

Book Reviews

Diane P. Janes, Editor

Canadian Internet Handbook (1995 Edition), by Jim Carroll and Rick Broadhead. Scarborough, On: Prentice-Hall Canada, Inc. ISBN 0-13-329350-5, 798 pp., \$21.95 (CND)

Reviewed by Earl R. Misanchuk

The first thing you will notice about *The Canadian Internet Handbook* (1995 edition) is that it is daunting in size - nearly 800 pages. Given the recency of the Internet, you might be surprised that there is that much information to be had about the Canadian portion of the 'Net. In case you're worried about having to read so much, however, relax. Only the first 268 pages form the body of the book; the rest is devoted to 19 different appendices. Given that, you might expect that this book would provide a very comprehensive view of the Canadian Internet, and you'd be right.

Although updated and revised following the commercially-successful 1994 edition, some of the book is bound to be obsolete by the time you read this review. Despair not, however; the 1996 version is likely on your bookstore's shelves as you read this. The authors appear to be committed to making this book as dynamically update-able as a book can be, and provides e-mail addresses to which readers can write to fill in gaps in information, offer comments and suggestions, identify errors, etc.

Before launching into a chapter-by-chapter overview of the contents, a few general comments are in order. A lot of people are talking about the Internet these days, and not everyone is using a common language (and that language which is common is liable to be laced with acronyms). Person A describes how she found this marvelous listserver about a topic that fascinates her, which allows her to have intense e-mail discussions with others across the country or around the world who share her passion. Person B describes a session in which private "chat" conversations go on in real time. Person C speaks of downloading a research paper she needed for a class she's taking. And person D talks about looking through a list of 50,000 CD's and placing an order for several, simply by typing in his name, address, and Visa number. All of them, when asked, will say that they were doing this "on the Internet". Yet

each one (assuming they had only experienced the activities described) would likely not be able to figure out how the others' activities were possible.

This illustrates the basic confusion surrounding the topic of the Internet. What is it, and how does it work? The four individuals above would give four different answers, reminiscent of the fable of the blind men and the elephant. That's the reality of the Internet today. To make matters worse - much worse - it's changing and growing so rapidly that what we know about it today may be obsolete tomorrow. That's why a book like Carroll and Broadhead's is so valuable: It gives an up-to-the-minute snapshot of today's Internet, with a glimpse of its history, and a peek at some of the possibilities of the near future. Furthermore, it does so in terms that are easily understood by the lay reader. You don't need a foundation in computing or communications to understand this book. By and large, it uses clear, common language, with detailed yet simple explanations where warranted. At the same time, it contains a good deal of more-or-less esoteric information, that would be hard to locate were it not between these two covers.

Chapter One, *Information Highways and the Internet*, is a general introduction to the topic for anyone who, for one reason or another, has managed to escape the media barrage of hype about the Internet over the past couple of years. In keeping with the promise of the title, it provides a special focus on Canadian applications of the Internet. Its tone is much like the rest of the media's: upbeat and rah-rah. Reading it, you might come away convinced that the Internet is the greatest thing since sliced bread. The more cynical of you might, on the other hand, take it all with a grain of salt. Still, it provides the reader with a reason to read more of the book, which is really all that can be asked of an introductory chapter.

Using the Internet in Canada, the second chapter, consists of about a dozen and a half case studies of companies and organizations that use the Internet. The strong commercial slant of this chapter may not have a great deal of interest for educators, but makes interesting reading nevertheless for the variety of ways in which the Internet can be used. One of the case studies does, in fact, deal with distance education applications, although in a necessarily terse way.

Chapter Three, *The Internet in Canada*, starts with a historical review of the development of the Canadian portion of the 'Net, and offers an up-to-date progress report of activities to the present. Regional and national networks, commercial Internet access services (the so-called "on-ramps"), and free-nets are described. Newcomers to net-navigation will appreciate the description of how it has changed from its original, non-commercial, state to its current one, and how many of the policies and practices of net-use were born and have evolved in response.

Internet Fundamentals, the fourth chapter, begins to get down to the nitty-gritty of the 'Net scape. If TCP/IP is just a tongue-twister to you, and an

IP address is an unknown quantity, this chapter will clarify things. Clients, servers, domains and how the Internet actually works are described in easily-understood terms. After reading this chapter, you should be able to more than hold your own in cocktail-party conversation. You might even develop a reputation as a 'Net-guru, if you aren't careful.

Internet Electronic Mail, the next chapter, continues in that tradition, with a rich explanation of the topic. Once again, although a number of technical topics are covered, they are done in an understandable manner: even if you've never actually used it yourself, you are likely to come away from this chapter with a more comprehensive grasp of how e-mail really works than a lot of people who use it on a regular basis. Useful topics such as e-mail etiquette (including flaming and smileys), and locating e-mail addresses of others, are also covered.

Chapter Six, *Tools for Knowledge Networking*, concentrates on newsgroups (USENET) and mailing lists (listservs, mailservs, etc.). It explains how they are organized and how they work, from the perspective of both reading them and submitting material to them. Once again, there are practical tips on etiquette and expectations. Tips on how to decode the often-cryptic newsgroups names are included.

