

Finding Information about Materials That Are Available For Purchase

There are many ways for a librarian to find out about materials that are available for purchase. All kinds of tools can and should be used, but it is important for a selector to keep in mind the purpose of the source or tool that s/he is using. It goes without saying that the more widely a librarian seeks for information about materials, the more interesting the library collection will be.

Reviews

The most important sources of information for selection are reviews. They provide descriptive and evaluative information and even make comparisons to similar works to help a selector determine whether the title being reviewed is the best selection for the library's collection.

There are several review sources written for (and in some cases, by) librarians. The most often used by librarians are three periodicals (which also have Web sites):

Booklist: Written for librarians and published by the American Library Association. Prints only reviews for recommended items. Publishes special collections of reviews on specific topics throughout the year. Covers current fiction and nonfiction books for adults, young adults and children; reference materials, electronic reference tools, and audio-visual materials. Some review material is available on the Website, but a subscription is required to access to complete text of reviews.

Library Journal: In addition to news and articles about libraries and librarians, contains reviews, written by librarians, of books, audio and video, CD-ROMs, websites, and magazines. Includes both positive and negative reviews. Covers few children's materials, because those are handled by its sister publication, *School Library Journal*.

School Library Journal: Focuses on print and nonprint materials for children and young adults. Materials are divided into three levels: Preschool to 4th Grade, Grades 5 and up, and Adult Books for Young Readers. Reviews, usually written by librarians, may be either positive or negative.

There are many other good sources for reviews, including:

Audiofile: Reviews audio books, offers articles about authors and readers. Provides information on audio book producers. Has a companion Website at: <http://www.audiofilemagazine.com/>.

The Charleston Advisor: Reviews Internet accessible electronic resources. Uses a rating system which scores each product based on four elements: content, searchability, price and contract options, features. A composite score averaging these elements is displayed at the top of each review.

Choice: for academic libraries, contains more information about scholarly materials than most other general review sources. Reviews written by subject experts (often college and university faculty.)

The Horn Book: Provides reviews, written by staff of the magazine, on children's books and children's audio books. Includes articles on children's literature as well as reviews. Most reviews are of recommended titles. *Horn Book* also publishes a semi-annual *Horn Book Guide*, which covers almost all the children's and young adult books published. The *Guide* is indexed by subject and by series.

Kirkus Reviews: Covers about 4,500 books per year, usually two-to-three months prior to publication. Reviews hardcover and trade paperback fiction, nonfiction from large, small and university presses, titles for adults and children.

Publishers Weekly: Includes articles about the publishing industry. Contains about 70 book reviews per issue. Contains some information on audiobooks, multimedia and movie tie-ins, and is particularly useful in giving information about national promotions of books.

Video Librarian: Reviews are divided into subject categories, with a special section on children's videos and "teen issues." There is a section on recently released videos of movies. Reviewers include staff members, librarians, teachers and film critics.

Voice of Youth Advocates: (VOYA) Aimed at fine-tuning library services to Young Adults. Reviews are coded for quality, popularity, and grade level interest.

In addition to these library-oriented review sources, there are a number of good review sources aimed at the general public. These include *The New York Times Book Review*, and many other newspapers. The *New York Review of Books*, *Bookforum*, and *Book Page* are review journals. Many mass market magazines run reviews: for instance, *Parents* reviews children's audio books as well as nonfiction books related to parenting. It is becoming more common for print magazines to also have Web sites that offer some or all of the content that is included in the print versions. A librarian who is familiar with the reviews that community members are reading will be better able to select wisely and to advise readers.

There are a great many Websites that offer reviews. Many of these are blogs—often personal sites where a book lover (or music lover or video lover) offers opinions. Some of these blogs are quite good, and if they encourage comments on postings, they can provide a sampling of popular opinion.

Some Websites, such as LibraryThing or GoodReads use social media features, which democratizes the reviewing process, but may also make it more difficult to judge the

reliability of an individual review. Amazon and Barnes and Noble also offer reader ratings and reviews.

In addition, Amazon, Barnes & Noble, major library vendors including Ingram and Baker and Taylor, and Books in Print (available through NebraskaAccess) include quotes or full reviews from reputable sources as part of their online information for a title. Excerpts from reviews should be checked to make sure that they are not taken out of context.

"Best of" and Recommended Lists

There are certainly a great many "best" lists. These would seem to provide useful guidance to a librarian in subject areas where s/he is not expert and has limited funds that need to be used in the best way possible. However, it is important to know who compiled the lists, using what criteria. Subject-specific lists compiled by experts may include many titles written for experts—which may or may not be suitable for a small public library. Some award-winning fiction may be very "literary." Using "best of" lists as suggestions of titles to consider can help to insure that a library collection is not missing some wonderful additions to the collection. However, examining the materials on the lists, or finding reviews of them before they are ordered can help to insure that the titles that are purchased will be useful to library customers.

Public Library Core Collection: Nonfiction

Published by H. W. Wilson (EBSCO) this venerable catalog, now in its 14th edition, lists "recommended reference and nonfiction books for adults." Also available are:

- *Children's Core Collection*
- *Middle & Junior High Core Collection*
- *Senior High Core Collection*
- *Public Library Core Collection: Fiction.*

Recommended Reference Books for Small and Medium-Sized Libraries and Media Centers

"designed to assist smaller libraries in the systematic selection of suitable reference materials for their collections."

Publishers' Catalogs

Publishers often send catalogs, flyers, and announcements to libraries to publicize their wares. These mailings are very useful for keeping up with new titles, but the information they contain is designed to make the products they describe sound good. Publishers' catalogs are sales literature, and should be approached with a degree of skepticism.

Vendor Catalogs & Online Inventory Lists

Major library vendors such as Baker and Taylor and Ingram maintain extensive bibliographic databases of what they sell. These databases were at one time simply inventory lists containing information about items actually in stock and ready to be shipped. Today they are interactive for ease of online ordering; they often include book reviews and other

information about a title; and they have expanded to include titles not currently in stock or not yet published.

National Bibliographies

A library selector can use WorldCat to see how many libraries own a particular title, and to check if libraries similar to his/her have a particular title (benchmark). This is a helpful tool when “filling in” subject niches in the collection. World Cat enables a librarian to do serious bibliographic research, borrow a book and examine it, coordinate high-ticket purchases with those of neighboring libraries, and cooperate to offer users a better collection than libraries could offer individually. WorldCat is available to Nebraska libraries through FirstSearch on NebraskAccess.