



# BUSINESS INFORMATION ALERT®

Sources, Strategies, and Signposts for Information Professionals

Volume 15, No. 5 May 2003

## Trade Journal Jackpot: Buried Treasure in Trade Magazines

by Michael Keating

Today, more than ever, trade publications are a valued source of information.

Increasingly, business researchers, librarians, and other information professionals are finding the information they need in trade publications. “I believe that trade magazines are still the best personal way to communicate with people in a specific industry. Short of a one-to-one meeting, there is nothing more interactive with a person than a magazine in their hands, or what I like to refer to as the ‘best laptop ever invented,’” says Samir Husni, Ph.D., a journalism professor and magazine expert at the University of Mississippi.

He continues: “Trade pubs that have been able to establish their trademarks and brands are still much more trusted than any other media. You can go to the Web and click on a web site and you don’t know whether you can believe what’s presented on that site or not. There’s no gatekeeping on the Web. It’s so easy to post anything on the Web. With a trade magazine, on the other hand, there’s a gatekeeper — an editor — and there’s a company that stands behind what they are sending you via the Web or in print.”

Furthermore, Husni contends, for some kinds of data, trade publications may be the only source for researchers. “Business statistics, market-share data, and other information for specific industries may only be available in trade titles,” he says.

Trade magazine editors feel that there is often extensive and unique data in their publications. “Our

annual buyer’s guide delves deeply into the engineering specifications of about 50 different components in our industry, and our editors examine the data that comes in to see if it makes sense from a physical and physics standpoint,” says Paul J. Heney, senior editor at *Hydraulics & Pneumatics* magazine in Cleveland.

Heney, who also serves as president of the American Society of Business Publication Editors, adds: “The data in our *Designer’s Guide to Fluid Power Products* goes into a lot more depth than any other source in our field; our readers can’t get all that kind of information in one place anywhere else.”

### Specialized Information

Sidney McNab of L.E.K. Consulting, LLC, recalls the challenge of trying to determine, in less than an hour, the major producers of three kinds of polyethylene. “It seemed a daunting task at first,” he says, “but a quick search in Table-base found rankings for all three products from the journal *Modern Plastics*. We had the answer within 10 minutes!”

For specific industries, trade publications may be the only game in town. “I work at High Point University in North Carolina,” says David Bryden. “We do a good bit of furniture research and would be lost without the many furniture publications. *Furniture Today*, *Wood and Wood Products Review*, and *HFN/HFD* are indispensable when it comes to numbers and stories about the industry. They also go a long way toward providing information about standards within the field.”

Another vote comes from Jennifer Boettcher, a business bibliographer and reference librarian at Georgetown University in Washington, DC. "Reading trades is like watching a murder mystery," she says. "You read articles about competitors sneaking up on a company, an attack on market size, the faltering of the marketing campaign, the collapse of market share, struggles to regain dominance, the last breaths of a company, and lawyers announcing bankruptcies."

"If it's a new concept, trade publications might be the best source," says Carolyn Ruby-Weilage of Micron Technology in Boise, Idaho. "Recently I had a customer ask me about the use of a product in automobiles. This is such a new area that the information I could find for him was not in the technical journals but in trade and business publications. I've also had customers ask me to find information about a product in development at a company. The product may be so new that information isn't being written about it in the technical literature yet, so

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*...trade publications are a valued source of information.*

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we have to use our news aggregator service to glean what bits and pieces are being made public."

## Public Librarians

Barbara Birkas, assistant manager of the government and business department at the Public Library

of Cincinnati & Hamilton County (OH), recalls using the *National Underwriter* magazine quite heavily for insurance, bank-

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ing, and accounting reference questions. Staffers in her department have also relied heavily on *Chain Store Age*, *Progressive Grocer*, and other periodicals serving retailers. They get statistics and other data from these titles and other trades using electronic sources including LexisNexis Statistical Universe, Proquest, Infotrak, Business & Company Resource Center, Electric Library, and Ebsco Host.

## Analysts

Trade magazines are useful research tools for research analysts. "Trade publications are often a great way to get up to speed on what's important in an industry and to keep track of ongoing developments," says David Petina, who works at the Freedonia Group, producers of global research reports ([www.freedonia-group.com](http://www.freedonia-group.com)) in Cleveland. "Another reason analysts rely on trade journals is that they allow us to quickly separate the important trends from the 'noise.'"

Another Freedonia researcher, Ken Long, uses both the articles and the advertising in trade jour-

nals. "They allow me to quickly get a handle on what's going on in a particular industry, identify current business issues and concerns, learn about up-and-coming technologies, and see who the major players are," he explains.

Long is currently writing a study on the U.S. fastener market. He consulted such trade publications as *Aerospace Engineering*, *American Fastener Journal*, *Assembly Magazine*, *Fastener Industry News*, and *Fastener Technology International*.

"It's a two-way street," says Long, who is a senior research analyst at the Freedonia Group.

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*Executives rate business-to-business trade publications among their top sources of information...*

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"We send out press releases announcing our new studies, and our analysts regularly talk to business publication editors who are seeking articles, bringing the whole process full circle. To provide one example, I recently discussed battery market trends with an editor at *Purchasing* magazine. The information I provided was used in an article to be published in a future issue."

## Top Management

Executives rate business-to-business (B-to-B) trade publications among their top sources of information concludes a recent Yankelovich Partners and Harris

Interactive report. This report, based on a telephone survey of 505 executives at U.S. companies with at least \$5 million in annual sales, was conducted for American Business Media (ABM). ABM is the trade group of business media firms in the U.S. Its members publish 1,300 magazine and newsletter titles, and manages 1,400 web sites in 181 industries.

