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**REVIEW OF: Anil Aggarwal. (Ed.). (2000). *Web-Based Learning and Teaching Technologies: Opportunities and Challenges*. Hershey, PA: Idea Group Publishing.**

by Tim Daniels

Over the past several years, the idea of Web-based education has grown in popularity. Many community colleges, colleges, and universities have begun to explore the possibility that Web-based education can be used to enhance both on-campus and distance education programs. In the book, *Web-Based Learning and Teaching Technologies: Opportunities and Challenges*, Anil Aggarwal brings together a collection of chapters written by experts in the emerging field of Web-based learning. The focus of the book is Web-based learning issues, trends, challenges, and opportunities facing colleges and universities who plan to develop e-learning programs. Although the focus is on institutions of higher education, Aggarwal's book is a great resource for anyone interested in Web-based learning. The book covers issues, technology, teaching strategies, and course development. This is an excellent resource and a must-have for any institution interested in developing or refining its Web-based education offerings.

Aggarwal has divided the book into four sections: Web-Based Learning, Web-Based Enhancing Technologies & Course Development, Web-Based Learning Environments, and Web-Based Learning Case Studies.

In the first section of the book, Aggarwal discusses four types of learning environments: traditional classrooms, lab modules, distance learning video and audio programs, and correspondence courses. He also addresses how Web-based education can be used to simulate each type. He is careful to point out that just because the Web can be used to simulate these environments, it does not mean it has to do so. In addition, he stresses that schools using the Web to deliver educational content should be prepared to support these endeavors with funds, a strong technological infrastructure, and good interface design.

The second section of the book discusses Web-enhancing technologies. This section explains how to analyze and select various types of software and services that can be used to develop Web-based classes and programs. The authors point out that no one software package can help you develop your online offerings. By using a combination of tools, one can develop a Web-based learning environment that will serve the needs of instructors and students alike.

The third section of the book discusses the Web-based learning environment and how that environment is shaped. Much of the section focuses on various assessment tools and the stages of assessment. The section also discusses how Web-based assignments are distributed, and how instructors manage the delivery and the collection of these assignments. Faculty development is also a topic of this section. The author uses the University of Maryland as a case study to show how the University can support and train the faculty to develop Web-based classes.

The fourth section of the book gives several case studies illustrating ways that Web-based learning is being used. This section covers many topics, highlighting a completely Web-based class and the ways that Web-based content may be used to enhance a traditional course.

Aggarwal has compiled an impressive resource in his book *Web-Based Learning and Teaching Technologies: Opportunities and Challenges*. This is a great book for anyone involved with or interested in developing a Web-based education program. It is recommended for all libraries.

*Tim Daniels, Asheville-Buncombe Library System.*

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## **REVIEW OF: John Burke. (1999). *IntroNet: A Beginner's Guide to Searching the Internet*. New York: Neal-Schuman.**

by Ross Tyner

One of the most difficult challenges faced by Internet searchers is the Web's incredible rate of change. Documents appear, disappear, migrate, and metamorphose with the regularity of Italian governments, frustrating those of us who make a living by organizing and retrieving information, not to mention most of our patrons whose information-seeking skills are not as well honed as those of a reference librarian. The same

challenge confronts an author — even if, like John Burke, that author is a reference librarian — who dares to write a book about Web searching. Given that the only constant on the Web is change, is it possible to write a book that attempts to teach readers how to perform research on the Web without that book becoming obsolete even before it has been published?

Fortunately, thanks to its process- rather than source-based approach, *IntroNet: A Beginner's Guide to Searching the Internet*, answers this question in the affirmative, even two years after its publication. In the Preface, author Burke states that the book intends to teach readers "about how to search rather than about where to search" (p. vii). For the most part, *IntroNet* stays true to this objective.

Burke divides his book into eleven chapters and three appendices. The first three chapters address general concepts that apply to many types of Internet searches, or what the author calls "the process and general strategies for searching the Net" (p. viii). Topics covered in this section include the types of information that are likely to be found on the Internet; selecting search terms and constructing search statements; and a comparison of the different types of search tools (e.g. search engines, directories, electronic reference collections) and appropriate uses of each. Chapters four through nine cover "searching for a particular type of information (facts, files, people, companies, and discussions) and demonstrate specific tools and strategies for searching for that information" (p. viii). Chapters 10 and 11 discuss evaluating and citing sources from the Internet.

