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Editor's Note: TER's New Title

With the start of volume 8, you'll notice that TER has a new title, Technology Electronic Reviews. Why the change? The word "telecommunications" in our former title continues to describe much of TER's content. In fact, there is a review of Nathan J. Muller's Desktop Encyclopedia of Telecommunications in this issue, illustrating this to be the case. For many of us on the editorial board, however, the term "telecommunications" no longer seems to describe the full range of subjects we cover in TER, especially when our reviews address topics outside the area of networks and networking technologies. We hope you'll agree that TER's new title better reflects the broad scope of our publication. Our goal is to continue providing you with relevant and timely reviews of diverse information technology resources.

Review of: Donald A. Barclay. (2000). Managing Public-Access Computers. New York: Neal-Schuman.

By Carrie Bickner

Managing Public-Access Computers is a recommended manual for library managers who need to bring themselves up to speed quickly on this complex topic. It is also recommended for managers who need to fill in a few technological blanks.

The design of the book is especially compelling. As with other titles in the How-To-Do-It series, this one is constructed with the busy library manager in mind. Concise lists, well worded headings and a clean table of contents work together to make a book that is easy to use.

Chapter one, which serves a crash course in the ABCs of technology, begins with an instance of the book's best features: its glossaries. If librarians dog-eared books, the first chapter's glossary would quickly suffer from crumpled corners. Plain-language definitions of basic computer terms such as "digital subscriber line" and "thin client" are accurate and concise. There are a few terms Barclay mentions later in the book that might have been good to define here. "Motherboard" and "Central Processing Unit (CPU)" are two such untreated terms. Subsequent chapters also begin with glossaries.

Additional well-designed features include the "Tip Sheets" and "Focus On" sections in each chapter. Chapter seven's "Working with the Systems Department," for example, has a one-page bulleted list called "Focus on Organizational Structure and Culture." This list highlights important strategies for creating good working relationships between public service staff and Information Technology (IT) staff. The same chapter features a Tip Sheet on how to identify computer hardware when reporting problems to the IT department.

Sample forms and signs, such as chapter eleven's "Public Feedback Form" and chapter seven's "Sample 'Out of Order' Sign," are other features that will prove useful to busy managers. These kinds of resources could save a library system quite a few hours designing such materials. A manager could tell the signage committee that it has one less task to do and thereby save a small bundle in staff time costs.

Good information design is not the book's only virtue. The work is substantive and encapsulates quite a few years of firsthand experience managing public PCs.

Barclay is currently the Director for the Health Informatics Education Center at the Houston Academy of Medicine, where he is responsible for a public-access computer lab and a computer classroom. His background also includes a turn as Coordinator of Electronic Services in University of Houston Libraries, where he managed public services in the University's Electronic Publications Center. Prior to that, he was a reference librarian and Coordinator of Library Instruction at New Mexico State University Library in Las Cruces, New Mexico.

Library managers should be pleased to have such easy access to these years of experience, especially at a time when libraries are only beginning to get a handle on the knowledge management required to run successful public-access computer services. Witness the experience reflected in this abstract of the three security truths Barclay offers in his chapter on computer security:

Security Truth Number One: There is no such thing as a completely secure public-access computer.

Security Truth Number Two: Sooner or later every public-access computer operation is going to experience some breach of security. Security Truth Number Three: There is such a thing as too much security. (p. 115)

Barclay's advice in this chapter could well help keep the library manager from losing the forest for the trees. Why, Barclay asks, spend \$2,000 protecting a \$1,000 machine (p. 115)?

Facilities and space planning is another topic where Barclay's experience will be of benefit to the reader. When planning a move from dumb terminals to PCs, managers often overlook the fact that dumb terminals take up less space than PCs. The extra space that mice and CPUs take up is easy to overlook. A safe bet is to allow at least 25 square feet for one PC workstation (pp. 19-20).

