

BOOK REVIEWS

ANTELMAN, KRISTIN, ED. **Database-Driven Websites**. Binghamton, NY: The Haworth Information Press, 2002. 133 p. Softcover, \$24.95. ISBN: 0-7890-1739-3. Hardcover, \$39.95. ISBN: 0-7890-1738-5. ☺

The increasing importance of the virtual library carries with it the necessity of constructing a Website that is well organized, easy to use, and rich in content. However that may be, it does not take a jeweler's eye to detect that library Websites are often deeply flawed. The advent of library portals promises to significantly improve and simplify these sites, but a corollary development must occur alongside such a portal: the creation of Websites that are not dependent on hundreds, even thousands, of static HTML pages. Database-driven Websites obviate the need for manually coding each of the possibly thousands of pages comprising a site. Instead, data are entered once into a database, which then dynamically creates appropriate pages based on the search terms entered by the user.

Websites based on static HTML pages require skilled coders not only for the initial creation of the pages but also for their revision when the content or URLs change. Processing and storing all these pages taxes even the most robust server. Websites that are database-driven usually require only a few files to serve as templates, which are then populated with content taken from the database. Knowledge of HTML is not needed to add data into the database, thereby eliminating the need for an ever-increasing number of coders on the library staff. But perhaps the greatest benefit of a database-driven Website is that its implementation then makes possible a library portal.

Database-Driven Websites is a compilation of articles describing how librarians have used the database approach to improve access to the resources and services available on their Websites. The editor, Kristin Antelman, has long advocated such an approach and her article "Getting out of the HTML Business: The

Database-Driven Website Solution" [1] is required reading for librarians wishing to boost the usefulness and efficiency of their Websites.

The book concentrates throughout on specific applications of the database approach. Each article is written by a different author or authors, and each, except for the shared theme, is a discrete entity that refers neither to the articles before nor after it. Antelman's brief and rather perfunctory preface does not succeed in unifying these articles or in bringing them together so that the reader feels that he or she is reading a book rather than a collection of journal articles. In fact, the articles appear, in exactly the same form, in volume 7, number 1/2, of *Internet Reference Services Quarterly*. The book would have greatly benefited from a longer preface that introduces the reader to certain general or overarching characteristics common to all database-driven Websites. Antelman's "Getting out of the HTML Business" could have served this purpose. In the absence of such an introduction, the reader is immediately *in media res*, and the succession of very specific applications the authors describe makes it difficult for the reader to construct a set of general principles about the subject. In the case of someone with no previous knowledge of database-driven Websites, these principles are arrived at only after the most arduous work. That this effort is needed at all is not surprising since the editor leaves the reader entirely to his or her own devices. The lack of a conclusion summarizing the lessons learned, the strengths and weaknesses of the approach, and the commonalities and peculiarities is also sorely missed. In brief, then, this is not a book for neophytes.

For the reader already familiar with the topic, the book might prove stimulating and helpful. The articles cover a variety of applications that are certain to suggest beguiling alternatives to an approach based on static HTML pages. Of special interest in this time of decreasing budgets are several articles that describe database-driven

resources constructed using free software (Thomas McMillan Grant Bennett's "Appalachian State University Libraries 'Ask a Librarian'" and Mary Platt's "Databases to the Web: From Static to Dynamic on the Express") or by repurposing an easy to use and relatively inexpensive bibliographic citation program (Ann Koopman's "Bibliographic Citation Management Software for Web Applications").

ColdFusion is the program of choice for many librarians who have switched to a database-driven approach; its role in converting to a complex portal of health information resources is described by Brian Westra ("Healthlinks: A Cold Fusion Application") and by Karen Hein and Marc Davis ("The Research Wizard: An Innovative Web Application"). The use of database-driven Web resources as a means of offering new services is suggested by Karen Underhill and Bruce Palmer's article on digital archives ("Archival Content Anywhere @ Anytime") and by Kristine Ogilvie and John Jewell's article on creating a portal to the state of California's Web resources ("Partnering to Build a State Portal: My California").

