

Book Review

Elizabeth P. Hartner, *An Introduction to Automated Literature Searching*. New York & Basel: M. Dekker, 1981. 168 p. US \$23.50; SFr. 72.00. ISBN 0-8247-1293-5. (Books in Library and Information Science, vol. 36).

A book introducing online information retrieval could both be a useful addition to the literature and capitalize on the growing interest and tremendous market potential of this segment of the information industry. Into this prime climate Elizabeth P. Hartner has brought *An Introduction to Automated Literature Searching*, published by Marcel Dekker, Inc.

The preface states, "This book is an introduction to the practical side of performing computer searches of scientific and technical literature...written for neophytes in the automated retrieval of published literature, whether they be scientists, technical problem solver...or college beginner." This practical information is contained in chapters, among others, entitled "How Do You Find Information?", "How Computerized Retrieval Works" and "Files Available for Mechanized Retrieval".

The book does offer information on many facets of online retrieval, on some in more depth than on others. The reader will be confronted with detailed discussions of Boolean operators and the principle of a logical product from logical sums, of the trickiness of file selection, of the interplay of editorial selection/indexing policy and search results, and of the recall vs. precision dilemma. There is also an entire chapter on the presentation of the search results: bibliography types, purposes, structures – an unexpected inclusion in an introduction to the practical side of performing computer searches.

Some of what is written here is clear and concise (as for example the section on search logic), and useful (sections on file coverage limitations and written search request descriptions); other portions are labored, with excessive rhetoric and numerous tables of questionable utility (journal/citation overlap and lists of periodicals, thesaurus excerpts) in this particular context. Bothersome in the book are the inclusion and explanation of generalized search examples, the constant use of acronyms without expanded forms or identifications, advice that is – at best – debatable, and information which is no longer valid.

By way of illustrating the actual process of searching the author presents a sample search for the phrase "collective bargaining", with a sample of the citations which would result from the search. The example citation, however, contains the desired phrase only in the title. The explanation is that a search program that "selects on the basis of 'free text' or 'title' terms" would retrieve this

citation. Not one of the three major U.S. online systems currently permits the keying in of such a phrase and its matching against like phrases in the title.

The reader is at one point given the following advice: "The first organization to consult [about the intricacies of a file] is not the originator of the file but rather the organization that prepares the searchable tape. COMPENDEX is a product of Engineering Index, Inc., but the tape that is searched online is prepared by Lockheed or SDC." Perhaps the problem here lies in the interpretation of the word "to prepare", or in determining who is responsible for the intricacies. The reality is that the producer/system relationship is symbiotic. Indexing intricacies and the suggested "best approach" are more likely to be explained by the indexing source, the producer, while the treatment of the indexing falls clearly with the system. To make the search system the organization of first resort, before the producer of the file, would in any event certainly arouse debate, from search systems and producers alike.

The dated nature of some of the material in this book is not surprising, but nonetheless annoying; the research, as explained in the preface, was conducted during the period 1965–1975. The second chapter closes with a list, indeed a partial one, of databases and their producers which includes EMA (Equipment Market Abstracts) and CMA (Chemical Market Abstracts) from Predicasts. That Predicasts ceased producing these subfiles in 1977, and that neither is listed in the glossary for further explanation, should be noted. PROMT, the database which resulted from the consolidation of the two subfiles, is listed however.

The final chapter, "How Computerized Retrieval Works", covers what is stored, along with file organization, and mentions (without full description) the organizations involved in this activity. Why this foundation is kept until the end and why, even for historical interest, notched cards, punched cards, and paper tape, and two paragraphs on binary code, are included as well, we may reasonably wonder. What the neophyte might find useful to know – the history, purpose, capabilities, limitations of retrieval systems as we know them today – is, unfortunately, given too little attention.

In 124 pages, the author attempts to take the information neophyte from ignorance to understanding and functional ability, using isolated specifics amid generalizations. This global objective, then, is the book's fatal flaw. Much was attempted; less was achieved. Recognizing the successfully presented portions, one still wonders whether the author achieves her goal – initiating the neophyte to the "practical side of performing computer searches".

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