More good practical advice lies in the chapter on printing. This is a very difficult aspect of computer service to manage, and Barclay describes service options clearly. This chapter begins with a glossary covering essential printer terms, types of printers, and networking terms. An illustrative figure entitled "Desirable Features in Automated Pay-to-Print Systems" is just the sort of list one would be happy to have on hand while addressing the board of trustees, for example, on a problem about managing printing from public workstations (p. 98).

My only real criticism of this book is that it falls short in addressing the problem of adaptive technology. It would seem logical that a library manager needing to brush up on the general subject of this book would also benefit from a more detailed discussion of software and hardware available to aid disabled users. To be fair, adaptive technology probably deserves an entire book, but I can see where the library manager needing a crash course in computers would benefit from a slightly longer discussion of the topic here.

My next point is a fussy one, to be sure, but the discussion of PC monitors (or video display terminals) precedes the adaptive technology section. In his discussion of monitors, the author suggests that there is little need for oversized monitors in a public PC section (p. 55). Any librarian who has worked with low-vision readers knows that an oversized monitor goes a long way in helping this group of users. While monitors of this sort are expensive, when considered as an adaptive technology purchase, they are quite modest. Furthermore, they do not require special support or installation like other pieces of adaptive technology do, and that makes them even less expensive.

One minor concern is that the index, while fairly good, misses some topics that are well covered in the body of the work. Cross-referencing is not as rich as it might have been.

Aside from these criticisms, *Managing Public-Access Computers* will stay within arm's reach on my desk. The author and publisher have worked together to create a manual that can be read in small, easy-to-digest bites, allowing the reader to assimilate this complex subject one piece at a time.

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REVIEW OF: Diane Kovacs. (2000). Building Electronic Library Collections: The Essential Guide to Selection Criteria and Core Subject Collections. New York: Neal-Schuman.

by David G. Sherwood

Collection development has become doubly challenging in this increasingly electronic era. Librarians must not only select from an overwhelming number of conventional print resources, but they must also contend with the exponential growth in the number of electronic resources worthy of inclusion in library collections. In *Building Electronic Library Collections*, Diane Kovacs defines electronic libraries (e-libraries) as "Web-published" collections of "Web-based resources" (p.xiii). The e-library, which "usually appears as a compilation of links on a Web page or site maintained by the library," should, she writes, be distinguished from the digital library ("full-text materials created from print or holographic sources") on the one hand and the virtual library (which includes library services) on the other (p.xiii). In this, the latest in a string of useful guides she has authored, Kovacs seeks to assist librarians in the selection and presentation of Web resources for specific groups of users and to identify the essential core resources to be included in e-library collections.

The book begins with a general introduction to planning an e-library and collecting sites for it, including a discussion of evaluation and selection criteria, and notes about the organization of and maintenance of e-libraries. The subsequent five chapters focus in a more specialized way on selected topical areas:

1. Ready-reference resources
2. Business, jobs, and employment resources
3. Health and medicine resources
4. Legal resources
5. Biological, social, and physical sciences and technology resources
6. Education, current awareness, and readers' advisory resources

The book concludes with a section providing excellent hints and checklists for ongoing maintenance and management of the e-library collection.

In each of the topical chapters, Kovacs addresses the unique collection and evaluation concerns appropriate for the topical area under discussion. For instance, in the health and medicine chapter, she examines a key question related to audience and purpose: Is the e-library intended for health professionals or is it intended for consumers? And how does the answer to that question affect the selection of resources? Each chapter also includes a discussion of the range and types of resources available and some of the options for organizing the resources selected. All chapters list the print and electronic tools that might be used to locate appropriate Internet resources. The chapters also address any unique problems in evaluating sites for a given topical area: How critical is quality? Must only the most authoritative or reputable sites be linked? How vital is attribution information? Is currency a prime consideration? Is privacy of information-seeking behavior essential?