Database-Driven Websites is not the first book on the subject that a novice reader should read. Such a book would include an introduction that prepares the reader for what is to follow and that primes his or her understanding, and it would not only offer transitional remarks to facilitate moving from one chapter to the next and foster a sense of unity or wholeness, but also provide a conclusion that summarizes and makes sense of what has gone before. For the reader who is already fairly proficient in this area, the purchase of this book may spare him or her the minor inconvenience of tracking down volume 7, number 1/2 of *Internet Reference Services Quarterly*.

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BRADLEY, PHIL. **Internet Power Searching: The Advanced Manual.** 2nd ed. New York, NY: Neal-Schuman Publishers in association with Library Association Publishing, London, U.K., 2002. 258 p. \$45.00. ISBN 1-55570-447-6. ©

With the plethora of Internet reference guides, handbooks, and manuals available, including those directed toward "dummies" or "complete idiots," and others tailored toward physicians, nurses, pharmacists, and others in health-related fields, why consider Phil Bradley's second edition of his "advanced" manual for a hospital or medical library collection? To be sure, the first edition sold relatively well; OCLC indicates that nearly a thousand libraries catalogued it, and, even more probably, purchased it for internal staff use. His credentials are solid. He spent eight years at SilverPlatter, part of his tenure there as director of training. He has published extensively on topics related to the Internet and to the creation and promotion of Websites, and according to his personal site, "its [sic] a sad (but true) fact that [he] always wanted to be a librarian" (www.philb.com). He knows how to present his material, which he does in an informal, non-threatening style in this volume. He anticipates that pages filled to the margins with text might overwhelm the novice, so they are printed with generous sidebars containing intermittent amusing, but often undocumented "facts" (*MP3audiobooks.com was bought for \$8 million in February 2000, and currently holds the record for the most expensive purchase of a domain name, 91*) or helpful hints (*Always check to see if a search engine offers help screens—not all do, but they can be very useful and provide valuable tips on search techniques, 45*).

Although the author states that the book is not exclusively geared toward information professionals, he refers to Boolean logic vs. free-text searching, truncation, and weighting criteria for ranking search results. This occurs early on in his introduction to search engines, but he fails to provide examples or direct the reader to a subsequent explanation later in the book. For the more experienced reader, the book is certainly well-organized for the "dip in" approach (xii) as well as its primary use as a basic text, one that I might have selected for teaching online searching classes in library school. As in the first edition, there are three parts, although the divisions make little intuitive sense. Why does part two, for example, entitled "Becoming an Expert Searcher" not include the useful "Forty Tips and Hints for Better and Quicker Searching" chapter that instead appears under part three, "The Future?" Rather, part two is a relatively short portion of the book and includes only two chapters, one on intelligent agents and one on Usenet newsgroups and mailing lists, while the bulk of the searching instruction can be found in the expanded part one, "Mining the Internet for Information."

This illogical broad arrangement aside, the chapters from the previous edition, as well as some new ones, are clearly labeled for those who recognize categories such as natural-language, free-text or meta search engines. Descriptions of representative search engines are provided, along with some excellent examples and screenshots, although some screens have already been revised since the shots were taken. It would be useful if one could determine immediately that a search engine is capable of supporting field searching, especially with the examples the author supplies. This reviewer remains unconvinced that a beginner will be drawn to this chapter. The Northern Lights description does not mention any costs, while the only nod to Google is its inclusion on a list of "other" free search engines.

New additions that might attract the more casual user are chapters on finding people or locating resources by media type (including cautionary notes about copyright restrictions) that proved very basic and quite helpful.

