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Personal Filing Systems: Creating Information Retrieval Systems on Microcomputers (Book Review)

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makes an important body of information sources approachable, almost as if the author herself were standing before the reader, delivering a well-organized presentation that shares the background knowledge and practical experience derived from her expertise in the drug information field.

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4. WATANABE AS, CONNER CS. Principles of drug information services: a syllabus of systematic concepts. Hamilton, IL: Drug Intelligence Publications, 1978.

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MCCARTHY, SHERRI. **Personal Filing Systems: Creating Information Retrieval Systems on Microcomputers.** Chicago: Medical Library Association, 1988. 167 p. $20.00. ISBN: 0-912176-23-7.

Today's electronic age is characterized by proliferation of information, and health professionals need to learn how to organize and manage their personal information files. Sherri McCarthy's *Personal Filing Systems: Creating Information Retrieval Systems on Microcomputers* responds to this need, as do two other recent publications: *Personal File Management for the Health Sciences* by Lynne Apostle [1] and *File Management and Information Retrieval Systems* by Suzanne Gill [2]. What makes the McCarthy book unique is its description of specific file management software. However as the author herself points out, the inherent problem with software and vendor information is that it quickly becomes outdated. In fact one major file management program called Artfile was omitted completely from the appendix listing preconfigured data management software, and SCI-MATE is listed as an ISI product but is no longer supported by them.

This book's strength is Appendix C, "Checklist for Evaluating Data Management Packages," and the discussion of that checklist in chapters two through seven. These chapters detail completely all the features one needs to consider in choosing a file management package and rate their importance. Such information is invaluable to the person who is about to purchase file management software.

The book's weakness is in its final chapters. Chapter ten, on communication and gateway packages related to computerized file management, is scanty and unnecessary. Detailed information is easily obtained in computer magazines. Health professionals will be interested in the recent publication *A Basic Guide to Online Information Systems for Health Care Professionals* by Ronald G. Albright [3].

The lack of emphasis on the preliminary groundwork needed before starting to computerize is disappointing. Regardless of the computer, one still needs to make some basic decisions about physical arrangement of files, access points, methods of inputting data, and other matters. Although these principles are touched on in chapters eleven, twelve, and thirteen, the discussions of user needs, database design, and subject indexing are better covered in the Apostle and Gill books. *Personal File Management,* for example, begins with a needs assessment worksheet and list of considerations for developing a filing system. The Gill book emphasizes basic filing principles and classification methods.

Finally the McCarthy text has an unusual sequence of topics that should have been restructured. Personally, I would have liked to see the book open with more information on the basic principles of file management and database design. This could have been followed by a more detailed comparison of manual versus computerized systems and by a list of questions health professionals should ask themselves about their files and habits before deciding to go ahead and computerize their information. Then the chapters describing characteristics for evaluating file management software could be viewed in context of the reader's needs. The chapters describing specific preconfigured and text-oriented packages could conclude the text.

In summary no one book satisfies the need for information on personal filing system management and retrieval. The McCarthy, Apostle, and Gill books complement each other and cover the field satisfactorily. *Personal Filing Systems: Creating Information Retrieval Systems on Microcomputers* is recommended for librarians who help health professionals organize their files, or for medical students or residents who have not yet started a system and would like to begin managing their data using a computer.

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2. GILL S. *File management and information retrieval systems: a manual for managers and technicians.* 2d ed. Englewood, CO: Libraries Unlimited, 1988.

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EATON, NANCY L.; MCDONALD, LINDA BREW; AND SAULE, MARA R. **CD-ROM and Other Optical Information Systems.** Phoenix: Oryx Press, 1989. 153 p. $29.50. ISBN: 0-89774-448-9.

This text will certainly interest librarians considering CD-ROM systems and their application to libraries. Although the journal literature is growing rapidly in this field, searching *Books in Print* yields only one other text with a similar title [1]. Indeed the authors list only nine basic texts in their bibliography. The authors' stated objective in writing this book is to provide "a basic, self-contained overview of optical technology as it applies to library systems and services."

The first chapter provides a nice overview of the basics of optical information technology. It includes brief descriptions of thirteen different optical media technologies, discussion and illustrations on how the data is prepared and the discs are made, and an important section on the status of standards in the optical disc industry. The chapter concludes with a brief illustration and discussion of the typical computer work station, which is helpful for the reader who hasn't seen one.

Chapters two through seven deal with applying optical technology to libraries. Overall library applications are discussed in chapter two. Software design and retrieval issues are discussed in chapter three, addressing in practical terms the evaluation of software for CD-ROM products with a suggested checklist and references. This chapter should be particularly helpful in choosing a database that is offered by more than one vendor.

The authors tackle public service considerations in chapter four, examining such issues as the administration and staffing of a CD-ROM installation, hardware location, conditions for use, instruction, staff training, and several other pertinent concerns. The reader who is planning a public use installation will benefit from the checklist of considerations for offering CD-ROM. Also noteworthy is an illustration showing the differences between print, CD-ROM, and online products in terms of cost, timeliness, search mechanisms, audience, and other factors.

Technical services considerations are discussed in chapter five. These include acquisitions systems, cataloging and retrospective conversion, public access catalogs, and indexing issues.

Chapter six presents hardware and software issues, discussing the advantages of turnkey systems versus hardware component purchases, an examination of multistation access to CD-ROM applications through local area networks, and the use of "jukebox"-designed retrieval systems. At the end of chapter six, the authors offer a simplistic explanation for CD-ROM installation, hardware and software upgrades, and maintenance. A checklist titled "Problem Solving and the CD-ROM Work Station" would have been a welcome addition here.

Chapter seven covers financial considerations in terms of purchase or lease of the typical work station, software, licensing, and production costs of producing a CD, which is helpful when considering a CD product.

Policy issues are addressed in chapter eight. The authors logically place optical technology in the continuum of information-delivery mechanisms and examine the library environment in which these mechanisms exist, the information delivery market.

The final chapter features case studies of libraries that have begun offering optical disc products, either in public services or technical services. Selected from a mail survey of thirty-two respondents, nine academic, school, special, and public libraries are described and serve as successful role models for the reader. Those unfamiliar with applied optical disc technology will appreciate the informal interviews with librarians and other practical comments regarding planning, installation, and management of CD-ROM work stations.

This text provides two appendices that are potentially helpful to the reader. Unfortunately several errors are noted. Appendix A lists producers and distributors of optical media but does not properly identify the named organizations; for example, the National Library of Medicine, a producer, appears in the same listing as Silver Platter, a distributor. Appendix B does better in listing further readings on optical information systems. A detailed index follows the appendices.

Exceptions noted, I believe the authors have produced a practical book that will serve both the uninitiated and the experienced reader well. Librarians eager to understand the basics of CD-ROM technology and applications will