## Findings from the ABM Report

Executives cite B-to-B magazines and B-to-B web sites as the top two sources they rely on for information and insight about how to build their businesses and do their jobs better. On average, executives spend more than two hours per week reading B-to-B magazines.

When choosing among several media, executives rate B-to-B magazines and web sites (in conjunction with salespeople) as the best means to obtain information that allows them to do their jobs better and grow their businesses. These B-to-B media are also ranked at the top for value in influencing or supporting purchase decisions by those executives.

## Trade Journal Tally

How many trade publications are out there? The numbers vary, depending on who is doing the counting. According to the SRDS Business Publication Advertising Source (December 2002, [www.srds.com](http://www.srds.com)), there are 9,300

domestic, international, and health-care publications. The SRDS volume covers 180 market classes.

Ulrich's international periodicals database ([www.ulrichsweb.com](http://www.ulrichsweb.com)), meanwhile, offers several different counts for trade publications. Ulrich's tracks serials worldwide and includes magazines, journals, newspapers, newsletters, and e-zines.

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Here are some counts from Ulrich's:

- Number of titles in Ulrich's database with the subject type of "Trade Literature" — 5,178
- Number of titles in Ulrich's database with the subject keyword "Business" — 35,566
- Number of titles with Ulrich's product code, "Scientific & Technical Books & Serials in Print" — 49,789
- Number of titles under Ulrich's subject, "Engineering" — 7,380

Running a search with the following terms yielded 87,620 titles: Subject Type: Trade Literature "or" Product code: Scientific & Technical Books & Serials in Print "or" Subject: Business "or" Subject: "Engineering"

## Shortcomings?

According to Jack Bryar, a taxonomist with Dialog/NewsEdge, business and trade publications are, in many cases, the only source of quality content on a business subject. However, he cautions that the trade journal has some shortcomings: "The problem with paper-based journals of this type is they are hard to work with. Magazines have a way of walking out of a library. In addition, many of the business publication articles are pretty superficial. Often the development of an important business or economic trend is documented over a dozen articles in several issues."

Aggregation is the key, Bryar says. He thinks you absolutely need access to trade magazine content, but you can get a lot more value from that content if it is aggregated into broad collections. "It is up to you and your managers whether you prefer this to be on disk form or online, but it should be collected in some form where content can be efficiently accessed and where there is a querying structure in place that is structured to support the questions business people are likely to ask," he says.

## The Value of Print

There are several reasons why librarians and researchers may want to retain the print copy. Rebecca Roth, information center manager at the American Council of Life Insurers, says, "Keeping the print journal is extremely

important, especially for tables and rankings. Often, the electronic vendor does not include the tabular data in the articles, and secondly because there is no one article vendor that has access to all the insurance trade periodicals (our particular interest)."

## Trade Journals on the Web

Trade publications have become such valued sources of information that they led to the birth of Specialissues.com ([www.specialissues.com](http://www.specialissues.com)), a web site that keeps tabs on special magazine issues. "Specialissues.com began life as a

question about salary surveys in 1993 when I worked in Houston Public Library's business reference desk," says founder Trip Wyckoff. "Since there were no up-to-date resources, I began tracking special issues of trade and industry magazines for fun."

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*[There is a] wealth of data available in special issues . . .*

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The wealth of data available in special issues includes industry outlooks, overviews, or surveys; statistical issues; company ranking lists; buyer's guides; salary surveys;

product/industry focus issues; membership directories; who's who registers; trade show specials; and more. Wyckoff feels that with the Web, trade magazines have enhanced value. "Many special issues are available on the Internet and are designed to be interactive/searchable and provide greater content than the printed versions," he says.

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## Trade Magazine Sources

Besides those listed in the article, these sources are worth checking out when you are looking for trade journals:

[www.penton.com](http://www.penton.com)

Penton Media's magazines serve the following industries: aviation, design/engineering, electronics, food/retail, government/compliance, Internet/information technology, leisure/hospitality, manufacturing, mechanical systems/construction, natural products, and supply chain.

[www.bacons.com/](http://www.bacons.com/)

Information on Bacon's Magazine Directory lists 14,000 magazines and newsletters.

[www.mediafinder.com](http://www.mediafinder.com)

Go here for information on subscribing, renting a mailing list, or advertising in about 90,000 magazines and newsletters.

[www.gebbieinc.com/magurl.htm](http://www.gebbieinc.com/magurl.htm)

This site describes itself as an all-in-one media directory that lists trade and consumer magazines.

[www.writersmarket.com/index\\_ns.asp](http://www.writersmarket.com/index_ns.asp)

Check this site for information on the *2003 Writer's Market Online*. This source lists 4,000 publishing opportunities including trade magazines.

[www.americanbusinessmedia.com](http://www.americanbusinessmedia.com)

American Business Media is the industry association for business-to-business information providers, including producers of trade magazines, CD-ROMs, web sites, trade shows, and other ancillary products that build upon print products.

[www.galegroup.com/BusinessRC](http://www.galegroup.com/BusinessRC)

Gale's Business & Company Resource Center offers a free guided tour.

[ejournals.ebsco.com](http://ejournals.ebsco.com)

EBSCOhost offers thousands of electronic journals. You can search free by journal name or subject.

[//ask.elibrary.com](http://ask.elibrary.com)

Electric Library is a fee-based service. A seven-day free trial is available.

[www.galegroup.com](http://www.galegroup.com)

InfoTrac is available in various media versions (Internet/CD). Check your public library if you do not have this service. **Note: Legal Information Alert and Business Information Alert** are available on this product.

[www.tradepub.com](http://www.tradepub.com)

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