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Review of Computers in Libraries: An Introduction for Library Technicians

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COMPUTERS IN LIBRARIES: AN INTRODUCTION FOR LIBRARY TECHNICIANS

COMPUTERS IN LIBRARIES: AN INTRODUCTION FOR LIBRARY TECHNICIANS.
Katie Wilson. *New York: Haworth Press, 2006, 194 pp., ISBN 978-0-7890-2151-9, pbk.*

At first glance, this doesn't look like a particularly lovable book. Open it, and the
prospect grows even gloomier – each chapter begins with a glossary of technical terms and ends
with a list of review questions. You wonder, what did library technicians ever do to deserve
such harsh treatment? But soldier on, and you'll find that Katie Wilson's new book is a little
treasure for anyone who is interested in how modern libraries work.

The first chapter is an obligatory introduction to computers. Many very thick books
describe the inner workings of computers in great detail, but Wilson is content to touch on the
basics in just a few pages. Her writing is clear, concise, and conversational in tone, e.g., "CRT
monitors are fatter, like a TV set." It's impossible to write about computers without using some
technical jargon, but Wilson keeps it to a minimum, and of course that context-specific glossary
of technical terms is always right under the reader's nose.

A similarly brief introduction to the Internet follows as chapter two. Then things get
more interesting, as library-specific functions are addressed. Wilson says, "A library collection
begins with acquisitions, and almost every step in this process involves the use of computers."
She might just as well have said that almost every step in any library process involves the use of
computers. The computers themselves, however, are not the real stars of the book. Instead, the
focus is on the various tasks that library workers regularly undertake in technical services,
resource sharing, systems, circulation, and reference departments. Wilson succinctly describes
vendor records, approval plans, ordering and receiving, claiming, fiscal close, the MARC record,
AACR2, authority records, load profiles, subject cataloging, pocket labels, item records, patron
records, barcodes, RFID, loan rules, holds, inventory, course reserves, binding, routing, indexes,

federated searches, interlibrary loan, consortial lending, etc. Interested in brief lessons in Boolean operators, writing HTML, and understanding XML? Those are included too. Helpful illustrations—screen shots, figures, and tables — are interspersed throughout. Granted, there isn't great depth, but the scope is vast. Wilson rarely bogs down while neatly hitting the main points, and she includes specific descriptions of processes rather than vague generalities. The book somewhat resembles an exam booklet for the question, "What do you know about how libraries operate?" Katie Wilson knows a lot.

So who would read such a book? According to the preface, the audience is "both practicing and new library technicians and library assistants," but the author goes on to say, "I hope this book is read by people who want to find out about how computer technology operates in libraries and information centers and what happens behind the library circulation desk or self-check machine." It may be a bit of a stretch to think that library patrons will line up in significant numbers to read *Computers in Libraries*. Yet this fine overview of the modern, technology-driven library deserves to be read by administrators, by trustees, by library science students, and by librarians.

The book includes a bibliography and index.

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