As one responsible for managing the electronic journals at our institution, this reviewer was curious to see how Bradley presented full-text resources available via the Internet. It seemed a reasonable expectation that the chapter on virtual libraries and gateways might address journals and books, since there did not appear to be any other part of the book that would do so. This chapter, however, might more aptly have been named "Website Evaluation." The author rightly assumes that the user should be able to distinguish between authoritative and questionable sites and lists some appropriate guidelines: type of domain, sponsors, currency, awards, design, ownership, and so forth. He mentions that a virtual library may contain full-text materials, but the expected comparisons of free, free-with-print, paid online, or major packages or html vs. PDF or other formats were not to be found. URLs for major "libraries" of free scholarly full-text, such as FreeMedicalJournals, FreeMedicalBooks, Highwire Press, SPARC (or other "open access initiative" sites), BioMed Central, and others did not appear, nor was there any discussion related to proxy server or remote use or the free alerting/tables of contents services numerous publishers provide. Instead, there are nearly three pages devoted to BUBL, a library and information science "virtual library" that, when examined, contained numerous broken links and a journals section whose most recent abstracts from our own MLA publication were actually from 1999 issues of *BMLA*, whose title change was not reflected. If this book were not for information professionals, then why not use more universal examples such as INFOMINE, CyberStacks, or, with the almost universal interest in health care, HealthWeb as examples of high-quality, filtered

gateways? Incredibly, the term "portal" appears nowhere.

The relatively brief part two, "Becoming an Expert Searcher," begins, oddly enough, with an overview of intelligent agents, and the author focuses on the agent performing the searches, not the human who is seeking to improve his skills. This chapter belongs either in part one or in part three, since he speculates on the future of information providers and the possible impact of intelligent agents on their careers. The only other chapter devoted to newsgroups and mailing lists may be relevant to expert searching and certainly provides practical advice on selecting, searching, signing-on and signing-off of mailing lists. The author notes the value of newsgroups to "information professionals" in one section, so it is clear whom he views as his real audience. Although Google is nearly ignored as a Website search engine earlier in the book, Google Groups, on the other hand, is featured here for its superior qualities as a newsgroup engine (the author mentions that the service was still in beta test at the time of writing in May 2001, although the book was not published in the United States until May 2002).

In part three, "The Future," Bradley attempts to "merge all the different elements into a coherent whole." He begins with concrete search examples and leads the reader through the process of defining the question and determining the best approach for finding an answer. Wisely, he advises against automatically turning to the Internet when a local reference book on the shelf might provide the information more efficiently. He then moves on to update or comment on predictions he made in his first edition. He admits he has been disappointed in the acceptance of intelligent agents and "micropayments," but his views regarding online journals and changes in scholarly publishing were, and still are, on target.

The forty tips and hints for better searching, misplaced in this sec-

tion, are practical: guessing a URL, time of day to search, and taking advantage of browser features, such as using the Find command, creating and editing bookmarks, using History, etc. The remainder of this section consists of helpful support information: URLs for a glossary, Netiquette guidelines, Internet providers, search engine reviews and comparisons, bookstores, bibliographies, and so on, including his own site at www.philb.com, and tips on antivirus software. Appendices offer the HTML code for a search engine home page, a list of country codes, and a compilation, by chapter, of all the URLs he previously listed at the end of each chapter. A glossary might have been more helpful than these ephemera, especially for the novice.

Books about searching the Internet have a very limited audience. They are outdated by the time they are published, as is this one, URLs change, Websites come and go, so even the clearest screenshots or most current Website list may prove to be of little value. This book could be useful for a library science class in which students are already familiar with basic search concepts and techniques and professional terminology. In the average library, especially a medical or hospital library, however, Internet classes tend to be of the one to two hour overview variety, and neither the content nor the format of this work lend themselves to this environment. Most users, especially those who do not enroll in classes or are using the Internet away from the library setting, would be better served by a practical Web-based tutorial or one of the many search engine comparison sites, such as the Search Engine Showdown at searchengineshowdown.com, the Search Engines Quick Guide at www.infopeople.org/search/guide.html or The Spider's Apprentice at www.monash.com/spidap.html. Those who seek more in-depth information may prefer one of the numerous Internet guides in their specific subject areas, such as *Internet Resources for Nurses* [1], *The Internet*

for Physicians [2], *The Physician's Guide to Internet Explorer* [3]. Libraries should be cautioned that Bradley's book was "published simultaneously" in Great Britain with a different title, pagination, and date [4].

