
Book Reviews

Morris, Anne and Dyer, Hilary HUMAN ASPECTS OF LIBRARY AUTOMATION Aldershot, Gower. Second edition 1998. 400 pages, hardback, 24 cms. ISBN 0 566 07504 0. Price: £55.

The introduction, or upgrading of computer facilities in a library, or any workplace, is not simply about the technical aspects of installing hardware or software. It is about managing change. The organisation which ignores the ways in which staff will be affected by such change does so at its peril. If staff are not involved in the selection process or fully informed about the installation or operation of a new system, the effectiveness of the expensive new technology may be reduced.

In this substantial text - showing a one-third increase over the 1990 edition - the authors cover many different aspects of human/computer interaction. They note that much of the literature concentrates on the technical aspects of library automation, with little attention given to human factors. They have wisely decided to start from first principles and to give thorough coverage of the topic whilst noting the impossibility of being comprehensive or up-to-date.

The authors' starting point is the way humans process information, the factors affecting such processing (motivation, perception, memory) and variations in physical characteristics. In an ideal world both system designers and system managers would take all these into account. After this brief introduction the second edition of the book deals with health and safety matters including the legal aspects. Separate chapters deal with musculoskeletal and postural problems, stress and reproductive hazards and vision problems. In each case, contributing factors are indicated and appropriate legislation (mainly UK or European) is cited. There are not always easy answers to the problems in this section but an awareness of the current situation can be beneficial. For example,

knowing that VDU users read faster and become less tired when using high resolution monitors may affect both hardware purchase and the way in which software is set up.

Morris and Dyer devote three sections, comprising about one quarter of the book, to workplace design. Firstly, they look at the components of a workstation - chair, desk, VDU screen, keyboard, mouse and so on. Then environmental factors (lighting, noise, heating and ventilation) are considered. Finally, the authors look at the process of designing a workstation. One chapter provides guidelines for specific types of workstation including the issue counter.

Moving on from mainly physical factors, six chapters deal with different aspects of the human/computer interface including software design, screen layout and the evaluation process. A section on interaction with the user, covering topics such as error messages and response time is particularly valuable to anyone evaluating software. A full chapter is devoted to software evaluation but, of necessity, only briefly. The penultimate section considers job design which is another topic often ignored when new systems are being implemented. Yet implementation is an opportunity to examine both the structure of staffing in the library and the control of individual jobs. The closing chapters are concerned with technological change and training, the latter of great importance - but often neglected - in the implementation process.

The layout of the book is clear with much use made of section and paragraph headings and bullet points. Tables, diagrams and photographs are used throughout. A list of relevant www0 sites and useful addresses is provided. There is a substantial list of references and both a subject index and index to authors cited.

Wisely, given on-going research and changing legislation, the authors do not claim comprehensiveness. There can be no doubt, however, that all bar the purely technical aspects receive some attention within the book. Library automation systems have become increasingly complex, and in recent years the move to a

networked environment, often client-server, has contributed to this complexity. It is understandable, then, that systems staff spend so much time focusing on the purely technical aspects such as PC specifications and comms. software. The authors clearly indicate that such matters are the tip of the implementation iceberg and that what lies beneath the surface is equally important. Implementation or upgrading a system is a golden opportunity to re-examine the library's practices and procedures and the environment in which they are carried out. Staff charged with implementing or upgrading a library system should acquire a copy of this book at a very early stage in the implementation process.

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**Fecko, Mary Beth ELECTRONIC
RESOURCES: ACCESS AND ISSUES**

London, Bowker Saur. 1997. 148 pages,
hardback, 22 cms. ISBN 1 85739 065 2. Price:
£30.

This is a handy book for busy practitioners and for students trying to get a quick overall picture of electronic resources in the USA and UK, and their recent impact on information and library services. In four clearly organised chapters it discusses how electronic resources (above all, the Internet and the World Wide Web) took off in the 1990s, what we find on the Internet (e-mail, bulletin boards, FTP, browsers, mark-up languages, search engines), electronic publishing (books, journals, online publishing) and document delivery services, and finally interactive multimedia and virtual/digital libraries.

It is a business-like survey of these things, providing definitions and descriptions, referring readers on to other discussions and URLs for further investigation on the internet itself. There is a long bibliography focused in the nature of things on material published around 1995. A

glossary helps with definitions and proper names eg InterNIC, MUD, Z39.50 and there is an index. There are some 35 reproductions of screen displays. Fecko is Head of Special Formats/Copy Cataloguing at Rutgers University, New Jersey. Advanced title information announced this work as having two authors, Fecko and Robert T. Warwick.

The main challenge for any work like this is covering a field which changes fast. Inevitably, it is a snapshot of the time of writing (about 1996), a digest of writing up to that time (about 1994/95), and, being an introductory text, it will satisfy newcomers but frustrate insiders who know what's happened since - and that's quite a lot. Much of the factual information clearly brings together in a neat order material available - in printed and electronic form - elsewhere, especially at the numerous URLs cited as sources and follow-ups. So we travel through domain names and e-mail, listservs and gopher and Mosaic, HTML and Alta Vista.

Helping us along are quotations and paraphrases and summaries of writers in/on mainly US and UK journals and websites. Electronic publishing picks up e-journals like *LIBRES* and developments like Academic press' *APPEAL* and Elsevier's *TULIP*, document delivery services such as JSTOR and UnCover, and interactive multimedia such as Grolier Interactive. Fecko provides a tourist guide, too, to virtual and digital libraries - the first she says in many places and the second essentially in one, and we visit Ames Public Library in Iowa, the Global Campus Project, ELINOR at De Montfort University and some of the participants in the US Digital Library Initiative.

For their time these are surely chosen as good exemplars of electronic resources in action. Since then things have moved on apace. Up-to-date readers will go to current discussion - not just in academic journals but trade ones too where some of the liveliest discussion takes place - and to the Internet itself. Developments in the UK eLib Projects and public library networking under EARL, let alone electronic access systems like ACORN, electronic copyright management

systems and their implications, and developments elsewhere in the world eg in Europe indicate just what the reader might find.

Of interest and value, too, for an information practitioner is the author's ongoing thread of discussion on access and issues: electronic resources have changed reference services and products, collection development, cataloguing, acquisition and archiving, and present challenges of access, security, copyright and disintermediation (where clients go straight to the information, not through libraries). Particularly useful is a discussion of costs and benefits where print and electronic parallel dissemination are concerned.

This is, then, a snapshot of yesterday which gives the reader an insight into the challenges of tomorrow. To get, read, move through and on; to buy and use now because by late 1999 it will be ancient history.

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