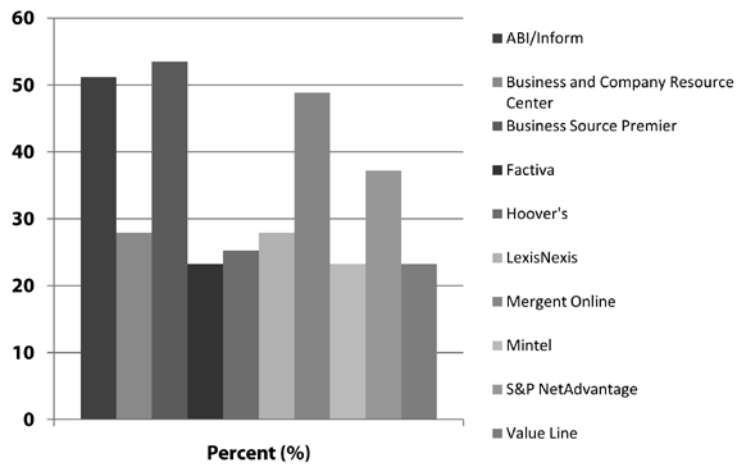


Figure 2. Top Ten Resources Recommended for Business Collections for Public Library

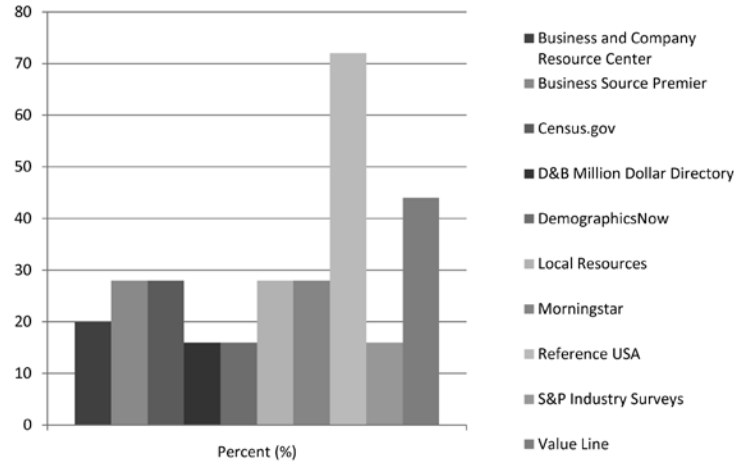
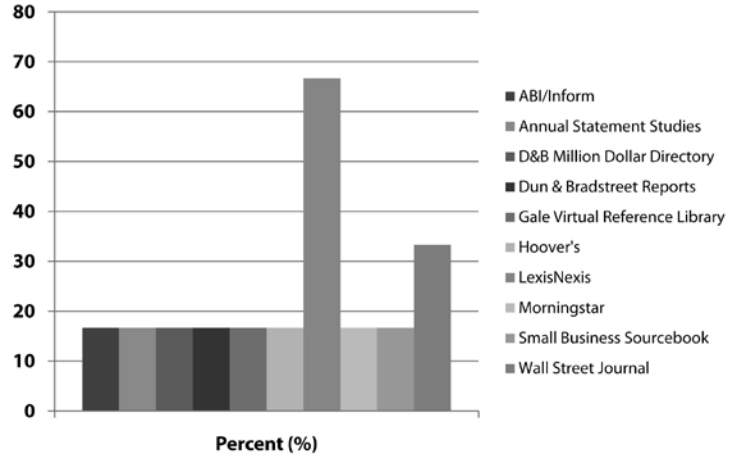


Figure 3. Top Ten Resources Recommended for Business Collections for Special Library



46 academic librarians, 31 public librarians, 9 special librarians, and 55 others who did not identify themselves. Respondents were asked whether it is important for librarians at a business library to have a business background (see table 1). A total of 44.83 percent of public librarians stated that a business background is important, while many librarians from academic libraries (31.82 percent) and special libraries (44.44 percent) think that a business background is only somewhat important. While our survey found that a significant percentage of academic librarians indicated business background is only somewhat important, a survey conducted by Christopher LeBeau found that a large number of academic business librarians who fielded business questions felt inadequately prepared. According to LeBeau, nearly 50 percent of academic business librarians learned their business knowledge on the job, were self-taught, or took business courses on their own.[15] In addition, nearly all generalist librarians who fielded business questions were self-taught or learned on the job. Responses to other questions in our survey follow:

What are the top three to five business needs of your community? What key strategies did or do you use to identify these needs? Services provided by libraries vary on the basis of the type of patrons they serve. Although each patron has a unique information need, we wanted to find out the information needs of users at different types of business libraries. To accomplish this goal, we asked the respondents to list the top three to five business needs of their communities. As shown in table 2, the business information needs of academic and special libraries are research oriented, while the information needs for public libraries are more practical.

