

Webology, Volume 5, Number 4, December, 2008

| | | | |
|----------------------|-----------------------------------|--|-------------------------------|
| Home | Table of Contents | Titles & Subject Index | Authors Index |
|----------------------|-----------------------------------|--|-------------------------------|

Book Review

[Digital consumers reshaping the information profession](#). David Nicholas & Ian Rowlands (Eds.). London: [Facet Publishing](#). 2008. 226 p. £39.95. Hard cover. ISBN 978-1-85604-651-0.

The introductory paragraph to *Digital consumers reshaping the information profession* (p.1), explaining the choice of the title as "*Digital consumers ...*" and not "*Digital information consumers ...*", set the tone for a thought provoking outlook on the challenges faced. Although the book focuses on the behaviour of people visiting the virtual space of information, the Internet has redefined and widened the information domain, and since people use the Internet like a superstore for many things and many purposes, "it is almost impossible to say what information is and what it is not ...".

Library and information (LIS) professionals and many others working in the information industry can no longer afford to shy away from drastic changes, and the need to reflect on the *digital consumer*, and its body of research and opinion papers, before tackling the challenges of dealing with them proactively. As the editors (Nicholas and Rowlands) explain: "The prime purpose of this book is to reconnect information workers/providers, from all walks of life, with their user base by putting forward a belief system that will help people understand, engage, relate to each other and survive in an ubiquitous information environment, where information professionals and knowledge providers are no longer the dominant players nor, indeed, the supplier of first choice" (p. 5). As later stressed: "... it is simply insufficient for information professionals to serve out their time until retirement hoping that it will become someone else's problem. The future is now. In fact the future was five years ago, just nobody noticed" (p. 9). The message is clear, the challenges will not disappear. They will escalate and need to be addressed by reconsidering our outlook on the digital consumer - in a wider context as merely information consumers or information users.

Digital consumers reshaping the information profession is therefore a most welcome publication for all practitioners and policy makers in the field of library and information science, as well as students who need to be alerted to the fact that research findings should constantly be interpreted and re-interpreted to make sense of rapidly changing circumstances in the digital environment. The editors and contributors serve as excellent role models in this regard. In *Digital consumers reshaping the information profession* they build on the findings of their extensive CIBER (Centre for Information Behaviour and the Evaluation of Research) project that has been extending over more than eight years. All contributors are linked to this project.

They include Tom Dobrowolski, Maggie Fieldhouse, Barrie Gunter, Paul Huntington, Hamid R. Jamali, Michael Moss, David Nicholas, Ian Rowlands, Chris Russell, Peter Williams and Richard Withey. A useful bonus to completing the final product and ensuring complimentary contributions may have been the fact that the authors have worked together before and know each other. Although there are a few overlaps between some chapters,

this contributes to ensuring a holistic view, and is not considered mere repetition. It actually adds to stressing the key points.

The book consists of nine chapters. In chapter one the digital consumer and the underlying philosophy of the concept is explored. Chapter 2 deals with the digital information marketplace and its economics signaling the end of the exclusivity of the printing press. The evolving environment is sketched, as well as the need to consider changes in business models that has long supported the information industry. As Withey (p.13) explains: "The digital change does not just concern information. It permeates every aspect of life, from the way we study, learn and educate, to the way we shop, acquire information, gossip, interact, find patterns and accumulate wealth".

In chapter 3 the e-shopper and the informed purchaser is pursued, taking an in-depth look at the behaviour of digital shoppers and the factors shaping their behaviour. Although it is a very useful chapter, I do not quite agree with a statement in the introductory chapter that "For many readers this will represent their first contact with e-shopping concepts and data" (p. 8). The chapter more probably might, however, offer a first "reflection" for many readers on what should be noted about e-shoppers and the potential implications of their behaviour for the information industry.

Chapter 4 explores the library in the digital age, and argues the need to note the realities of the 2nd digital revolution, but not forgetting earlier revolutions affecting the information industry. Against this, theories that are emerging from changes are explored.

Understanding the psychology of the digital information consumer (elsewhere the term digital consumer is mostly used - as prescribed by the book title), is considered very important. This is explored in chapter 5 which offers important insight for what lies behind information seeking behaviour and how to utilise knowledge of such behaviour amongst other things to design online communication systems more effectively. "Hence, understanding how to utilize online or computer-mediated communications effectively and knowing how people respond to automated, yet slightly humanized, online systems is vitally important in an era where so much of what we do in our every-day lives involves this form of communication. We need to know how people engage with each other through online technology and we also need to know how they engage with technology itself" (p. 108). Since psychology does not often feature in the literature of Library and Information Science, this is a very useful contribution.

Chapter 6 explores the information seeking behaviour of the digital consumer with specific reference to the virtual scholar. It is based on the use of transaction logs and deep log analysis - both areas well explored by the contributors in their own research. In the digital environment, it is also essential to note the Google Generation, and therefore chapter 7 explores the myths and realities in this regard. An interesting observation of this chapter is that consumer traits conveniently attributed to the young are in fact now mainstream for people from all age groups accepting the new IT developments with the same attitude and eagerness as the youth.

In the penultimate chapter, chapter 8, changes that are in the pipeline for the digital consumer are identified. Digital consumers will soon have even more choices to make than ever before in terms of sources of information and about commodities and services. They can also more readily become producers in the digital world. The book is concluded with an executive summary to which all contributed by offering a suggestion for the future. The final words captures the very reason for to read, and re-read the book: "Build that dialogue with the consumer, never forget they have choice, remember that we are all part of a much bigger information universe now and follow and adapt to the behaviour of the e-shopper.

Finally, the information community must stop thinking it knows best, otherwise it will be in danger of becoming irrelevant. The consumer knows best". To apply this advice in a meaningful manner library and information professionals need to read - and especially reflect on - *Digital consumers: reshaping the information profession*. For those with access to the professional library and information science literature it might also be good to monitor the contributor's ongoing research efforts and reports, and to start working on forming their own proactive views - awaiting a next or follow-up edition. In this line it would be useful to see a chapter encouraging and preparing LIS professionals to monitor the behaviour of their own group of digital consumers on a small scale.

All chapters are either well or extensively referenced. *Digital consumers reshaping the information profession* is highly recommended to all LIS professionals and those who work in the information industry. It certainly should also be recommended to both undergraduate and graduate students.

[Ina Fourie](#)

Department of Information Science, University of Pretoria

E-mail: ina.fourie (at) up.ac.za

Bibliographic information of this book review for citing:

Fourie, Ina (2008). "Review of: Nicholas, David, & Rowlands, Ian. *Digital consumers reshaping the information profession*." London: Facet Publishing, 2008. *Webology*, **5** (4), Book Review 17. Available at: <http://www.webology.org/2008/v5n4/bookreview17.html>

Copyright © 2008, Ina Fourie.