Appendices A, B and C are lists of Internet resources. This is one area in which the book strays from its how-not-where objective. Appendix A, "Where to Find Out about New Ways to Search," lists some very useful sites, but of the seven current awareness tools listed, three have disappeared or moved. More puzzling is the inclusion of Appendix B, "Ten Fun and Useful Sites." This is an annotated list of "some unusual Net resources that [Burke has] had great experiences with in the past" (p. 103). Whether or not one agrees that sites such as The Ultimate Band List, The Internet Movie Database, and the Searchable Online Archive of Recipes are "unusual," their contribution to teaching Internet search skills is debatable. Appendix C, "Strategy Quick Reference", briefly outlines possible search strategies for different types of information. The index appears to be accurate and comprehensive.

The book is most useful when it sticks to its stated purpose of teaching how rather than where to search. For example, Burke's discussion of the importance of searching at the appropriate level of specificity and techniques for narrowing broad topics — limiting by time, place, or particular aspects of a topic (p. 10-11) — is relevant to any online search tool. The same is true of the section on how to select search terms, isolate key concepts, select synonyms, and consider broader and narrower terms (p. 12-13).

Chapter 3, which divides search tools into six categories (search engines, search directories, electronic reference collections, active information sources, meta-search engines, and one-stop searching pages) is also consistent with the author's goal of teaching about types of tools rather than the specific tools themselves. Burke's descriptions of the tools and their uses are accurate and succinct. This chapter would have been enhanced by a discussion of the value of human-compiled, subject-specific links pages (many of the pages within the WWW Virtual Library and About.com come to mind). As Albert, Jeong and Barabasi illustrated in their 1999 *Nature* article, following links can sometimes be a more efficient and effective means of navigating the Web than leaving the job to robots. Burke does mention some sources that provide access to links pages, but the topic could have used more emphasis.

The book's strongest section is chapters 4 through 8, each of which provides sound advice for searching for a particular type of information on the Internet. Burke displays his Web-searching savvy by providing some tips that could be taken as common sense to a reference librarian, but which are likely the product of

frequently asked questions by new users at the reference desk. For example, the inclusion of "active information sources" (p. 32-35) — discussion groups, chat rooms and ask-an-expert services — as useful search tools is welcomed, but is often overlooked in other Web search resources. My personal favorite is Burke's advice on how to find a person's e-mail address: "If you know where the person lives and just need their e-mail address, you could simply give them a call and ask them. I guarantee that this is the quickest way to find out that particular piece of information" (p. 66). These two sentences ought to be posted on every computer and at the top of every Web-searching course syllabus.

As the two examples above suggest, the book's target audience appears to be novices. The book's subtitle confirms this, as does Burke's definition of basic terms like "topic" (p. 9), "synonym" (p. 12), and "search term" (p. 12). The book's vocabulary — largely colloquial, as in "The following list reduces the number of tools you need to mess with" (p. 84) — also appears to be aimed at beginners. Occasionally, however, the book's content is inconsistent with its stated audience. For example, the first two steps Burke suggests in formulating a search statement are "Use Boolean Operators" (p. 14) and "Use Parentheses to Separate Concepts" (p. 15). I would argue that Boolean operators and nested search strings are not concepts that would be generally considered beginning techniques for Internet searching, nor are they even recognized by many search tools. Appropriate use of + and - signs to include and exclude terms is probably more useful and accessible to beginners and more generally applicable to Web search tools. Another example of content whose level is arguably inappropriate for the stated audience is "Four Hallmarks of a Good Search Tool" (p. 20-21). The criteria Burke lists here are Consistency, Regular Updates and Maintenance, Explicit Statements about Scope, and Statement of Selection Criteria. This may be good advice for someone who is trying to evaluate different search tools but, for most users, the only hallmark that really matters is obtaining desired or expected results.

Despite these reservations, this book is recommended for beginners who want a solid grounding in Internet search concepts and techniques.

#### **Reference:**

Albert, R., Jeong, H., & Barabasi, A. (1999). "Diameter of the World-Wide Web." *Nature*, 401, 130-131.

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## **Clarica Grove and Phil Hughes. (2000). Linux Command Summary. Seattle: Specialized Systems Consultants, Inc.**

by Charles B. Gambrell

This volume from the Linux Journal Library certainly lives up to what the title promises. But can it fulfill its front-cover claim to be "The indispensable reference for everyone using Linux?" In the introduction, it more modestly purports to be "a reference for experienced Linux users and a learning tool for newcomers" (p. 3).

