

BOOK REVIEW / CRITIQUE DE LIVRE

The New OPL Sourcebook: A Guide for Solo and Small Libraries. By Judith A. Siess. Medford, N.J: Information Today, Inc., 2006. US\$39.50.

As the lone librarian for a provincial health region, I eagerly anticipated reviewing *The New OPL Sourcebook: A Guide for Solo and Small Libraries* for any new ideas (and fresh ways of looking at old ones) that it could offer to both improve my efficiency and entice more people to use the library's services. I was not disappointed on either count.

Judith A. Siess divides the latest edition of her book into two parts, the first of which covers what she calls the "Basics" of being an OPL. (She defines the term "OPL" as meaning a "one-person librarian", which is a rather amusing definition if you think about it long enough.) In Part I, advice is given on how to manage oneself, the library, and the customers — "customers" being her term of choice for users of library services. Part II consists of a lengthy directory of resources.

Siess is at her best in Part I when discussing time management, planning, communications, marketing, finance, and downsizing. It would be a challenge to any librarian, not just an OPL, to read through her suggestions and case studies without stopping several times a chapter to jot down "must do" reminders. Her main thrust throughout is that an OPL must constantly be proactive in positioning and presenting the library as essential to the success of the institution it serves.

Siess's time-management suggestions emphasize the concept of working smarter, not harder. To that end, she encourages readers to analyze where their efforts are being squandered on less mission-vital activities and thoughtfully supplies an example of a form to be used for that purpose. She also provides tips aplenty on how to manage phone calls, e-mail, filing, meetings, difficult people, and when to say "no". The judicious outsourcing of tasks is also an option she suggests OPLs explore for the sake of saving time, but because she fails to provide an explanation of what she means by "internal outsourcing", readers may be mystified as to how to act on that particular suggestion.

In the chapter "Communication, Marketing, and Advocacy", she suggests various ways to improve communication with management, customers, and, so important in this day and age, the IT department. Unfortunately, while trying to emphasize the necessity of finding ways to work with, and not against, the folks in IT, she refers to them as "nerds" in the title to her discussion and employs a quote using that term. This is truly regretful, as stereotyping of individuals is in and of itself a bar to achieving totally open and productive communication. Her lapse into stereotyping is even ironic given the fact that elsewhere in the book Siess admits to being "horrified" by the novelty action-figure that depicts a typical librarian as a severely dressed and coifed middle-aged woman in the act of shushing.

OPLs will find in *The New OPL Sourcebook* no shortage of innovative ideas on how to promote and advocate for their libraries. And while not all of her suggestions are original,

it's the creative way in which Siess suggests implementing them that generates an eagerness to try them out.

Siess also offers sage advice on how to avoid being overwhelmed by the onslaught of new technologies but reminds us to be proactive in developing a plan for the library to adapt to the future before management presents its plan. Less helpful is her discussion of current technologies and communication innovations themselves. For instance, Siess insists that OPLs must "take the lead" in introducing really simple syndication (RSS) and blogs into the home organization, but nowhere does she explain what they are or how they can be of use.

Although not listed on the cover or the title page as a co-author, editor John Welford is acknowledged by Siess to be largely responsible for the 228-page, mostly annotated directory that comprises Part II. He certainly deserves kudos for his exhaustive research and verification of Web addresses. The "Medicine, Health, Nursing, and Medical Libraries" chapter alone is 59 pages long, with 12 pages devoted to evidence-based medicine resources. Furthermore, an investigation by this reviewer of the 67 online resources listed in the section "Consumer Health Information Web Sites" revealed only one Web address that is no longer valid. Surprisingly, however, not mentioned in this cornucopia of resources is Doody's Core Titles in the Health Sciences, a collection development tool specifically designed for small hospital libraries.

The chapter titled "Libraryland Stuff" is also jammed packed with goodies, with job hunting, grant writing, and disaster planning just a few of the 21 areas covered. However, the author missed an opportunity to optimize the usefulness of *The New OPL Sourcebook* by failing to incorporate references to Part II in Part I. For example, nowhere in her discussions of outsourcing in Part I does Siess provide a pointer to the pages in Part II that provide information on outsourcing vendors and their respective services.

Where the book disappoints is in the 53 pages of the opening chapter, "What is an OPL?" The information in this chapter is largely dated, and Siess even acknowledges the datedness to some extent when she admits in a note, "This was way back in 1996 and times have certainly changed." Rather than narrating the details of her typical work week of 10 years ago, when she herself was still an OPL, she would have better served her audience by interviewing and then relating the weekly experiences of a currently working OPL who is faced with juggling today's technologies and customer expectations. Moreover, her references to researching a CD-ROM base and checking local union serials lists do not leave the impression that she has a working knowledge of newer electronic resources; albeit this impression is somewhat negated in a later chapter. In a book that costs US\$39.50, has a 2006 publication date, and is marketed as the latest edition of a sourcebook, readers rightfully have an expectation that all content will be as up-to-date as it possibly can be.

The opening chapter gets bogged down, too, in discussing the history of the OPL movement and those involved with it.

While names of certain people and organizations may be helpful to an OPL working in a given country, an organized appendix of such information would be far more useful and would make for far less tedious reading than her long-winded, meandering narrative.

Unlike the comfortable prose style evident in the rest of Part I, her writing in "What is an OPL?" does not flow. Siess tends to jump around from one subject to another, all too often within a paragraph. And the amount of space she devotes to information on related topics can be incomprehensively lopsided. As an example, in the section "Where OPLs Work", nine and one-half pages are devoted to a rambling discussion of prison libraries, whereas the discussion of law libraries warrants just a little over a page and all other types of libraries (including hospital) less than a page. Overall, the entire first chapter requires some serious editing both as to content and construction.

It's opening chapter aside, Siess's *The New OPL Sourcebook* does an admirable job of efficiently and entertainingly addressing the essentials of running a one-person library. Especially for its time-management, marketing, and budgeting ideas and its extensive directory, it is a worthwhile resource to read and have at hand. Lastly, take Siess's third-chapter advice about not wasting time and skip Chapter 1.

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