

Reference and Information Services: An Introduction

MP Satija*

Author's Affiliation:

*Honorary Professor, Dept. of Library & Information Science, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, Punjab 143005, India

Corresponding Author: MP Satija, Honorary Professor, Dept. of Library & Information Science, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, Punjab 143005, India

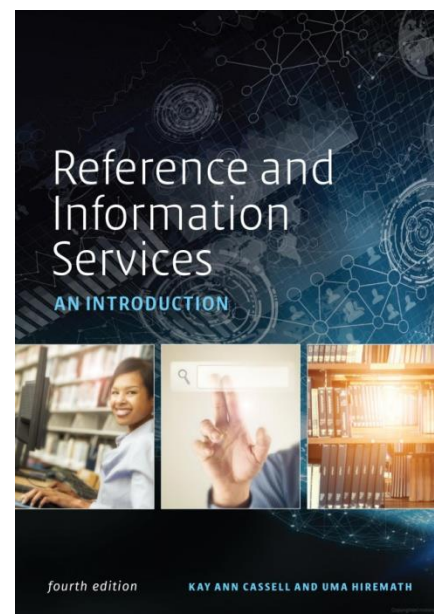
E-mail: satija_mp@yahoo.com

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ABOUT THE BOOK

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BOOK REVIEW

In the digital era it is trite to say the metamorphosed libraries and their information services are still in a flux. With the coming of the Google and its cohorts Alexa and Siri the seemingly threatened institution of information services in libraries is at the cross roads. Many readers feel the redundancy of the reference department of a library as every reader is its own reference librarian. But

expert librarians swear by its enhanced need due to the heightened expectations of library users. It is no denying the fact that the Google instantly answers ready-reference type questions anytime anywhere without going to the library. It is true but only for quick and hard-fact type questions. For authentic and long range answers to be compiled we still need such services. Therefore in the Google era the reference services have become bit complex due to users' heightened

expectations. Literature on reference and information services as recorded in various chapters of the book under review bears witness to this new high – so does the 4th edition on close succession of the previous one (2012) of this book to be sync with dynamically changing information universe. It may not be wide of the mark to say that libraries exist to provide such services as their basic functions. S.R. Ranganathan truly terming it humanism in action projected it as the *summum bonum* of a service library – and he professionally lived up to this belief as a practicing librarian. Reference service is endorsed by all the five laws of Ranganathan (pp.137, 138).

The whole text of the book devoted to reference sources and services has been divided into four parts of twenty three chapters in all besides a few valuable appendices. The appendix (pp.453-459) is a year wise (from 2007-2018) list of reference sources rated ‘outstanding’ by the Reference and User Services Association (RUSA/ALA www.ala.org/rusa). This list is based on twenty-two criteria to select reference publications for small and medium sized libraries. “Index of reference sources” (pp.463-473) is an alphabetical navigation key to the numerous reference sources, both print and digital, described in this book. Part-I “Fundamental concepts” of the first three chapters offers various definitions of reference service since its history, and describes the breadth and depth of various and variegated services offered by this department. It also describes the mode of provision of services, whether in person or online, and how answers are constructed by formulating the strategy based on individual requests and delivered ultimately. The Part-II of nine chapters (4-12) describes authoritative resources correlated to the queries. This part, the *terra firma* of the book, catalogues, critically describes and evaluates all categories of resources, both proprietary and in open access mode. Listing and description are not by traditional types, as given by William A. Katz or usually found in other such books, but by the nature of

questions, they can tackle. The Part-III of four chapters (13-16) dwells on advances in and specialized issues such as reference and information services to children, imparting information literacy, and use of the Internet – the most ubiquitous reference source ever, though chaotic and turbulent. It does outline the strengths and limitations of the Internet use in the reference department. Lastly the Part-IV of seven chapters (17-23) devoted to the management of the reference department takes up issues of the reference collection building, ethics, plagiarism, and IPR, and provides a checklist to review the reference sources for their quality and relevance. Other topics are staff requirements, their qualifications and job description and organization of services. Also discusses how to improve reference services and their outreach by leveraging Web 2.0 technologies. Lastly it peeps into the foreseeable future of the evolving services. In all, the whole book is too densely packed with relevant issues and topics to be described in this brief review.

Each chapter has been divided into sections with feature headings, illustrated with charts and diagrams where necessary, and closes with recommended further readings and bibliography of cited works given separately. This edition has been expanded and updated within the dynamic reference ecosystem of a new style of information seeking by mobile and cloud computing. All this makes it a worthy successor to William A Katz’s two volumes which reigned supreme in the field for more than four decades. This work is an indispensable companion for any information service provider and reference sources collection builder. And, of course, for every teacher and student of reference sources and services, it is a must.

REFERENCES

1. Katz, William A. *Introduction to Reference Work*, 8th ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2001, 2v.
2. Ranganathan, S.R. *Reference Service*, 2nd ed. Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1961, 419p