Each topical chapter then discusses unique problems in choosing core Internet sites for the topic and lists the core sites with annotations. The author's procedure for compiling her core lists included a poll of the Publib and Libref-I discussion lists. In one series of questions, Kovacs asked list readers to name the print, CD-ROM, tape, and on-line databases without which they could not work. Kovacs also asked poll participants to name the reference tools they most used for questions in the topical areas represented by this book's chapters. The core lists were compiled, in part, by locating Internet equivalents to these often used resources identified in the poll. Each chapter concludes with a bibliography of print and electronic publications cited in the chapter and a lengthier annotated Weblibliography of metasites appropriate for the area.

Each chapter also includes one or two "e-library builder stories," in which the author narrates the experience of the librarians who have made some of the most notable attempts to organize the Web for library users. The e-library builder stories highlight the work of Carole Leita (Librarian's Index to the Internet, <http://www.lii.org/> (<http://www.lii.org/>)), Becky Wright, et. al. (Ohio Public Library Information Network-OPLIN, <http://www.oplin.lib.oh.us/> (<http://www.oplin.lib.oh.us/>)), Gerry McKiernan (Cyberstacks, <http://www.public.iastate.edu/~CYBERSTACKS/> (<http://www.public.iastate.edu/~CYBERSTACKS/>)), and Deb Logan (Taft Library/Mediacenter, <http://www.infotaft.marioncity.k12.oh.us/> (<http://www.infotaft.marioncity.k12.oh.us/>)), among others. These e-library builder stories are pleasant features of the book, conveying some portion of the wisdom acquired by these librarians in the process of creating their own e-libraries.

While those who have already created their own e-libraries may enjoy reading the e-library builder stories and might profit by using the core lists in this book as checklists to be sure their e-libraries are not missing anything important, this book is best used by a librarian who is just beginning an e-library project. The beginner, charged with setting up or maintaining an e-library, will find all the basics succinctly covered in the pages of this book: preliminary logistical planning, evaluation and selection criteria appropriate for Web resources, brief guidance in the organization and maintenance of an e-library, and a fine list of core resources with which to start the project. One added benefit is that the subject chapters may be used as stand-alone guides. The librarian working in a law library, for instance, might need to read only the introductory chapters and the one devoted to law resources. However, in order to make each topical chapter stand by itself, the author was forced to repeat some key points in each chapter. For instance, a key figure listing content criteria appropriate for evaluating Internet resources appears six times in the book.

Finally, although Building Electronic Library Collections does include URLs in the core lists and Webliographies printed in the book, Kovacs seeks to avoid one of the prime pitfalls of paper-and-ink discussions of the Web. Web sites are moving targets. The freely available resource today is a fee-based service tomorrow, and the indispensable Web page discovered last week will have disappeared into the ether before it is next needed. Kovacs has prepared an accompanying password-protected Web site where the book's Webliographies are updated, and three quarterly updates have been posted as of the date of this review. The Web site URL and its password are conveniently published in the book's preface. Not merely a listing of core Internet sites, Building Electronic Library Collections is a primer for librarians facing the difficult task of choosing, organizing and presenting Internet resources for a unique user group.

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REVIEW OF: Eric A. Meyer. (2000). Cascading Style Sheets: The Definitive Guide. Sebastopol, CA: O'Reilly & Associates.

by John Wynstra

So what exactly are Cascading Style Sheets (CSS)? To put it simply, they are a mechanism whereby a set of rules can be written to define the look and feel of HyperText Markup Language (HTML) documents based on the specific tags that are used. CSS can define the font-family, color, position, size, background color, and many other attributes that determine how the content ultimately will be displayed. By simply linking a document to a style sheet, the browser will use those rules to render the document.

