

BOOK REVIEW / CRITIQUE DE LIVRE

The Extreme Searcher's Internet Handbook: A Guide for the Serious Searcher. 2nd ed. By Randolph E. Hock. Medford, N.J.: CyberAge Books, 2007. 326 pages (soft cover). ISBN 978-0-910965-76-7. CAN\$31.95.

As a former reference librarian and now Internet instructor, author Randolph Hock is obviously passionate about searching the Internet. *The Extreme Searcher's Internet Handbook: A Guide for the Serious Searcher* is written with enthusiasm and humour; the author has fun with a topic that could easily become overwhelming. Hock introduces the book assuming the reader knows the basics of computers (how to log on, what an Internet browser is, etc.). As the Introduction explains, it is meant to be a book written for researchers, writers, librarians, teachers, and others, covering what a serious user needs to know to take full advantage of Internet tools and resources.

One of the problems inherent with any book on the Internet is that it's quickly outdated, sometimes before it even reaches bookstore shelves, which is one reason I'm always hesitant to buy a book like this. The author overcomes this problem by maintaining The Extreme Searcher's Web Page at www.extremesearcher.com. The Extreme Searcher's Web Page is updated regularly to account for changing URLs and disappearing Web sites.

The book is laid out clearly and logically. Chapter 1 starts with "Basics for the Serious Searcher," covering a wide variety of important information and begins with a very brief history of the Internet. While interesting, this section could be skipped to get on with the real gems that are included later in the chapter. Although the section on developing search strategies should probably have been given its own chapter, its brief advice on breaking down your question into its basic concepts and tips for narrowing a search is well written. Next, the section on assessing the quality and authority of Web sites covers the topic well. Hock explains how to look at the Web site source, content, and authority to determine if the information is trustworthy. Finding older information using the Internet Archive (www.archive.org) is quickly discussed before Hock heads into a discussion of the Invisible Web. Some general points on American copyright are touched upon before launching into a section on citing Internet resources. The chapter ends with a discussion on keeping up-to-date with Internet resources and tools. Although each one of these sections could have been given their own chapter, the author lists informative URLs to other sites so that the reader can find more information on the topic at their leisure. There's enough information packed into this one chapter for an entire book. For those Internet users who are new to Web searching, this section should be required reading. Even experienced searchers will pick up useful tips on ways to make searching more productive. This chapter could easily be used to teach a course on Internet searching.

The next four chapters look at specific tools that can be used for searching. Chapters 2 and 3 review Web directories and portals, while chapters 4 and 5 are the parts that are going to be of most interest to those who have never tried using different search engines. Chapter 4 reviews how search engines work, discussing typical search options common to all search engines, such as searching by date or language. If you've ever wondered why Boolean searching doesn't work as you'd expect it to in your favourite search engine, you'll find the answer here. No need to memorize the different Boolean capabilities of each engine because a table of Boolean syntax for major search engines is included.

In chapter 5, Hock goes in-depth, profiling each of the most popular search engines: Google.com, Yahoo.com, Live.com, and Ask.com (formerly Ask Jeeves). A lot of space is taken up here listing the different capabilities of each search engine. There's nothing here that couldn't be found by reading a search engine's FAQ. Save yourself some time by heading to the end of the chapter where the author has created a chart listing each of the four engines' main features (Boolean searching, stemming, etc.).

Concluding the first section of the book, chapter 6 packs a huge amount of information into one chapter. Groups, newsgroups, forums, and their relatives are all discussed.

The place where this book excels as an indispensable reference text is in chapter 7, "An Internet Reference Shelf," with short descriptions of Web sites of all types (weather, maps, stock quotes, company information, etc.). This is not a chapter to be read beginning to end, but to be kept as a reference when needed.

The book ends with several chapters that discuss specialized searches. Chapter 8 describes ways to find multimedia, chapter 9 covers news resources, and chapter 10 covers finding products online—everything from online auctions to finding catalogues. Hock concludes with chapter 11, "Becoming Part of the Internet: Publishing." This includes brief information on blogging and looks quickly at "social networking" sites such as MySpace.

There is a wealth of valuable information crammed into this small book. One problem is that Hock has tried to make sure he covers everything about the Internet for everyone. The title is misleading; calling it "A Guide for the Serious Researcher" makes it a book that a beginner Web searcher is unlikely to pick up, although that's really the market it's aimed at. That being said, there's going to be something here for everyone. Experienced searchers will pick up a few tips and tricks to help make their searching more efficient, and the Internet Reference Shelf is sure to list Web sites that you weren't aware existed.

Michelle Purcell

The Ottawa Hospital – General Campus
501 Smyth Road

Ottawa, ON K1H 8L6, Canada

E-mail: mpurcell@ottawahospital.on.ca