

Steyaert, J. (1999). The internet and technology for the human services (book review).
Computers in human services, 16(4), 70-73.

The internet and technology

- Karger, Howard and Joanne Levine. 1999. *The internet and technology for the human services*, Addison Wesley

This book gives itself the aim to 'demystify the internet and related technology, empower human service professionals with both beginning and advanced knowledge of the internet, to take charge of the technology that will inevitably help to shape their work'.

The authors tackle this task by providing the reader with no fewer than 18 chapters of information plus an appendix, covering nearly 400 pages in total. Chapters deal with probably every item a new user of the internet would want to or need to know about. This includes some background information to the internet and its history, how to conduct research over the internet, what hardware you need, how to choose your internet service provider, listservs, newsgroups, how to make a web site, ... Each chapter comes with some exercises on top of the traditional references.

The authors are self-conscious and start by apologising for outdated information. Fair enough, technology is moving faster than any process of book writing/printing/distributing can cope with. But why not provide a supporting web site to the book, one where the reader can update the critical information and the rapidly changing details such as e.g the 60 pages list of useful web addresses. I didn't try out how many of those were already obsolete, but everybody is aware of the link-rot phenomena.

Overall, the book is well written and makes for very accessible reading. However, it leaves on puzzled. Why do two professors of social work write this book? Why does it carry the refinement 'for human services' in its title? About 90 % of this book, though useful, is of a generic nature and not specific to human services at all. Your local bookshop probably carries a dozen books that cover the same ground. True, this book is comprehensive, well structured and useful. But human services ... ? The publisher probably thought it a good idea to target a niche market of buyers rather than publish yet another generic introduction. But the authors should have taken that opportunity and tailored the contents to the targeted audience. Some chapters do provide the reader with a glimpse of what might have been, such as the chapter on information policy and certainly the final concluding chapter.

The authors in their introduction claim not to want to write a 'dummies' introduction, because those are for a too general audience. I'm afraid it's just what they have done. Inserting a couple of references to human service situations doesn't make this a truly human service focused book. Fortunately, it turned out to be a comprehensive and accessible 'dummies' book and it is consequently one to be advised for introductory courses on technology in any human service training or education. Until maybe one day somebody writes a true human service based introduction to this domain.

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