

Strauss's Handbook of Business Information: A Guide for Librarians, Students, and Researchers (Fourth Edition), authored by Hal P. Kirkwood, Santa Barbara, CA: Libraries Unlimited, 2020, 403 pp., \$100.00, ISBN: 978-1-4408-5130-8

Introduction

Business research can be complicated and is different from other types of research that librarians (and some patrons) are used to conducting. This very thorough guide explains the importance of each type of business information, why a patron might seek it, and provides the most useful resources for answering common research questions. It also educates unfamiliar readers on the main concepts within various fields of business, so they will better understand their patrons' needs. This new edition has been thoroughly updated, including three new chapters. It covers both print and electronic resources for use in business research and reference, both general and field-specific. The author, originally from the U.S., has been a business librarian for more than 20 years and is currently the Bodleian Business Librarian at the University of Oxford.

Scope

At just over 400 pages, the Handbook is no small matter. It would be most useful to librarians assisting business patrons in academic, public, and corporate libraries. This guide would be particularly helpful to librarians new to the field of business, but because even librarians working in business libraries for years are asked new and unexpected questions, this type of reference book would be useful for anyone who is asked business-related questions.

Organization and Content

The Handbook is split into two major sections: basic resources and field-specific information. The first section contains various chapters on widely used business resources, subdivided into chapters including Print and Internet, Consolidated Business Information, Company Information, Industry Information, Government Information, and Statistics and Economics. The first chapter outlines business guides (for example, those developed by academic librarians), useful websites, collection development guides, journals, blogs, and other resources for business librarians. It also covers general business reference materials such as dictionaries, almanacs, encyclopedias, and handbooks. The second chapter outlines the main business databases (with a handy chart comparing products from the major vendors, though unfortunately split across two pages) and describes various types of serial publications (trade, scholarly, popular, etc.) providing business information. The chapter on company information explains the difference between private and public companies, but the information sources are largely U.S.-focused. The chapter on industry information provides a thorough description of the types of information needed for industry research, including ratios and industry codes. The government sources provided here are also U.S.-focused, as is the entire chapter on government information (both federal and state, in addition to providing a detailed explanation of the structure of the U.S. federal government). The statistics and economics chapter also chiefly explains U.S. sources but also provides useful descriptions of statistical and economic concepts. It concludes with several sources of free international statistical data online, both country-specific and aggregated

(such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the International Monetary Fund).

The second section contains separate chapters for various types of field-specific research. For each, the author explains the major concepts in that area of business (for example, market segmentation for marketing, financial statements for accounting, etc.) and goes on to describe the type of research done in that field along with places to find it, including reference sources, periodicals, databases, websites, (mostly U.S.) statistical sources, and relevant associations. There are several chapters dedicated to finance-related topics including banking, investments, stocks, bonds, mutual funds, and futures/options, each with descriptions of the needs of those seeking this type of information. Particularly impressive is the detailed explanation of the stock market. This section also includes chapters on insurance, real estate, entrepreneurship, competitive intelligence, and corporate social responsibility information sources.

Each chapter contains subheadings, which are hyperlinked from the table of contents in the e-book version. Furthermore, each URL within the text itself is hyperlinked, making the e-book version of the Handbook far preferable to the print version. There are also many useful appendices including acronyms and abbreviations, U.S. government information sources, key economic indicators, free websites (organized by type), case study sources, information literacy for business, book review sources, business librarian blogs, and journal ranking lists. There is a title index in addition to the subject index, both hyperlinked within the text.

Evaluation

As a business librarian for more than a decade, I am astonished by the depth and breadth of this guide and fervently wish I had it when I started my career. I plan to purchase it for my library as a tool because not only is it useful for assisting patrons, it is also a great resource for collection development purposes and LibGuide curation. The sheer size and scope make this guide somewhat overwhelming, but fortunately, the finding aids in the index and table of contents assist in narrowing the options. In addition to the aforementioned appendices, many useful figures are provided including database comparisons, how to interpret a stock market table, and investment guide comparisons. Though necessarily U.S.-focused due to its large scope, the Handbook would still be useful for business librarians outside of the U.S., both for the more general resources and as a pointer to sources that might be obtained closer to home.

The scope of the book leads to some understandable overlaps in chapters. The nature of information these days also leads to some fuzzy distinctions – for example, what is the difference between a guide and a website? Occasionally, the very detailed explanations can veer slightly off-track (is it necessary for new librarians to know that databases were once accessed on magnetic tape or via modems?) and at times the distinctions between resources can get a bit meta (a guide to guides, for example). Occasionally, the organization isn't clear – for example, the section on Statistics and Economics lists statistical sources, then has a very useful explanation of statistical concepts, followed by a section on economics which, while valuable, seems shoehorned in, and then returns to statistical explanations and more sources. Overall, however, the incredible immensity of the business information landscape is thoroughly

and accurately described in the Handbook. The author's vast knowledge is impressive and it is clear that each recommended resource has been read / used by him, as he provides brief evaluations of each. Heartily recommended for any librarian who has to - even occasionally - provide business research assistance.

Footer:

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