The author of *Cascading Style Sheets: The Definitive Guide* makes a good case for the fall from grace of HTML and the redemption that can be found for it in the use of CSS. The author contends that the original intention of HTML was to provide a means of marking up a document in such a way that the structure of the content was captured by the markup. Thus we have tags for headings, paragraphs, lists, images, quotes, and many other structural features found in documents. It was never intended that HTML provide elegant and precise presentation capabilities, however, the desire and capability for nicely presented content changed the use of HTML from structure markup to presentation markup. This ultimately has had the effect that the structure of the documents is now lost to a blur of font tags that say nothing about the content, only how it should look. The loss of this structure can be harmful when audio reader programs attempt to read a document to the visually impaired. CSS provides a means by which HTML can once again focus on the structure of a document while at the same time providing a greater degree of control over the presentation of the document.

This book is all about details. Single chapters of 40 to 50 pages focus on topics such as text properties, fonts, boxes and borders, colors and background, and visual formatting. The book is full of examples, tips and tricks, and caveats. The author uses real world experience to make the reader aware of the way things are supposed to work as well as the way they really behave. In addition, the author is keenly aware of the different renderings by popular browsers and makes sure to warn the reader when something is not handled correctly by a specific browser.

Chapter 1 begins with a brief history of HTML and a description of how CSS fits into the scheme of Web publishing. While the author is concerned over the fact that the use of HTML has become focused on presentation rather than structure, he does not dwell on this as he makes his sales pitch for using CSS. Instead he appeals to the reader's desire to make good-looking documents by demonstrating that CSS provides an even greater degree of control over presentation than is possible by using just simple HTML. At the same time, he appeals to the reader's desire to save time, making the point that maintaining Web sites is considerably easier with the proper use of CSS.

Chapter 2 gives a broad overview of just how and why CSS works the way that it does. It covers class and ID selectors, pseudo-classes and pseudo-elements, inheritance, and the cascade itself. Each of these ideas combines to give CSS very precise control over the HTML tags and their display. The concept behind the cascade is rather simple. It determines which rule takes precedence when more than one style is defined for one tag. This conflict is possible since documents can point to more than one style sheet at a time.

Chapter 3 covers units and values. At first it seemed like a little bit of overkill to spend so much time on this topic, but actually there are a number of pitfalls that can be avoided by making proper choices in how you set your attribute values. As an example, there are four ways that can be used to record a color value: a) named colors, b) RGB values, c) percentage colors, and d) hexadecimal colors. A pitfall with named colors, for example, would be using a named color that is not recognized by every browser, and so the author includes a discussion on Web safe colors. This chapter forms the basis for understanding how to best set the attribute values and in particular, what measurement units to use and what to avoid.

Beginning with chapter 4 and continuing through chapter 7, the author views CSS through the microscope. He covers the details of CSS attributes associated with manipulating text (paragraphs, divisions, etc.), fonts (font-family, font-style, bold vs. underline, etc.), colors and backgrounds, as well as boxes and borders. It is rare in this book to find a page that does not have an example that illustrates the use of the attributes being discussed. One shortcoming of this book is the lack of color. So much of what is talked about relates to color and the addition of color in the examples would make the point more quickly. On the other hand, the price of the book would almost certainly be out of reach for many readers with the use of color. The author instead opts to work with the grayscale colors of black, gray, and silver to make his points, and he does an adequate job.

Chapters 8 and 9 cover visual formatting and positioning. The discussion focuses much more on why things work the way they do rather than the how to make things work a certain way. These chapters are also filled with examples.

Chapter 10 discusses CSS2. Much of this book is focused on CSS1 since it is what has been implemented in current browsers. At the time of the writing of this book, most of CSS2 had yet to be correctly implemented. As a result, the author chose to use this chapter to describe what should be expected when CSS2 is more fully available.

The last chapter in this book, called "CSS in Action," walks the reader through three case studies to demonstrate how CSS can be applied to convert a traditional HTML rendition to one that is controlled by CSS. The examples Meyer uses are a simple home page, a database-driven site, and a magazine article.