What are the top ten resources (print, online, paid, free, etc.) you would recommend for a business collection serving your type of clientele? While it is important to understand the needs of users, it is equally important for libraries to provide necessary resources to fulfill these information needs. The question asked the respondents to list print, online, paid, or free resources that they would recommend for a business collection. Regardless of the type of library, fee-based products dominated the recommendations (see figures 1, 2, and 3).

What technology is offered at your library? The public-access computer is a standard technology offered by many libraries, so it should not be a surprise that it is the number one technology that is being offered in all three types of libraries (see table 3). Closely related to the public-access computer is wireless Internet access. Our survey indicated that 90 percent or more of public and academic libraries provide wireless technology; however, only 44 percent of special libraries offer the same technology. In

addition, academic libraries lead in offering any technology when compared to public and special libraries. While more than 60 percent of academic libraries offer laptops, less than 25 percent of either public or special libraries provide laptops at their libraries. The same trend was discovered for ports and portable audio devices. The only exception is the offering of game consoles by public libraries.

What, if any, emerging technologies (e.g., online forums, social networking sites, wikis, blogs, etc.) does your library use? For what purpose (outreach, reference, instruction) are they used? As expectations and demands of users change over time and as libraries continue to develop and implement new services, business libraries are no exception. To better understand innovative services currently implemented by business libraries, an open-ended question, "What groundbreaking or innovative services do you offer your clientele?" provided an opportunity for libraries to showcase any innovative service they offer. Services aimed at outreach dominated the responses. This includes embedded librarians, author cafés, business plan competitions, and collaborations with third parties. Other innovative services include on-demand and point-to-point service, space renovation, and better business collections. In addition to innovative services, we were interested in emerging technology implemented by business libraries. Blogs, wikis, and chat reference are common; other less popular emerging technologies in use include podcasts, screencasts, desktop delivery, and social bookmarking tools.

How does your library promote its services and business resources or business collection? Resources may be underused if users are unaware of their existence. As a result, this question aimed to find out how different types of libraries promote themselves (see table 4). Distributing information through flyers and brochures is very popular (96.77 percent) among public libraries; it is less common for academic (50 percent) and special (44.44 percent) libraries. At academic and special libraries, the most popular method of outreach is the library website—91.3 percent and 100 percent respectively. Another venue for public relations is through library workshops. More than 80 percent of public and academic libraries promote themselves through in-library workshops; 55 percent of special libraries use the in-library workshops for outreach. To extend promotion efforts beyond the library building, 70.97 percent of public libraries, 58.70 percent of academic libraries, and 44.44 percent of special libraries introduce themselves to their users through off-site workshops.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Through the results, it can be noted that trends may be changing from a more traditional way of delivering services and resources to more innovative and creative ways. It is as if libraries have become scientific labs, exploratory in nature with constantly changing and fluid environments. It also has to be noted that while all libraries have the same basic role in their communities, the type of library plays an important role in what gets done and how things get done. This is because of the size of libraries, their specific purpose, their budget, and how their money is allocated and received. The budget is one of the biggest factors driving what can and cannot be done.

While traditional services are still very much needed in libraries, an argument can be made that subject expertise is important for business librarians. Our survey asked whether or not subject expertise was necessary, and many respondents indicated that subject expertise was only somewhat important or not important at all. Michael Lavin (a business librarian of national stature) takes the opposite position. He poses the argument that business reference is very complex and demands not only considerable time for each patron, but

Table 3. Technologies Offered by Library Type (%)

	Public Libraries	Academic Libraries	Special Libraries
Public-Access Computers	100.00	95.65	66.67
Wireless	90.00	97.83	44.44
Ports	20.00	43.48	22.22
Laptops	23.33	60.87	11.11
Portable Audio Devices	10.00	23.91	11.11
Game consoles	16.67	2.17	0.00

Table 4. Outreach Effort by Library Type (%)

	Public Libraries	Academic Libraries	Special Libraries
Flyers/ Brochures	96.77	50.00	44.44
Websites	90.32	91.30	100.00
In-Library Workshop	80.65	80.43	55.56
Off-Site Workshop	70.97	58.70	44.44

also bibliographic expertise and subject knowledge.[16] This issue of the importance of business background for business librarians merits further attention.