The seventh chapter is entitled *Remote Access Applications*. If you've wondered what Telnet, FTP and Archie are and how they work, this is the chapter you want. Sample sessions are included; you can mimic them to get started in remote access.

Tools for Knowledge and Information Retrieval, the eighth chapter, talks about a handful of useful information-retrieval tools: Gopher, Hytelnet, World Wide Web browsers, Finger, IRC and WAIS. This chapter should be read selectively, as not all tools described will be of interest or of use to all readers.

Chapter Nine, *Connecting to the Internet*, describes access points, be they institutional or corporate, or via the services of an Internet Service Provider (of which there is a sizable and growing number - the names, addresses, and phone numbers of which are included in an appendix). The mysteries of shell accounts, SLIP/PPP connections, e-mail only, and full network connections are illuminated and compared. A handy section in this chapter is Questions to Ask Your Internet Service Provider. If you are contemplating subscribing to Internet access, this chapter is must reading. It may save you from shelling out money and not getting the services you expected.

Why the Internet? is the question raised in Chapter Ten. It discusses trends and projections, hopes and fears and aspirations of business, governments, and educational institutions. Somewhat in the style of current media hype, this chapter nevertheless offers considerable food for thought, particularly for the educator.

The final chapter, *Putting the Internet into Perspective*, attempts to do just that, contrasting recent media coverage with the reality, and examining various recent undertakings on the Canadian scene. It ends with a call for participation in public discussion about a number of Internet issues.

The number of appendices is, as indicated earlier, quite large; nevertheless I think it worthwhile to list their titles so that you can infer the kind of information they provide. (For some, the appendices might well be the most valuable part of the book.)

- A. Canadian Internet Timeline
- B. History of the Development of CS*net 1986-1990
- C. Directory of Canadian Internet Service Providers [i.e., who can you call in your area to obtain Internet access]
- D. Directory of World Wide Web Servers in Canada
- E. Directory of Gopher Servers and Campus-Wide Information Systems in Canada
- F. Internet Forms
- G. Directory of Canadian USENET Newsgroups
- H. Directory of CSO and WHOIS Servers in Canada
- I. Directory of IRC Servers in Canada
- J. Directory of Archie Servers in Canada
- K. Directory of Internet Service Bureaus in Canada
- L. Directory of Canadian Internet Resources
- M. Directory of Internet-Accessible Library Catalogues in Canada
- N. Directory of Internet-Related Publications
- O. Directory of Community Networking Organizations in Canada
- P. Directory of Canadian Organizations with Registered Internet Domains
- Q. Mailing List Software Commands
- R. Where to find SLIP/PPP Application Clients on the Internet
- S. More Canadian Internet Sources

Some of those appendices will be of general interest, but some of them contain information so esoteric as to be of interest to relatively few readers. This brings me to my major criticism of an otherwise fine book: There is too much information included in the appendices; this book tells me (and, I suspect, most readers) more than I wanted to know about the Internet. While it is gratifying to see so much Canadian-oriented material, the breadth of topics available is too great. A good deal of it is supplementary, and while it probably should be available somewhere, I'm not convinced that a book of this type is the best location for it.

Furthermore, a large number of the appendices will be out of date by the time each annual edition is printed (e.g., the lists of servers, and of

organizations) and their contents will be ever-increasing in number. By the turn of the century (assuming the publisher keeps providing annual updates - which it must do if it expects to generate sales) the already-large percentage of pages devoted to appendices will increase to a very high percentage. Some of that material perhaps could be made available on the Internet itself, perhaps on WWW pages, instead of in appendices to the book. The book could simply briefly describe the contents of those web pages, and provide the URL's to them. That would also make it easier to keep the information up-to-date. Then there's the matter of the trees saved...

All in all, this is a reference well worth having. The 'Net neophyte will find the explanation and examples easy to follow and understand, while the more experienced 'Net-nut will find value in the more detailed information in the appendices.

REVIEWER

Earl Misanchuk is Professor of Extension at the University of Saskatchewan, where he works primarily on the instructional design of distance education courses and on computer-based instructional and informational materials. He has published books and articles on the use of print materials for instruction and on interactive multimedia instruction. His most recent research efforts are in the area of computer screen design.

Computer Mediated Communication and the Online Classroom, edited by Zane L. Berge and Mauri P. Collins. Cresskill, New Jersey: Hampton Press, Inc. 1995. Volume 1 (ISBN: 1-881303-13-6, 230 pages), Volume II (ISBN: 1-881303-11-X, 209 pages) and Volume III (ISBN: 1-881303-13-6, 257 pages).

Reviewed by Cathy L. Bruce-Hayter

Computer Mediated Communication and the Online Classroom is a three-volume series which provides a wealth of information on the topic as well as directs the reader to numerous other sources for continued study. Each volume, comprised of 12, 11 and 14 chapters respectively offers a comprehensive look at its major issues inclusive of practical examples and strategies for implementation. Each chapter provides a list of references and each volume ends with a glossary. Of particular note is the fact that the authors and editors of this series completed these volumes, up to the hard copy, through electronic mail.

Volume I, entitled *Computer Mediated Communication and the Online Classroom: Overview and Perspectives*, presents a broad overview of the