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Review of Technology for the Rest of Us: a Primer on Computer Technologies for the Low-tech Librarian

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TECHNOLOGY FOR THE REST OF US: A PRIMER ON COMPUTER
TECHNOLOGIES FOR THE LOW-TECH LIBRARIAN. Nancy Courtney, Ed.
Westport, CN: Libraries Unlimited, 2005, ISBN 1-59158-233-4.

This work began as an LSTA-funded seminar "Technology for the Rest of Us:
What Every Librarian Should Understand about the Technologies That Affect Us" which
I attended in Columbus, Ohio, on May 24-27, 2004. If I recall correctly, that seminar
included about eight of the eleven topics covered here. Clearly, by identifying myself as
one of the attendees, I am admitting to the fact that I belong to the classification, "low-
tech" librarian. How can that be? I learned to use OCLC for cataloging, took a
programming class, attended numerous computer-training sessions, and automated my
acquisitions department using dBase, Paradox, and vendor-supplied software before it
moved to an ILS module! Yet, here I am having attended this seminar and now, having
read this work, filled anew with awe at all of the things that librarians and our technical
allies do today.

The book begins with a basic overview primarily of how the hardware's software
works. Robert Molyneux, Wilfred Drew, Jr., and Mark Cain cover this area, respectively,
in the first three chapters: computer networks, wireless networks, and security issues. I
group these three topics together because I think that most libraries have systems
librarians or access to computer technicians to handle this work. There are still plenty of
challenges in this area such as how to make the right hardware decisions and prevent
cybertheft. These three chapters do a good job of refreshing librarians' knowledge of
these concerns. Chapter 10, Adaptive Technologies by Jerry Hensley, also deals with
hardware and software—designed to improve assess to information and computer tools
for those end users with special needs. For those libraries that have not invested in some

adaptive technology, this chapter will help you understand the possibilities and get you started.

The remaining seven chapters cover topics ranging from OpenURL, RFID, blogs and RSS, XML, Open Archives Initiative (OAI) and metadata harvesting, to institutional repositories and the creation of digital files. The authors include Walt Crawford, Eric H. Schnell, Darlene Fichter, H. Fran Cervone, Art Rhyno, Sarah L. Shreeves, Charly Bauer, Samantha K. Hastings, and Elise C. Lewis.

If only one of these topics is unknown to you, then this book is worth the price. If several are known, but a little fuzzy, then this book is absolutely worth the price and the time to read it. Why? The content, although you may not understand all of it, is presented as simply as possible and is very readable. The text is filled with references to additional readings including books, articles, and web sites. Additionally, there are many illustrations and examples to illustrate complex information. And, the work concludes with a very useful Selected Bibliography by Kathleen M. Webb and a wonderful Glossary by Frances Rice that will surely help you understand the new language that is spoken in today's libraries.

Finally, when finished, I suspect that every reader will be asking some of the following questions at staff meetings. "Do we need an Open URL resolver?" "Would our patrons benefit from a library news blog?" "Should library news be offered as an RSS?" "Does our institution create enough research for us to make it available in an institutional repository?" "Do we provide adequate adaptive technologies for our users?" "Should we replace our IP authentication with a virtual private network?" You may still

not know HOW to do all of these things, but at least you'll be able to take part in the decision-making intelligently.

Recommended!

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