
Published by the
BRASS Business Reference in Academic Libraries Committee

Vol 1(4), March 2004

Clement Ho
Reference and Instruction Librarian
American University

The Future of the GPO and Its Impact for Business Librarians

The Government Printing Office (GPO) may not be one of the top sources for information that comes to mind for business librarians. However, as the number of laws and regulations governing our lives grows and as American society becomes more litigious, people dealing with business need to be aware of the myriad rules that affect businesses. This is where the GPO becomes relevant. Its mission is to procure, organize and disseminate official information from all three branches of the federal government. It publishes the Congressional Record, the Federal Register, the Code of Federal Regulations, the U.S. Code, and other government documents.

Unbeknownst to the general public, the GPO is undergoing drastic changes as it examines the ways it should fulfill its mission. The basis for the changes is the digital revolution. Under the direction of new Public Printer of the United States, Bruce R. James, the GPO has accelerated its transformation into primarily an electronic information dissemination service. More than 50% of GPO documents originate in a digital format and will never be printed, except on demand and as needed.

<http://www.gpoaccess.gov>. This is the GPO Web site that provides government documents free to the public. GPO Access grew out of the Government Printing Office Electronic Information Enhancement Act of 1993 (Chapter 41 of the U.S. Code Title 44) which required the GPO to provide online access to publications. More than 250,000 document titles are now available from GPO Access. As the GPO proudly proclaims,

portals to Federal information products." There is an average of 32 million retrievals each month, and, over 1.6 billion from 1994 to 2003.

One result of the availability of free documents on GPO Access has been a drastic reduction in GPO bookstore sales. This h

The drive toward digitalization is evident in the Federal Depository Library Program (FDLP) as

a major redesign of GPO Access. It is now easier to navigate, and its search engine is improved by offering more ways to limit searches although it is still not as easy to use as Google. The content of GPO Access is unrivalled, and, as its interface and searching capabilities improve, its value in the growing arsenal of research tools for business librarians will rise.