BOOK REVIEWS

Public Microcomputing: Facilities and Usage in Public Libraries. S. D. ROBERTSON. Pacific Information, Studio City, CA (1986) 102 pp. $24.95. ISBN 0-913203-16-5.

Since there have been so few books written about public access micros, it is always fun and noteworthy when a new one makes its debut. Robertson's new volume is important and different on several counts; he attempts to compile and to make some sense out of statistical and empirical data from a number of public access projects as well as to draw some general conclusions and guidelines. He also includes an extensive and quite useful bibliography. In addition, the results and analysis of an original survey are included. The survey form is attached along with some notes on methods.

Public access is defined as the public library use of microcomputers by patrons, whether for educational or entertainment purposes. The first major chapter, a look at the past decade of public access library microcomputing efforts, presents a good review of the literature. Anyone who has kept up with public access will feel right at home, since many of the major projects and documented efforts are discussed. There are some "User and Use Data" provided from these projects, as taken from the literature.

Newcomers to public access must be somewhat in awe of all the things that librarians have tried with the public and micros: electronic bulletin boards, reading programs, circulation of hardware and software, videogames, in-house use, and programs aimed specifically at adults. However, the author attempts to show that solid information about users and trends is lacking. This provides the justification for the material presented in the rest of the book.

In order to analyze use patterns, the author creates an analytical framework that consists of a number of variables that are grouped into four component categories: operator issues, hardware factors, software factors, documentation, and training. Each of these areas is subsequently broken into smaller units (e.g., operator issues translates into training, use pattern, and age). Chapter 4 reproduces the survey that takes these areas into account. Some comments are made about the methodology, testing of the initial survey, and response rate. Most important, this was a patron survey; no one went in and asked the librarian to fill in what he or she thought the patrons were doing.

The actual results of the survey are reported in Chapter 5: "Study of Existing Microcomputer Facilities — Results." Although there is not the space, and it is not appropriate to repeat all of the results here, some findings can be given. The study reports on three survey sites, all in California (Burbank Public Library, Simi Valley Library, and Thousand Oaks Library), each with over 90% response rate. Average number of uses or visits to a computer site per month (per patron) was 5.92. Age groups among sites was markedly different; although one had even distribution among ages (40% over age 40 and 64.4% over 18 years of age), the other two sites had large majorities of 70% to 80% under 18 years of age.

Based on his literature review and the results of his survey, Robertson concludes with a chapter on how to go about establishing a microcomputer center. Presumably, the emphasis is now on how to do it right, since he has scientifically analyzed what's been going on. However, in this regard he states little that has not already been exhausted in the literature. This is not intended as a criticism, as it must sound, but as a compliment to the many public access microcomputer librarians that have been hard at work for the past 10 years. Each library is different, so each must pick and choose public access services according to their clientele, budget, staff, and disposition, even if that sometimes means no public access at all. These differences are just what has been reported in the literature.

Finally, the suggestions and guidelines are a bit brief, especially if they are all that one is armed with when setting up shop. But since I don't think that Robertson intended them to be anyone's sole guide (hence his excellent bibliography and additional resources list), it is an excellent place to start.

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Library Education and Professional Issues; A Handbook for Library Management. D. F. KOHL. ABC-Clio, Santa Barbara, CA (1986) xxv + 274 pp. $35.00. ISBN-0-87436-436-1.

This book is the sixth in a series of handbooks for library managers, which attempts to summarize pertinent research in areas of concern to those with management responsibility. This particular vol-

ume may be of greater use to those in the field of library and information science education than to on-the-job managers.

The first part of the book focuses on library education and, among other things, reveals how little is really known about it in any broad sense. Much of the research reported is based on experiences at a single institution or from a limited sample, clearly leaving the impression that research on library education has been very limited and can't be generalized very far. The scope of this section is certainly appropriate, covering as it does 48 headings arranged in alphabetical order.

The second and longer section of the work relates to professional issues. One could quarrel with the selection here (e.g., is bibliometrics a professional issue or a research method?). There is extensive coverage of gender issues and career issues but the exclusion of ongoing and persistent issues such as access to information or intellectual freedom tends to belie the title. One who turned to this section for a systematic exploration of the basic and ongoing issues in the field would be either misled or disappointed. Nevertheless, the treatment of the issues presented is valuable.

Administrators who want a single volume to tell them what is known or not known about the problems they face might find the work less than satisfying. On the other hand, library educators would find it extremely valuable. It should end the common doctoral student complaint, "I can't find any topic to write about," for it reveals a wealth of un- and underresearched topics.

These few criticisms aside, the concept of the volume and the series is very valuable for the field. It is extremely useful to have these research summaries pulled together for the guidance of users. Hopefully, in 5 to 10 years, when this needs to be done again, enough research will have occurred on these two topics to demand separate volumes.

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Business and Economics Databases Online: Environmental Scanning with a Personal Computer. C. J. POPOVICH. Libraries Unlimited, Littleton, CO (1987) xviii + 276 pp. $35.00 (U.S.; $42.00 elsewhere). ISBN 0-87287-454-0.

Environmental scanning is a technique, which, according to the author of this book, is now widely used by corporations for assessing the business and technological environment in which they operate. How then, are such corporations to assess this environment and thereby make better strategic decisions? Clearly the use of online databases is a valuable tool.

On this premise, the author proceeds to explain personal computer hardware and software, as well as two major online vendors (DIALOG and I.P. Sharp). He follows with a series of model searches, some of which involve downloading data onto the PC and analyzing it using Lotus 1-2-3. In principle, the instructions could be followed by either a librarian/information officer or, indeed, an end user.

The problem with such a book is its failure to offer the reader any overview of the potential sources of information, or of the various ways information can be accessed. A reader not owning an IBM PC, Smartcom II telecommunications software, or Lotus 1-2-3 will find the detailed and lengthy instructions on how to set up the software or download data meaningless. Even those fortunate enough to already own this hardware and software are not made aware of the wealth of alternatives to DIALOG or I.P. Sharp. Indeed, some of the excellent databases available through these two hosts receive no mention at all.

The book is not a textbook of sources for environmental scanning, or of online searching for business databases. At best, it is a workbook to be used by students or other end users planning their first online searches using unfamiliar equipment and software. In this regard, the book serves some purpose, particularly by helping to explore the applications of the user-unfriendly softwares employed by I.P. Sharp. However, no clues on how to deal with error messages from either host are provided.

It is clear from my comments that reliance on this book alone would lead the reader to conclude—incorrectly—that all that is needed to be known has been described.

The book can only be recommended, therefore, as a workbook accompanied by lectures or other sources to put the very restricted and detailed picture provided by it into a proper perspective.

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