On the whole, Clarica Grove (Advertising Traffic Manager for Linux Journal) and Phil Hughes (Linux Journal Publisher) have provided a great reference work that provides a large amount of material in a small and handy volume.

The book is divided into eight parts: introduction, user commands, *sysadmin* commands, system configuration files, *awk*, *ed*, *shell*, and *regular expressions*.

Introduction: This provides a good summary of not only what the volume presents, but also an indispensable overview of how the commands are presented. Pages 3 and 4 are a must-read.

User Commands: As would be expected, this is the longest part of the book and does a good job of covering commands relevant to "the average user or system administrator, and [included] in most Linux distributions" (p. 3). What I found impressive was the extent to which it clearly lays out the parameters of so many of the common Linux commands. This is no small job, and it's done very well. Perhaps experienced system administrators would not be as impressed by this section, but then their memories may not be perfect either. In my opinion, the book would be improved with more cross references to related commands. Also, where is *rddate*? While not in every distribution of Linux, I believe it should be, and is easily added to active commands. The command is used to find a date and time from a remote machine and/or set the date and time on your local machine.

Sysadmin commands: This is a perfectly named section that in a mere 23 pages presents a good summary of many important administrative commands. My only complaint is that by so dividing the commands, the new user is left to search in two sections of the book. Why not place some cross references under User Commands? This would be more efficient and time saving for the reader. I find it very frustrating when a reference book such as this "makes" me look in several places to find information about a command.

System Configuration Files: On these two pages is a list of what the authors regard as some of the important system files and a very brief description of many system files. The experienced user will know these files, but the new user probably will find too little by way of description to be helpful.

*awk*: This section may be helpful for the experienced Linux user, but the new user will need a tutorial on *awk* to make sense of it.

*ed*: Why a section on *ed* and not *pico*, *emacs*, or *vi*? Personal preference? I wish the authors had told me. Nevertheless, if you have never used *ed*, there is sufficient help on this single page to begin using this editor. I had never used *ed* (I had used *vi* some, and *pico* much more), but after reading the section and having the book opened to this page, I edited a file with *ed*.

*Shell*: I liked this section. It ran only four pages, but a slow and deliberate read of these pages will make the new Linux user much more comfortable with the shell and its command line.

Regular Expressions: This is a half page summary of "regular expressions" used in many Linux utilities to manipulate characters and character strings. I see this as offering little help to the new user. Reading over this section will not remove any of the "mystery" surrounding "regular expressions."

What is missing? This may be purely idiosyncratic, but why not include a section that cross-references DOS commands to Linux commands? For those of us old enough to remember the DOS command line and/or those of us who use the Windows NT command line almost daily in our work, such a section would be very helpful. This would also serve to make Linux more easily accessible to the NT administrator looking to make more use of Linux in the organization. (This wouldn't break some rule of the Linux purist, would it?)

While the book's size is convenient, I had a hard time getting the book to lay flat on my desk. Maybe the next edition could be wire-bound.

The most serious shortcoming at the time of this review was certainly not with the book, but trying to buy the book. Attempting to purchase the book online revealed the book was not in stock at any of the large booksellers. Turning to a good source of technology and computer books, <http://www.fatbrain.com/> (<http://www.fatbrain.com/>), was also unproductive. On the back cover of the book, we are advised that we can visit the Linux Journal Web site for this and other products ( <http://www.linuxjournal.com/store/> (<http://www.linuxjournal.com/store/>)). In attempting to connect to this URL, I was redirected to <http://store.linuxjournal.com/> (<http://store.linuxjournal.com/>) and finally to a Web page reporting, "Sorry, Linux Journal Store is closed for maintenance. We will re-open soon." This is surprising to me, given the overall quality of the Linux Journal. If one visits the site of the parent organization of Linux Journal, <http://www.ssc.com/> (<http://www.ssc.com/>), one can eventually discover (with some diligent searching) that you probably can purchase this book at Einstein's Books ( <http://einsteins-universe.com/linuxjournallibrary/> (<http://einsteins-universe.com/linuxjournallibrary/>)). But there is no online ordering. Users must order by e-mail or setup an e-mail order account.

It is very unfortunate that what is overall a good and helpful volume would be so hard to purchase. My advice is: If you see this book in a bookstore, buy it; I fear you may never see it again. Given the convenient size and scope of the book, while I cannot call it indispensable, I can say that it deserves a spot on my desk and will be much used.

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