

Meet the Editors

Sheri Lanza and Bob Berkman: Guiding Users of Information Services

by LAUREE PADGETT

It's hard to believe that I'm writing my last column for the December issue. During the past year, I've profiled the editors for most of ITI's publications. The last two on the slate are Sheri Lanza, editor of *The Cyber-Skeptic's Guide to Internet Research*, and Bob Berkman, editor of *The Information Advisor*. Both Lanza and Berkman are true experts on packing a ton of information into these two



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eight-page newsletters.

Cyber and *Info Advisor* have been around for quite a while. Next month, *Cyber* will mark its 15th anniversary, while *Info Advisor* will enter its 23rd year. Although many of the other ITI publications that I have written about this year have endured slight modifications or even major makeovers in their histories, these newsletters have kept the same focus since the first issue. For *Cyber*, it's always been about helping power searchers use the internet as a cost-effective research tool. For *Info Advisor*, the goal is to identify, compare, and recommend business information sources from the internet and from traditional fee-based vendors. This sure-and-steady course has helped these two publications build up a loyal readership that depends on the newsletters for the specialized niche areas covered.

Career Cruising With Sheri

Lanza was born in Cleveland and cites San Jose, Costa Rica, and Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, as two of her most memorable places to live. After completing her undergraduate work at the University of Michigan and Miami University (Oxford, Ohio), where she received her B.A. in mathematics and a minor in psychology, she added an M.B.A. (finance and marketing specialties) from University of Miami (Coral Gables, Fla.).

Her first professional job was as a market research analyst for a large medical supply company. Next, she had a market research and new product development position with a cruise line. Other jobs in her "repertoire," as she aptly says, include "stints as an actuarial analyst, software

trouble-shooter, commercial attaché at a U.S. embassy, and various consulting jobs in a wide array of fields."

As if she didn't have enough job diversity, Lanza joined the ranks of the self-employed by starting her own company, specializing in international and domestic business research. "Along with the searching, I did some international consulting and began to do a lot of writing, including a series and a column for *Searcher*; two books; and articles in other publications in the information industry," she says. "The writing is what led to my affiliation with *Cyber*."

A Cyber Tour

Cyber was first published in 1996 by Ruth Orenstein of Bibliodata. In its premier issue, Orenstein noted that *Cyber's* target audience was high-level searchers "who already know how to make the best use of online services and who would like to add the Internet to their arsenal." Susanne Bjørner, *Cyber's* first editor, is now the newsletter's contributing editor. Orenstein took the editor job after Bjørner, followed by Susan Fingerma, and then Lanza, who became editor when ITI purchased the publication in 2002, a little more than 7 years ago.

Although its focus has stayed the course for nearly 15 years, Lanza believes the publication has also made adjustments when they were needed to reflect industry changes. A majority of *Cyber's* readers are librarians, whether public, university, government, corporate, or law; many readers are independent researchers as well. All are looking for resources that provide high-quality, cost-effective results from internet searches. However, up until a few years ago, *Cyber* only covered free websites. When many free sites disappeared and many others morphed into fee-based sites, says Lanza, "the decision was made to include low-cost sites as well." This enabled *Cyber* to expand its coverage while recognizing that budgets are tighter than ever; keeping costs to a minimum is still a must.

Because *Cyber* is eight pages, its content "must be tightly focused and succinctly written." As much information as possible is squeezed into those eight pages, and the emphasis is on quality, not quantity. "There aren't any advertisements in *Cyber*," says Lanza, "every page is devoted solely to providing information to readers."



Cyber's goal is to point readers to the best but least expensive online information sources as quickly as possible; most topics are fair game. This means different subjects are covered from one issue to the next. There are also Specialty Scans, which offer valuable snippets in the areas of legal/government, news/media, international, technical/medical, and business and finance. Regular columns highlight nonprofit organizations and search engine features. Columnists include Bjørner, who writes *CyberSelection*, and another well-known industry guru, Randolph Hock, who writes *Seriously Search Engines*.

Rather than singling out any specific hot topics for the coming year, Lanza says *Cyber* will continue to help readers stay on top of where to go to find the best and most cost-effective—or better yet, free—information resources on the internet.

What About Bob?

A Jersey boy, Bob Berkman earned his B.A. in government from the University of Virginia and an M.A. in journalism from the University of Montana. (He credits Missoula, Mont., with being the most interesting place he has ever lived, which no doubt was quite a change of pace from his home state.) He has been writing *The Information Advisor* since its inception in October 1987. Before that, Berkman was an editor at McGraw-Hill in New York City from 1980 to 1986. After moving to Rochester, N.Y., in 1986, he became director of secondary research for The Winters Group, Inc., a position he held until 1989.

While there, he conducted a survey of his firm's clients, who were researchers, and learned that their biggest concern in market research "was assessing the quality of business information." Armed with this information and missing the publishing world, he decided to start his own newsletter, *The Information Advisor*. The Winters Group published *IA* from 1987 to 1990; Berkman published it from 1990 until 1993. Find/SVP took it over from 1993 until 2005, which is when it became an ITI publication.

Eye On IA

Each issue of *IA* identifies, compares, and recommends business information sources. The sources can be located on the internet, or they can be databases produced by traditional, professional, fee-based ven-

dors. Many *IA* readers are company librarians who want to know how competing business info sources compare feature-, quality-, and pricewise, according to Berkman. They also want to know how to do the most effective business research.

How does he choose the companies and products for *IA*? "I usually pick a company, site, or database that seems to be offering something new and/or significant that would be valuable to biz researchers," he says. He also will review a new product to coincide with its release by a well-known information vendor that his readers will want to discover. When I checked out the most recent issues of *IA*, I found articles on websites such as Data.gov and Glassdoor.com, monitoring and news alert services, a comparison of Bing versus Google, and fee-based people finders.

As for hot topics that will continue into 2010, Berkman lists social search, which he defines as "using Facebook, Twitter, and Friendfeed for true research"; location-based searching; and mobile searching. He also says *IA* will continue to follow the evolving role of information professionals. While some firms deem info pros and data centers "unnecessary" due to the accessibility of "free" information, other firms are using their info experts in new and creative ways to leverage the best information sources. He also sees Enterprise 2.0 as a critical process for ensuring a company's effectiveness.

One of *IA's* unique features is that each article provides an in-depth and detailed product feature comparison chart.

Another is the fact that at eight pages, the newsletter can be read quickly. While it is available in print, its primary mode of delivery is via PDF (by email).

What Goes Around

In 1974 as a ball boy at the U.S. Open (for those of you who aren't sports fans, that's one of the four tournaments that make up the Grand Slam of tennis), Berkman won the ire of Pancho Gonzalez for pestering him for his autograph. And 35 years later, Berkman is still working the "net," this time with the goal of helping his readers find the best business info sources. Meanwhile, Lanza, while no longer involved with cruise liners, is still helping her readers navigate around sites and resources that are not "see" worthy to find the best internet bang for their buck. Hopefully for readers of *IA* and *Cyber*, Berkman and Lanza will stay on board with their respective publications for a long time to come.



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