Book Review

A Guide to the Literature of Electronic Publishing: CD-ROM, Desktop Publishing, and Electronic Mail, Books and Journals

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187 pp., £43.75   ISBN 1-55938-044-6   JAI Press, 1990

This book claims to present a comprehensive guide to the literature of electronic publishing, books, journal articles, proceedings and special reports, published in the English language between the 1940's and 1988. The information is presented in four chapters each covering a subset of the field — electronic books, journals and libraries; videotex, teletext and electronic mail; desktop publishing; optical disk. Each chapter comprises a bibliographic or descriptive essay followed by an apparently comprehensive bibliography, typically containing five to six hundred entries. A final chapter presents some conclusions, and an appendix contains a list of 76 'periodicals of value for information about electronic publishing' (not including EP-odd !).

How does one judge such a work? As always when presented with a bibliography, I first looked to see whether I figured in it. There was indeed one reference to me, but I was worried that the item cited was in fact a book review (though not described as such), and my more substantial contributions to the literature were omitted. I therefore applied the next test, looking for some of the key papers and authors. I was horrified to find that virtually none of them are present. What trust can you place in a bibliography which in the context of hypertext references Vannevar Bush but omits Ted Nelson and Doug Engelbart; which, in the context of desktop publishing does not reference Bigelow on digital typefaces? What are we to make of a treatment of electronic mail that describes it as 'closely related to Teletext' and does not mention the Internet? Can we take seriously a source book that does not include the seminal "Seybold Reports" in its list of periodicals of value? Do articles in the popular trade press, which abound in the bibliographies, really count as part of the literature of electronic publishing? I suspect that the bibliographies have been compiled by some automated scouring of on-line databases: the total absence of any critical input makes the result worthless.

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