

**Sorrow, Barbara Head and Betty S. Lumpkin. *CD-ROM for Librarians and Educators: A Resource Guide to Over 300 Instructional Programs*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc. 1993. 162pp.**

For many years I have been teaching CD-ROM technology and application courses for school librarians, teachers and curriculum specialists, and I am always eager to hear from others concerning their recommendations and experiences. I've spent considerable time with school librarians, and I have just finished a workshop seminar dedicated to multimedia CD-ROM sources for elementary and high school libraries. Thus, I am not a total stranger to this area.

I do not, as a rule, write book reviews. This time I have to make an exception. School librarians could better use their money elsewhere than spend it on this book. The subtitle promises to be a "resource guide to more than 300 instructional programs." I do not think there are more than a dozen or so instructional programs represented in this entire publication. The titles mentioned are mostly reference sources for CD-ROM, not educational programs.

This is a minor criticism compared to the cover's claim that, "Each program's listing includes full information and a review." Nothing could be further from the truth. The full information, even by the author's definition, should include title, producer, format, subject, price, grade level, hardware, software, distributor and description. While the first six elements are more or less available, the hardware and software requirements are often glossed over with a "see distributor" comment. To use the word "review" for publicity blurbs taken from catalogs is an insult to anyone who has ever written a review. I can only be happy that the authors did not use as a source the DAK catalog that pitches super discounted blow-dryers, bath mats and CD-ROMs in a style more familiar to QVC home shoppers.

The "reviews" are apparently taken without editing from free catalogs from CD-ROM distributors (EBSCO, Bureau of Electronic Publishing, Updata) reiterating their sales pitch as, for example, in the World Fact

Book disc: "Whether you're planning a coup in a South American dictatorship or just checking the terrain in Tehran for a tete-a-tete, the CIA has the information you need." If the original source catalog was wordy about a certain title, so is this book. Sophisticated Santa Fe is a good example. On the other hand, the entry under Toolworks '92 Encyclopedia merely says "illustrated encyclopedia updated for 1992." It would have been nice to mention that this is the Grolier Encyclopedia for bundle sales, and is a multimedia—not simply illustrated—encyclopedia.

I wonder how much time the authors spent with even a small fraction of these databases? Anyone could have compiled this listing. I found nothing in this book that confirmed the claim that "each entry has been carefully reviewed for objectivity, appeal to students, educational content, timeliness, format, and factual credibility."

The database section is the worst section. The bibliography is good and the distributors' directory useful, though some key players, such as SilverPlatter, are omitted. It is difficult to understand why the authors devote two and a half pages to LCD projection panels in the introduction, but fail to mention the essential issue of a minimum or recommended configuration for text-only and multimedia databases.

The index is amateurish, although it is required to locate database categories and individual titles. When you see the names Margaret Thatcher, Bill Cosby and Michael Jordan in the index, you might assume that they are quoted with regard to CD-ROM. Brace yourself—they are in the index because they are examples of how to type in personal names. When I needed to find something using the index, it simply didn't work. The index entry for "multimedia" refers the reader to page 43, where there is no mention of multimedia. True, I did not look up every index term, so the rest may be perfect. Considering the 1993 publication year, multimedia titles are very under-represented.

Even essential text-only databases are often ignored, such as the CD-ROM version of World Book Encyclopedia, or the entire NewsBank

family (except for a passing mention on page 9), and the non-SilverPlatter versions of some databases like ERIC. Inclusions (such as BIOSIS) are sometimes equally puzzling, and the lesson plans touted in the preface will provide little help for a teacher. A good librarian in his or her worst moment could ad-lib much better.

The proliferation of CD-ROMs has created an unnerving tendency. All publishers want to publish a book, or at least some reviews or articles in their magazines. This leads to unbelievably low-quality publications. Enthusiastic but naive reviews by people who have looked briefly at two CD-ROM databases are published. And these reviewers are thus immediately labeled experts. Such publications appear all too frequently and do users a disservice. This book promises far more than it delivers. It is primarily a poor compilation of publicity blurbs that barely deserve publication. It is strongly *not* recommended.

—Péter Jacsó  
Associate Professor  
Graduate School of Library &  
Information Science  
Rosary College

To order contact McFarland & Company, Inc., Highway 88, Box 611, Jefferson, NC 28640. ISBN 0-89950-800-6. Softcover. \$24.95.



**Larijani, L. Casey. *The Virtual Reality Primer*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994. 274pp.**

*The Virtual Reality Primer* is a significant addition to the growing number of introductory books about virtual reality (VR). The author has done exhaustive research. She summarizes current VR research and applications in a way a novice can easily understand, while the more experienced reader can see how knowledgeable she is about her subject. Furthermore, Casey is an extraordinarily good writer. In sum, it is not the author's fault that I can only give this book a rating of two and a half logos.

What might otherwise be considered an excellent book is hampered by poor illustrations and graphic design. Most