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WEISMAN, ROANNE. **Own Your Health: Choosing the Best from Alternative and Conventional Medicine**. Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communications, 2003. 471 p. \$16.95. ISBN 0-7573-0011-1.Ⓜ

For those interested in alternative therapies alone or as a complement to conventional medicine, *Own Your Health* is a unique combination of inspirational stories, research facts, and the power of integrative medicine. Weisman, a medical writer, wrote the book as a testament to the alternative treatments (namely exercise, massage, and Chinese medicine) that helped her recover after a debilitating stroke. Co-author Brian Berman is an international authority on alternative medicine and founder and director of the complementary medicine program at the University of Maryland, the first university-based center of its kind in the United States focusing on research. Berman's expertise and authority will definitely

increase physician awareness of other therapeutic treatments available to patients. Berman helped establish and now directs the complementary medicine field of the International Cochrane Collaboration.

Each chapter in this book is structured to include the following: "Closer Look" sections, which include more information about certain alternative modalities; "Take Action" sections, which include health tips from experts; and for health sciences librarians and physicians interested in evidence-based medicine (EBM), "What's the Evidence?" sections, which explain which treatments work and which do not, according to published research. In addition, there are sidebars in shaded boxes, which offer assessments of both alternative and conventional treatments.

The "integrative medicine" philosophy sets the tone for this well-informed guide. "The term integrative medicine originated in the late twentieth century to describe the combination of conventional (also called "allopathic" or Western) medicine and alternative, or complementary, health practices" (p. 6). "In addition to providing the best conventional care, integrative medicine focuses on the preventive maintenance of health by attention to diet, exercise, stress management and emotional well-being" (p. 28).

Weisman presents a wide variety of case histories and describes both conventional and alternative treatments. Among the many illnesses discussed are osteoporosis, stroke, cancer, cardiovascular illness, chronic pain, spinal cord injuries and multiple chemical sensitivity (MCS). There are many alternative treatments given in-depth coverage in this volume, including: Ayurvedic medicine, acupuncture, hydrotherapy, yoga, the Alexander Technique, meditation, herbal medicine, energy healing, chiropractic and craniosacral therapy, therapeutic touch, and muscular therapy.

Own Your Health is comprehensive in its scope as it includes alternative treatments for children (including integrative approaches

to asthma) and a chapter on aging well with complementary methods. There are useful appendices, which include a glossary of alternative medicine as well as publications, organizations, resources, and Websites (this author found James Duke's database on the chemistry and uses of medicinal plants very interesting at www.ars-grin.gov/duke/).

A key factor in the recovery of each patient in this book is again the integrative philosophy: "... optimal healing occurs when *everything* affecting you as the patient is addressed. To quote the late Sir William Osler, renowned physician and teacher, 'It is more important to know what sort of patient has a disease than what sort of disease a patient has'" (p. 15). The patients in this book are described as "health explorers" or "medical pioneers" because they have the personal determination and the support of family, friends, and physicians to explore alternative methods of treatment, to "own their health."

The account of one patient with multiple myeloma and kidney failure who used meditation, Reiki healing, and acupuncture, as well as conventional cancer treatment to treat her illness, then enters remission, is truly inspiring. This patient goes on to become the first human with multiple myeloma and kidney failure to receive a double transplant.

There are many personal, inspirational stories in this reference work, which makes it an easy read. One of the most interesting frameworks for the book is the exploration of the link between factors such as lifestyle, stress, diet and exercise, and their impact on disease. An excellent example of this is the SEARCH study at the Duke Center for Integrative Medicine, which is exploring mind/body methods and the reduction of heart disease risk.

This book pays equal attention to conventional and alternative treatments. The author reminds the reader, through a series of inspirational stories, that although alternative medicine can be very bene-

ficial, recommended conventional medicine must not be ignored as a treatment for disease. Weisman illustrates this by describing one patient who ignored conventional treatments for breast cancer and the cancer unfortunately spread to her lungs.

Own Your Health shows patients and physicians that the best treatment for illness is usually a combination of alternative and conventional medicine and that neither approach should be ignored in the quest for recovery. This book definitely qualifies as a reference source in any health sciences library.

