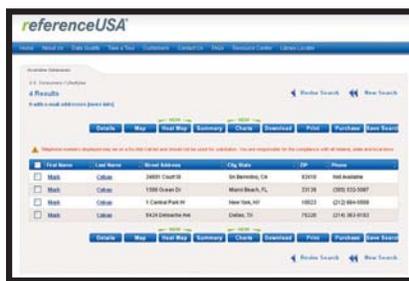# ereviews

■ *By Cheryl LaGuardia*

CONTENT ReferenceUSA is a database providing access to information on over 25 million businesses and more than 262 million consumers. Business listings include such data as company names, phone numbers, complete addresses, key executive names, SIC Codes, employee size, sales volume, geo-codes for mapping, contact details, franchise and brand information, news, liens, judgments and bankruptcies, and credit rating scores.

> **ONTHEWEB** Don't miss Cheryl LaGuardia's *LJ* column, **Not Dead Yet**, for her advice for baby boomer librarians, her take on what they still have to offer, and the possibilities of the intergenerational library.

Residential information comes from more than 5,200 White Page telephone directories, with each listing as it appears in the phone book. Information is available 8 to 12 weeks after the phone book, and the residential listings are processed through U.S. and Canadian National change of address records monthly. U.S. residential listings also contain recent census information, including median household income, median home value, latitude/longitude, and percentage of owner-occupied housing. The database is continuously updated.

USABILITY A toolbar at the top of the home screen links to, for example, data quality, a database tour, contact information, FAQs, resource center, and library locator. Below that toolbar are two large buttons for Take a Tour (they really want you to take a tour) and Library Locator.

The home screen also offers a list of available databases, including U.S. Businesses/Employers USA, Canadian Businesses, OneSource (International Companies and Executives by Title), U.S. New Businesses, U.S. Healthcare (Physicians and Dentists), U.S. Standard White Pages, U.S. Consumers/Lifestyles, Canadian White Pages, and U.S. New Movers/Homeowners. To the right of these is a Latest News panel;

during this review the news was about ReferenceUSA's new Data Visualization with exportable pie or bar charts, as well as color-coded heat mapping of data. The powerful and sophisticaled data visualization features (both charting and heat mapping) enhance results offering "at a glance" ability to spot patterns and target group concentrations.

At the time of review, the tour includes tutorials on how to find a business type using ReferenceUSA's U.S. Business Module (which takes about four minutes), and another on how to locate detailed information on competitors and similar businesses by using the ReferenceUSA U.S. Business module (a little over three minutes). These tutorials were provided by the University of Texas at Austin and Texas State University San Marcos. The second tutorial threw me a bit because it begins by having you locate ReferenceUSA from an alphabetical list of databases, which will be odd for users who've started within ReferenceUSA. Otherwise, the lessons are helpful.

Library Locator prompts users to enter their zip code in a box; I found the 183 libraries within a 25 mile radius of my zip; listed were the names of the libraries, their phone numbers, and their addresses. This is useful information, but I question the amount of screen real estate taken up by the library locator and tutorial buttons, when the meat of the file is in the list of available databases.

And this *is* a meaty file. All the available databases allow both a quick search and a custom search mode, with the former finding bare-bones information (for example, company name, executive name, city, state, and phone for U.S. businesses) and with custom options including extensive, user-friendly choices that allow for incredible granularity and truly targeted list compiling.

The Custom Search in the U.S. Businesses database allows users to query the data by such factors as company name; brands and products; executive name, title, gender, or ethnicity; keyword/SIC/NAICS; major industry group; geographic limiters from state down to neighborhood;

map-based search, area code; number of employees; sales volume; public/private company, foreign parent, home-based business, government office, stock exchange, ticker symbol, credit rating, business expenditures, web address, Fortune 1000, Yellow Page ad size, years in database, year established, and square footage. The successive selection features of the search mechanism make it extremely fast and simple to carry out research: it took me approximately ten seconds to locate the 25 Fortune 1000 businesses in Massachusetts, for example.

Several databases, such as U.S. Standard White Pages and Canadian White Pages, are pretty straightforward, offering what librarians and patrons expect to find in a business information file. The U.S. Consumers/Lifestyles database is different, however, and fascinating. Here, users can perform a quick search by typical access points such as name, phone, city, and state, and lifestyle categories ranging from apparel/fashion/beauty to charitable donor, personal finance/self-help, and purchase behavior. The file notes that "Lifestyles are scored based on level of interest from 0 to 9 in our database. 0 meaning no interest; 9 meaning heavy interest. Selecting Lifestyles from the categories below will include individuals with a score of 6 and higher (6 to 9)."

A lifestyles search, then, goes beyond the basics of most files, but custom search delves even deeper into consumer characteristics such as estimated home value, estimated household income, age, marital status, children present, ethnicity, gender, language spoken, religion, political party, female occupation, male occupation, mortgage present, home owner, years in home, year home built, location type, number of units. grandparent present, and veteran present. This level of granularity is amazing.

PRICING Pricing for annual institutional subscriptions starts at $2,000 and increases based on population served and modules available.

VERDICT ReferenceUSA's incredibly easy, yet extremely sophisticated search capabilities are stunning. And the quality of the data is every bit as good as they describe at their data quality page (www.referenceusa.com/Static/DataQuality). Heartily recommended for public, special, and academic libraries.

Cheryl LaGuardia is a Research Librarian for the Widener Library at Harvard University and author of Becoming a Library Teacher *(Neal-Schuman, 2000). Readers can contact her at claguard@fas.harvard.edu*