

BOOK REVIEW / CRITIQUE DE LIVRE

Building & Running a Successful Research Business: A Guide for the Independent Information Professional. Second Edition. By Mary Ellen Bates. Medford, N.J.: Information Today Inc., 2010. 500 pages (soft cover). ISBN 978-0-921965-85-9. CAN\$38.95.

Mary Ellen Bates is the founder of Bates Information Services, a consulting company specializing in business research and research training. Well known as an expert in her field, she has been in demand as a speaker, writer, and trainer for nearly two decades. She has authored numerous books on information searching, particularly focusing on “super-searching” in the online environment. In this second edition of her 2003 handbook, Bates continues to guide those information professionals interested in branching out into the business world by providing relevant, current, and invaluable advice based on her experience as both an information expert and an entrepreneur. Interestingly, Bates describes her impetus for the revision as “...what was then only available to the big players is probably now just an app you can download to your phone.”

The book has a familiar and easy-going style reminiscent of the *Dummies* series. Call-outs, lists, and short, and clearly labeled paragraphs make it the type of book through which one can flip and always land on useful tips. The chapters such as, “Understanding Your Competition”, “Managing Your Clients”, “Marketing Do’s and Don’ts”, and “Your Business Image” are well organized into manageable topics that could easily be stand-alone information snippets. This is definitely not a book that requires cover to cover reading, but it can be used as a reference book for information consultants.

If you are looking for a guide to help you set up a research business in the realm of health sciences information, this may not be the book for you as it is not subject specific. Bates has pulled together experiences, examples, and advice from information consultants in a wide variety of areas, addressing topics such as grant writing, public records searching, knowledge management, information audits, advertising, and healthcare. Its limitation as a subject-focused guide is also its strength as a generalist approach to business start-up and maintenance. For example, regardless of subject expertise, one will still need to know about fee structures, the art of proposal writing, incorporating, client confidentiality, and ethical and legal considerations, all of which are addressed by Bates.

While reading through this book and preparing to write this review, I studiously made notes and highlighted some of the tips and tricks that I considered to be useful. This turned out to be an unnecessary exercise; consistently, a call-out at the end of each chapter contained the same information that I had gathered. These call-outs effectively summarize the major points made throughout each section of each chapter. I have already incorporated the *Top Tips for Internet Research* (p. 403) in to my library workshops this semester and referred to *Life Lessons Learned* (p. 156) for the times when I work from home.

This book is an excellent general introduction to entrepreneurship for those new to the field or an affirmation for established information professionals. If each topic were to be discussed in the detail necessary for full understanding, the book would be at least four times the size. In this sense, its generalist approach is a limitation to those requiring more detail to forge ahead into the risky world of business ownership. It appears that the author recognizes this limitation and accounts for it by providing additional sources of information and support in an appendix. The Association of Independent Information Professionals (AIIP) is mentioned numerous times throughout the book and is also given its own appendix. Finally, Canadian readers will find that most of the information regarding the legalities of running a business focuses on the United States, although Canadian income tax differences are briefly mentioned on page 83.

Overall, this book is recommended for anyone who is considering a part- or full- time career consulting in the information arena. It provides a clear picture of what such a career looks like in terms of work–life balance, tools needed to get started, client considerations, etc. It is also an excellent introduction to detailing the requirements necessary to run a successful business including associated costs, negotiations, advertising, branding, and subcontracting. It may not be an ideal reference guide for those already established, but at CAD\$38.95, it may still be worth purchasing for affirmation as well as for quick advice.

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