The survey also asked respondents to name the top ten resources recommended for a business collection. Broken down by type of library, the results varied greatly. The top recommended resource for academic libraries was *Business Source Premier*, which barely edged out *ABI/Inform* and *Mergent Online*. For public libraries, the recommended resource was *Reference USA*, which overwhelmingly was the top choice. For special libraries, the top recommended resource overwhelmingly was *Lexis Nexis*. While there were a few shared recommendations, not one resource was common to all three types of libraries. For example, shared between academic and special libraries were *ABI/Inform*, *Hoover's*, and *Lexis Nexis*. Shared between academic and public libraries were *Business and Company Resource Center*, *Business Source Premier*, *S&P NetAdvantage*, and *Value Line*. And between public and special libraries the shared recommendations were *D&B Million Dollar Directory* and *Morningstar*. It is interesting to see the differences because the results demonstrate that each type of library tailors their resources to meet the needs of their specific community. While our survey did not further explore how or why particular resources were selected, Golderman and Connolly summarize availability of Web-based reference sources used by business librarians in their excellent and in-depth article "Briefcases and Databases."[17] They organize resources into the following categories: Business Reference Suites, Stand-Alone Databases, Economic Indicators and Forecasts, Financial and Company Information, and Statistical Data Files. In the Business Reference Suites category, Golderman and Connolly suggest *ABI/INFORM*, *Business & Company Resource Center*, *EBSCOhost*, and *LexisNexis Academic*. It was affirming to see that the top recommended choices found in our survey somewhat mirror the resources identified by Golderman and Connolly. Other resources identified by Golderman and Connolly were also recommended by librarians in our survey (including *Mintel*, *Factiva*, *Hoover's*, and *Mergent Online*.) A follow-up survey to the one we conducted would be useful in identifying other resources and to see how closely those resources match Golderman and Connolly's list.

Since opinions of what qualifies as innovative vary, we asked what innovative services were currently being offered. At the top of the list was electronic resources. The recommended resources suggested by each type of library are indicative of the populations they serve. Special libraries tailored their resources according to type of business or parent organization. Public libraries use local resources more frequently than others. Academic libraries lead in offering new technology, which again is not an unusual finding given that academic libraries are in a setting that encourages innovation and learning. Yet, despite the fact that emerging technologies and electronic resources topped the list, innovative ideas took on many different forms. For example, some academic libraries have embedded librarians in academic departments and residential halls. Author cafés were held, which encourage faculty members to speak about their work. Business plan competitions and collaborations with third parties are popular in public and corporate libraries. On-demand and point-to-point service and workshops, better business collections, and a comfortable library space were mentioned as being necessary for moving toward a more innovative environment.

Cohen and McDonough describe how effective collaboration and partnership, thinking outside the box, and listening to their clients' needs helped create the New York Public Library's Science, Industry and Business Library (SIBL).[18] The SIBL targeted the small business community and shifted away from just being an Internet-café type of facility to become a tiered service center. This involved revamping the existing website, developing skills of staff, partnering, and intense marketing. The SIBL implemented various services and resources, including workshops given by business experts, individualized attention, and additional database offerings. Some of these enhancements were suggested by librarians responding to our survey. The SIBL also recognized that staff development and ongoing partnerships were necessary for the SIBL to be successful.

Services or resources lose their value if the intended users do not know of their existence. Consequently, outreach effort is necessary to promote the services and resources that a library offers. The Undergraduate Market Council (UMC) was established by Emory University Library as a tool to reach out to undergraduate students. The UMC's charge was to "describe and explore the embedded college library, from the perspective of both the library and the user community, with the aim of enhancing the undergraduate experience of the research library."[19] Innovation requires creative thinking. An example of an innovative activity by the UMC was the exhibit the library assembled on horror and suspense titles.[20] The library displayed these titles in the new book area during the Halloween season. Decorations (ranging from cauldrons filled with candy to tombstones) were used to draw attention to the collection. The goal was to encourage reading. The library also created the *Student Library Guide*, an informational newsletter. While it is specifically targeted to freshmen, it is appropriate for all students. This guide evolved over time to become its own publication rather than a newspaper insert. These are just a couple of simple but effective innovative approaches to drawing in users and showcasing collections and services. It is important to remember that innovation is not restricted to technology. As libraries embark on providing and creating innovative services, it will be critical for them to market themselves effectively.

FURTHER RESEARCH

Library environments change at a fast pace, making continuous and ongoing research a must to keep libraries moving forward. We hope that our survey will serve as an impetus for further research. Because of the rapidly changing environment, it would be difficult to create an inclusive best practices guide for business libraries. However, it would be

possible to expand our research to put together a current trends guide or newsletter. Also, a similar survey conducted with patrons would help to reconcile what libraries are doing and what patrons want and need. As budgets become more constrained, it is important to make sure that funds are expended on services and resources that fulfill the information needs of patrons. Listening to our patrons and seeking their feedback should happen continually. It would also be beneficial to investigate issues related to human resources, such as professional development for support staff or helping library employees adjust to organizational change. There are other questions that deserve further attention. For example, how does the role of a business librarian differ by library type? Why do many business librarians feel that subject expertise is not needed when studies argue the opposite? Should librarians get certified as business advisors? If so, how should libraries support this? And, with the increased use of Web 2.0 technologies, how are these technologies being used? Finally, how do business libraries define innovation and how is that process supported?

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