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Acquisitions

International Trade Commission Library

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NAFTA Literature at the International Trade Commission Library

Most of the United States official materials regarding NAFTA originate in the Executive Office of the President, especially the Office of the United States Trade Representative. These materials can be purchased from the U.S.G.P.O. There were also numerous Congressional hearings; many of these are probably now out of print, government agencies and the public are welcome to make use of the ones in the collections of the ITC libraries. (contact: USITC, 500 E St., SW, Washington, DC. 20436. Library Services [Main Library], Room 300: 202-205-2630; fax 202-205-2316 or Law Library, Room 614: 202-205-3287)

Many of these materials are available in electronic format; one of the most important sources is the National Trade Data Base, produced by the Department of Commerce. This is a collection of at least 120 separate files containing documents relating to trade. It includes several files specifically on NAFTA, including the text of the treaty. It is available as two CD-ROMs, issued monthly, or on Internet ([ftp.stat-usa.gov](ftp://stat-usa.gov)). The CD-ROMS are easier to use, but the Internet is more up-to-date. (contact: U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Office of Business Analysis, HCHB Room 4885, Washington, D.C. 20230; 202-482-1986)

ITC Library has the CD-ROM available on two stand-alone machines. A copy has been placed on our agency LAN as an experiment, but we have had performance problems, and needs further work. The agency is just beginning to get access to Internet. We do have a connection in the Library, and people can request assistance in getting access.

With regard to electronic media, Library users range from hackers to the computer-phobic, with most people falling into the none-too-enthusiastic middle. The Library recently conducted a survey of its users, and found that most people still prefer to get their materials in hard copy. Generally, there has to be a unique benefit to the electronic format for it to be used with any enthusiasm. We also polled recipients of our agency publications, and found that they thought electronic formats were a great idea, but that in addition, they still want to receive their paper copy. Our in-house users informed us that if they were going to use electronic formats, they wanted to access to the materials at their desk. Our analysts do appreciate the ability to get specially organized information: sometimes industry organizations are able to download from a large database just the information that the analyst needs, in the format that he or she needs it. We find that people still don't automatically think of downloading materials from CD-ROM, even though they can send the information directly to their own files on the LAN.

One very popular CD-ROM system is Proquest. This is an collection of business-related

periodicals, many in full-text. It is easy to use, it reproduces the image of the article, so that tables and other graphics are readily available. Our analysts like to be able to search such a vast array of materials simultaneously.

We are trying to encourage use of the electronic formats by advertising them in the newsletter that our office puts out; making lists available on the Library Menu on the LAN; having handouts available; posting signs and through assistance from the Reference staff. We also intend to integrate them into our public catalog. Analysts who are computer enthusiasts also act as gatekeepers for their colleagues, searching specialized electronic bulletin boards and relaying the information that they find.

We also have online access to Dialog, Nexis, and Info-92. Because of the expense involved, Dialog and Nexis are generally searched only by the Librarians. We allow analysts to search Info-92 by themselves. In addition, our Law Library has access to Westlaw, which the attorneys can search for themselves, and we subscribe to the Washington Alert service, which is used mainly by the Congressional Liaison Office.

The Library has a conference room that has equipment for playing videotapes, audiotapes, and audio CD-ROMS. Most of these materials are for training, but we also collect such tapes as an interview with the Trade Representative. These are extremely popular and our user survey indicated that agency staff want us to increase our collection. The agency has formed a committee to develop an agency training center that would rely mainly on audiovisual materials. The Commissioners currently have access to CNN, and the Library has asked to be connected this year.

About the Speaker

Elizabeth A. Root is the Head of Technical Services at the International Trade Commission. For the last 18 months, she and Katherine Loughney, Head of Reference and Reader Services, have been alternating as the acting Library Chief. Prior to coming to the ITC, she worked at the National Agricultural Library, first as a cataloger and then as an Acquisitions Librarian.