The book ends with four appendices and an index. One appendix that seems particularly useful is titled "CSS Support Chart." The author uses a chart to list all of the CSS attributes in rows and the various browsers in columns subdivided by operating system. The chart indicates how well an attribute is supported by a browser by showing a "yes," "no," "partial," "buggy," or "quirky" in the browser column that aligns with an attribute row. The browsers included on this chart for Windows are: Netscape 4; Internet Explorer 3, 4, and 5; and Opera 3. For Macintosh, the list includes: Netscape 4 as well as Internet Explorer 3, 4, and 5. The chart also contains references to the section in the book that discusses the attribute.

I found this book to be particularly well written and I thought the author did an excellent job balancing practical application with theoretical content. There are a whole lot of aspects to HTML that I had never thought about before, but upon reading this book I found myself thinking, "so that is how that works." I would recommend this book to anyone who does a significant amount of publishing to the Web.

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REVIEW OF: Nathan J. Muller. Desktop Encyclopedia of Telecommunications (2nd ed.). (2000). New York: McGraw-Hill.

By Jennifer Weintraub

Encompassing electrical engineering, management, and computer science, telecommunications is an increasingly popular and significant subject in today's world. The Desktop Encyclopedia of Telecommunications by Nathan Muller is a good basic reference in the field for beginning and intermediate audiences. This book would be a worthy addition to any library, public, private, or special, particularly because there are an increasing number of non-specialists interested in computers and networks.

This reference work excels at providing information relevant for both generalists and specialists. The author's aim is to provide "nontechnical professionals with the essential knowledge required to succeed in the dynamic, fast growing telecommunications industry" (page xxxviii). There is enough basic information to educate the casual student of telecommunications and enough detail to be useful to those who have some technical expertise.

This book is a welcome addition to the small collection of reference works in the telecommunications field. The 18-volume Froelich-Kent Encyclopedia of Telecommunications began publication in 1991. It differs significantly from Muller's book. Each entry is written by a different author, usually a scholar in the field, and there are far fewer entries but longer ones. In addition, at \$3510, that set is too expensive for all but the most comprehensive scientific libraries. Another work, the Data and Communications Dictionary, edited by Julie Peterson, is more up to date, having been published in 1999. However, it is very much a dictionary, consisting of many short entries, including terms in both the computer sciences and telecommunications. It is a comprehensive but different kind of reference book, more suitable for ready reference. Muller's Desktop Encyclopedia of Telecommunications is unique in the field and falls directly between a dictionary and an extensive encyclopedia.

The content of the book reflects its wide audience. There are extensive entries on all technical topics. Other entries cover management concepts that put the technical information into the context of the wider business world. This means there are long entries on specific technical topics such as "Infrared Networking," complete with flowcharts and diagrams, general concepts like "Network Security," and managerial concepts such as "Outsourcing" and how it pertains to the telecommunications industry. There are entries on the "Telephone" and on "Intranets." The breadth of the book is wide and deep at the same time. Entries emphasize networking and data, with less information on computer technology for its own sake. Entries often include illustrations, such as diagrams of specific kinds of connections, in a flowchart type design, or screen shots. There are also tables and figures, numbered consecutively in each chapter. Each chapter corresponds to a letter in the alphabet. Each entry contains "see also" terms for cross-referencing.

While all entries are alphabetical, there are useful aids for finding correct entries. There is an appendix that lists many acronyms in the telecommunications field. The book ends with a good index, useful for finding words or subheadings in an entry.

The Desktop Encyclopedia possesses some minor flaws, primarily in the book design. The layout is not very clear. Upon opening the book to any given page, it is difficult to tell if the section appearing is a subsection or its own entry, based on the typeface of each subheading. The entries are noted in the inner margin, making it difficult to flip through the book alphabetically to find an entry. In addition, this reference work would benefit from a short list of further readings in the field, or works consulted to create this book in order to help the novice student of telecommunications.

Nevertheless, the Desktop Encyclopedia of Telecommunications does indeed fulfill its back advertisement in providing "explanations, not just definitions." In the increasingly complicated field of telecommunications, this is a relatively inexpensive basic reference work on the subject that would be a good addition to many collections.

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