This compact, light-weight dictionary is a helpful travel companion (e.g., for use at business meetings). As the title of this inexpensive reference indicates, the Rechtswörterbuch für jedermann is a legal dictionary for general layperson use. It was not written as a dictionary for specialists, such as legal translators and interpreters or jurists, but is intended to serve as a practical tool for anyone in need of basic legal vocabulary. It may also be a helpful resource for translators working in other specializations who occasionally need information on a legal term.

Content and Layout
The dictionary contains over 12,500 German entries and more than 17,500 English entries. In his introduction, Gerhard Köbler describes the increasing relevance of other countries’ legal systems for legal professionals in Germany, which has led to the need for more information about foreign legal systems. This observation is followed by an overview of different jurisdictions, divided up into British law and its various systems (common law, equity, administrative law, public law, etc.). The dictionary even touches on the law in Scotland, Northern Ireland, and the Isle of Man, but explains the American legal system in far less detail. Köbler delves into history (as far back as 41 A.D.) and describes the development of each legal system up to the present. Also included are educational requirements for jurists in the U.K. and the U.S. along with career choices for jurists in these countries. (As a side note, this would have been an appropriate place to explain the difference between a notary public in the U.S. and a Notar, or öffentlich bestellter Notar, in Germany. After all, this significant difference might not be general knowledge, but Köbler did not include this highly relevant information.) Although these renderings are educational and interesting, it is rather surprising that in a dictionary described as “compact,” 26 pages are devoted to a lengthy introduction.

Terminology Choices
Considering the goal of providing a legal dictionary for everybody, it is surprising that the dictionary does not contain cross-references or context information, which can easily lead to errors. To give an example, the translations provided for the German term Orden are “medal, decoration, order,” without any mention of the religious connotation of the last term. The dictionary also contains general terms...
that are rather unusual for a legal dictionary, such as Nizza, Nonne, or “cab” and “telephone.”

Numerous German nouns have separate entries for the female and the male form, even though the female and male form are the same in English, at least most of the time. For example, there are two separate entries for Normadressat and Normadressatin, with the same rendering in English. This concept is taken to yet another level with the term “attorney.” There are two different entries each for the female and male form of the term “attorney” and “attorney-at-law” (instead of using “attorney [at-law]” with the same translation: Anwalt, Rechtsanwalt, and then Anwältin, Rechtsanwältin). It seems that a single entry (e.g., “notary”) followed by the male and female form in German (Notar/in), where nouns always have the female ending, would have been a more effective use of space. Of course, in the rare cases where an actual female form exists in English, this should be stated (e.g., heir/heiress).

This approach would also have freed up space for terms that are not included in this dictionary, such as terminology pertaining to cyber law (the term is not even mentioned), communications, or the Internet in general. These are legal sub-fields that certainly should have been included in a dictionary published in 2011, at a time when the Internet and the associated legal ramifications were very much a reality.

Given the broad applicability of family law, it is surprising that the term “custody” is included without any reference to parental custody or its variations, such as “legal custody,” “full custody,” “shared custody,” or “physical custody.” Similarly, the dictionary’s German translations for “representation” are rather limited and fail to take into account the term’s meaning in the context of a will. It would seem that terms of this nature would be of particular interest to laypersons handling legal documents.

It is certainly important to include antiquated terms. After all, one might come across those terms in old legal documents, but they should be denoted as such. One example would be Notzucht, which is rarely encountered nowadays. Also, three translations (Notzucht, Schändung, Vergewaltigung) are offered for the English equivalent “rape” without noting their proper use in modern German legal language.

The short list of abbreviations that is provided only pertains to grammatical abbreviations. Common legal abbreviations such as cf., et al, id., or ff. are not listed. However, the abbreviations “am.” or “brit.” in parentheses is a useful feature and indicates whether a term pertains to U.S. or British usage.

Overall Evaluation

As the subtitle implies, this compact legal dictionary is a useful tool for non-professional users who need to look up a term quickly. Legal professionals as well as legal translators/interpreters may find the dictionary a helpful basis for further terminology research online or in other bilingual and monolingual legal publications. The dictionary offers a good introduction to legal terminology for general use at an affordable price. However, it cannot replace more thoroughly researched standard legal dictionaries such as the ones written by Clara-Erika Dietl, Egon Lorenz, and Alfred Romain.