
The Economics of Information in the Networked Environment

Butler, Meredith A. and Kingma, Bruce R. (eds), *Haworth Press, New York, 1998, 313 pages, \$69.95, ISBN: 0 7890 0659 6*

The Economics of Information in the Networked Environment contains the proceedings of a conference held in Washington, DC in September 1995. The majority of delegates and speakers at the conference were based at US higher education institutions (HEIs). They included academics, librarians, administrators and a handful of non-HE stakeholders, including a couple of publishers and a subscription agent. Although the work focuses on the US and the political context in North American, much of the content is relevant to non-US academic libraries. The book aims to address the question of how academic libraries can effectively manage the costs of access and delivery of digital information in the context of library budget restrictions and above-inflation increases in journal subscription fees.

The papers in the book are divided into ten sections, reflecting the sessions at the conference. Each section contains two or three papers with a 'questions and discussion' section at the end. Section titles are of limited use to a reader. The titles of individual papers give a better indication but some of these are also misleading. For example, James Ryan's paper entitled 'Measuring the costs and benefits of distance learning' lists what he considers to be the benefits but includes no information on the costs of distance learning. This book is a reproduction of the conference proceedings; nothing of substance has been added. The conference keynote speeches are not documented in full; only slides and brief précis are included. The book has no index or bibliography. The only addition is a Preface, in which the series editor claims that the work would 'make a genuine contribution for anyone interested in the administration of libraries and the emerging new economics of information'. The book covers a wide range of issues including electronic publishing, the responsibilities of different stakeholders in the scholarly communication chain, intellectual property, resource sharing and collaboration, document delivery, distance learning, appropriate charging mechanisms and efficient use of the network through, for example, price differentiation, and the apportionment of costs within HEIs. Although it includes a paper on the JSTOR project, archiving and preservation are not covered elsewhere.

More than four years after the conference, much of the content of the book is dated; some of the issues raised here have been explored in depth and developed further since 1995. Furthermore, other than a section containing papers by three economists of information, Noll, Getz and Varian, very few papers present data or developed models of the economics of digital information. Economic models can be

realistically tested only after technical, legal and cultural issues have been addressed so even in 1999 there is little hard data available on this subject. Nevertheless, many of the papers are excellent. The book effectively raises the issues that digital library developers have attempted to address over the past four years. In that respect, it would be a good introduction to anyone new to the field, although only if complemented by more recent material.

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Management Information Systems: Managing information technology in the Internetworked enterprise, 4th edition

O'Brien, James A., 1999, *Irwin McGraw-Hill, Boston, paperback, xxv + 700 + 92 pages, £24.99, ISBN 0 07 2906111*

As a textbook and reference source, *Management Information Systems* is a tremendous success. This over 800-page publication provides lots of detail on almost every aspect concerning the use of information systems and information technology in a business environment. The writing style is clear, interesting and captivating, and leaves one with the feeling that this is the ultimate source on information technology and information systems. Aspects that are discussed range from cookies to push technology. Object-oriented languages, the systems approach, videoconferencing and many other aspects that have an impact on the Internetworked enterprise are also covered. James O'Brien is well qualified to write in the field of computer information systems, as well as business information systems, and his subject expertise is clearly reflected in the logical and detailed discussions. A further bonus is the didactical structure of the publication, which makes it an excellent textbook. *Management Information Systems* consists of five modules, each with two or more chapters. The modules are based on a conceptual framework that organises the content of the text into five major areas: foundation concepts, technology, applications, development and management. Each module is preceded by a triangular diagram indicating the position of the particular module. Foundation concepts, the first module, is the cornerstone of the triangle. Each chapter includes a chapter outline, learning objectives, case studies and numerous figures, diagrams and photographs. The figures and diagrams greatly enhance the 'learnability' of the material. Each chapter also includes a summary and a list of key terms and concepts, with the page number of their first explanation indicated in brackets. A quiz requiring the reader to link statements with the appropriate key terms or concepts is included, as well as discussion questions, real-world problems, application exercises, answers to the quiz and a selected list of references. The list of references could have been more

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up to date, but in a publication of this nature this is probably to be expected. Most of the sources listed were published between 1993 and 1997. Although this definitely does not distract from the impression that the author is an expert in the field, it would have been useful if the reader had more recent references to follow up. On the other hand, the discussions are so clear and extensive that I seldom felt the need to consult other sources.

Management Information Systems contains a preface, 15 chapters and two appendixes. The latter include several real-world case studies, which can be used to supplement the case studies in the chapters. Numerous interesting case studies are included, for example on Mazda Motor Corporation, American General Insurance, Reebok International, Hallmark Cards, Lockheed Martin and Hilton Hotels, GeoCities Inc. and Knight Ridder Inc. The case studies add to the publication's ability to keep track with real-life challenges. Various support materials are also mentioned (p. x), as well as a supportive web site (www.mhhe.com/business/mis/obrien). There are brief and detailed tables of contents, a very useful glossary and detailed name index, company index and subject index. The chapter topics include the following: information systems in business, solving business problems with information systems, computer hardware and software, telecommunications, database management, the Internet and ecommerce, intranets, extranets and enterprise collaboration, information systems for

business operations, managerial decision support and strategic advantage, managing IT, and security and ethical challenges. The emphasis of the text is on technology, its impact on enterprises, and how to deal with this within a systems approach. It especially stresses the information systems knowledge required by the business end-user and the strategic role of information technology. Hardly any typographical errors were spotted; in a book of this magnitude, this is really quite an achievement. Unfortunately the soft cover is not suitable for the size and weight of the book. Even after one read, my copy's cover looked worn.

Management Information Systems is aimed at undergraduate or introductory MBA courses in Management Information Systems. Such courses are required in many business administration or management programmes as part of the common body of knowledge required of all business majors. The book is highly recommended for this target group, as well as for any student of information systems in a more general sense. Librarians and students in Library and Information Science can also use *Management Information Systems* fruitfully as a recommended source to gain an insight into the effects of technology on enterprises and how to deal with these.

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A word from the Editor

Books Review Editor for *The Electronic Library* is Anne Morris of the Department of Information and Library Studies, Loughborough University of Technology. We are always seeking new contributors to add to the existing pool, and anyone interested in writing reviews of 350-500 words can contact Dr. Morris. There is no fee but reviewers can keep the book if it is useful to them.

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