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LIPOW, ANNE GRODZINS. **The Virtual Reference Librarian's Handbook.** Berkley, CA: Library Solutions Press in association with Neal-Schuman Publishers, Inc., New York, NY, 2003. 199 p. \$85.00. ISBN:1-55570-445-X. ☺

This volume is a useful and practical guide for librarians who are contemplating offering online reference services either synchronously or asynchronously. Those who are already providing chat or are answering questions via email will also find helpful hints for marketing and evaluating their service.

In the early 1990s, Anne Grodzins Lipow, co-author of *Crossing the Internet Threshold* [1], introduced a generation of librarians to the opportunities the Internet provided. With *The Virtual Librarian's Handbook*, she provides a framework for establishing policies and making decisions about reference services in general and virtual reference service specifically. She narrowly defines virtual reference service as "live, interactive, remote service;" the virtual librarian, then, provides point-of-need, live, interactive question handling using chat and voice software that enable synchro-

nous communication with a distant client. (p. xx) This is a subject of interest to both academic and hospital librarians, as evidenced by a number of posters presented at the annual meeting of MLA in May 2003 and by the summer 2003 theme issue of *Medical Reference Services Quarterly*. This book complements the *Starting and Operating Live Virtual Reference Services: A How-To-Do-It Manual for Librarians* by Mark Meola and Sam Stormont who cite Anne Lipow's work. [2]

The three sections and eight chapters of the book offer an outline of issues to consider in deciding to implement virtual reference and include titles such as "Discover the Benefits and Confront the Problems," "Shop Wisely for Software," "Update Your Libraries Policies," and "Let the Service Sell Itself." The book is filled with figures, sample policies, and exercises to enable the reader to think about the issues raised in the context of their own library and includes examples of both good and not so good Web pages, including virtual reference links and service descriptions.

A major value added to the book is the inclusion of a CD-ROM with copies of the exercises and worksheets as well as a list of references with their URLs, where available. The CD also includes links to discussion lists the author recommends, saving a great deal of time for those just beginning to consider virtual reference. While the book itself is in a workbook format with room to write in the margins, the CD is a great tool for those who wish to keep the book intact or have multiple individuals complete the exercises. Several staff members can easily make copies of the doc-

uments, in Word format, for completion.

Chapter two, "Get Yourself in the Virtual Frame of Mind," includes an especially interesting exercise to determine "your awareness of ambiguity score" (p. 27). This exercise has a series of twelve statements and asks that each issue be rated "mostly true" or "mostly false" or "haven't thought about it." The exercise is successful in getting the reader to look at how librarians see themselves and their services in comparison to how library users might view librarians and is worth completing whether planning to offer virtual reference services or not.

Throughout the book, the author challenges the reader and points out "old thinking to discard" and "new thinking to adopt." She ably discusses the changing role of the librarian and urges an active rather than passive role in the development of services, specifically virtual reference services. Often by the time a book is published, it is outdated; this volume is timely in its content while avoiding stereotypes and implications that everything libraries have done in the past needs changing. The author "focuses on those areas of reference service that address the information and reading needs of those in the community who are finding more convenient, though perhaps not as good, alternatives to using the library." (p. xvii). She is a strong advocate for libraries and their important role in society. This book is a tool to help librarians develop and articulate a service beyond what many have previously provided.

Virtual reference services rely on virtual reference software and there are a number of products on

the market with new ones announced regularly. The book's chapter on selecting software is particularly helpful in providing checklists of issues to think through, staffing implications, costs and budgeting, and use of licensed databases to answer questions. Decisions on these issues inform the software selection, which is enabled by the presentation of a grid that can be used to evaluate each product reviewed. These tools are designed to be used in the selection of virtual reference software, but can be easily adapted for use in choosing other software.

The Virtual Reference Librarian's Handbook has many features that make it a valuable tool for libraries considering the addition of virtual reference service. The checklists, exercises, worksheets, and tips will prove useful across all types of libraries. The book is not one to add to the collection; rather it is a workbook designed to be used by practitioners in planning and implementing virtual reference services. Anyone contemplating such service will find this book very helpful in his or her deliberations.

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