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Review of Copyright in Cyberspace: Questions and Answers for Librarians

Glenda A. Thornton
Cleveland State University, g.thornton@csuohio.edu

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COPYRIGHT IN CYBERSPACE: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR LIBRARIANS.
Gretchen McCord Hoffmann. *New York: Neal-Schuman Publishers, Inc., 2001. ISBN 1-55570-410-7. 264 pp.*

This is a book that every librarian should read, from interlibrary loan librarian, to reference librarian, to web designer, to library director. Up until recently, for many of us, copyright meant that we needed to put notices on our copy machines, follow the "guideline of five" for interlibrary loan borrowing, and make sure that we removed all photocopies from our reserve systems each semester. Ah, for the good old days! With the advent of computer technology and more specifically, the Internet, nothing is simple anymore and it is the wise director who ensures that someone on the staff is paying attention to the rapidly evolving copyright law—and most likely that person should be the director!

Gretchen M. Hoffmann has written an extremely readable and excellent book for this very purpose. The librarian with only a basic knowledge of copyright and a realization that things have changed, can utilize Hoffmann's book to gain a fundamental understanding of the history, purpose, and importance of copyright. Then, upon this excellent foundation, Hoffman goes on to explain how the workings of the Internet and computers (in case the reader does not know) have resulted in so many recent legislative changes and updates to the basic copyright law. This constitutes the first part of this work.

In Part II, Hoffmann gets down to the business of explaining how copyright laws could now affect almost all librarians because of the very nature of the work librarians are doing with technology. I say, "could now affect" as it is still very unclear as to what all of the legislation really means when applied to specific situations, and there is not enough case law yet, for anyone to have a clear picture. For example, to view someone's website, which has been made freely available on the Web, requires the viewer to "make a copy"—is this an infringement of

copyright? Of course not, you say. However, according to Hoffmann, “Even if our courts decide that a license to browse is implied by making information available on the Web, some cyberspace lawyers have argued that serious copyright implications still exist simply because of the potential of infringing copyrights via browsing” (p. 71). Hoffmann’s solution—librarians should get involved “at higher government levels to ensure that an ‘exclusive right to read’ is not created, even if completely unintentionally” (p. 72).

Part III of this work, “Specific Library Applications” gets back to a discussion of most of the basic things that libraries do. This section discusses the library as an Internet access provider, possible liabilities, and what a library can do for protection. Additionally, it brings us up-to-date on interlibrary loan, electronic reserve systems, class-based course pages, library instruction, and distance education. Hoffmann ends the section by urging librarians to take a stand for libraries and library users.

The final section of the book is a “sourcebox” of original documents including excerpts from the Copyright Act of 1976, a variety of guidelines from the Conference on Fair Use, and statements from the American Library Association. The author provides the final four sources herself. In these she outlines how a librarian can fulfill his or her professional responsibility to represent the needs of the library and its users, and she provides lists of organizations, publications, and web pages that would be useful in this process.

To sum up, this is an outstanding work and one that should be on the personal bookshelf of every library director, at the very least. It could easily be a textbook for a library school course in copyright issue and it should be in all library school collections. It is well indexed and the table of contents is outstanding. This reviewer’s only negative comment is the overuse,

perhaps exclusive use, of the feminine pronouns, “she” and “her” which were very annoying to this reader. Highly recommended.

Glenda A. Thornton
Director
Cleveland State University
Cleveland, Ohio