Book Reviews

The 2011 guide to free or nearly-free e-books

Chris Armstrong, UKeiG, 2011

With free e-information high on the agenda of many librarians in this era of rapidly diminishing resources, Chris Armstrong's 2011 guide to free or nearly-free e-books could not be more timely. In our institution, we have been scanning the Web horizon for a number of years for free material (particularly ebooks) to supplement or even to substitute items from our collections, so we awaited the publication of this book eagerly.

The brief introduction describes the purpose of the work "to facilitate easy access to free e-books and e-book collections which can enhance their digital collections" (p.x), then launches into an annotated list of 232 resources, divided into two main sections: adult e-books and younger than adult e-books, with an additional section for late entries. The adult e-book section makes up the bulk of the book, with 208 entries, and is further subdivided by type of resource (archives, publishers, single titles, gateways and so on). Two indexes (general and title) aid navigation. There is also a useful list of references for wider reading.

Having spent over ten years working on locating e-books on the Internet, Chris Armstrong clearly has an impressive knowledge of freely available e-resources. This book gives a good overview of the breadth of material available, from large multi-disciplinary collections such as Project Gutenberg – "the oldest archive of e-books" (p.57) – to single texts including a mathematics textbook and a biography of Chomsky. Interesting approaches to e-book creation are highlighted in the sections focusing on experimental publishing and social e-books, including graphic novels and an e-book based on reactions to the *Golden Notebook* by Doris Lessing. Each entry contains the URL of the resource, one or two keywords and a description. In many cases the format is mentioned, and the introduction contains a brief description of different format types and the applications needed to access them.

Chris notes that "the directory is essentially descriptive … and … does not offer literary or textual criticism" (p.xii) so it is essential for readers to evaluate each resource for suitability. It helpfully flags up issues such as presence of adverts, limitations with display navigation, searching and so on.

There are some inconsistencies in the keyword descriptions – for example Classic Bookshelf is described as "Literature", whereas Classic Book Library is "Fiction". "Various" is frequently used where another more meaningful term might be appropriate for resources such as the Biodiversity Heritage Library.

The most obvious observation is that this book would be fantastic as an e-book itself. Navigating the resources via a single click would be straight-forward, and it could include scope to update and add entries, add comments, become a social tool. However, the print format makes it a good starting point for anyone new to this area who may find the new technologies and number of resources available on the Internet overwhelming.

Colleagues experienced in this area suggest that searching the Internet for free ebooks relies to an extent on serendipity due to the organic and constantly changing nature of the Web, which in turn relies on a user's confidence and familiarity with navigating the Web. This book provides a friendly and reassuring introduction to what can be an unmanageable and overwhelming subject. For those already working in this area, it highlights many resources worth investigating that may have been overlooked. Ideally this will be the first of many future revised and expanded editions!

Ann Etkind, Sarah Halliday, Sue Thomas, Cathy Tong

Improving students' Web use and information literacy: a guide for teachers and teacher librarians

James E. Herring, Facet Publishing, 2011

This latest addition from Herring's body of publications for teachers and teacher librarians on the internet has many benefits. The Web is established as an information source, so it is only befitting to have an update of his practical tips based on sound pedagogical theory.

The style layout is clear, making it a joy to dip into. Each well-structured chapter follows the same format stating clearly its scope, with individual introductions followed by helpful headings, and completed with conclusions re-emphasising the coverage, supported by lists of references. There is of course a comprehensive index, and the chapter references are compiled together to form the bibliography, which in itself makes for an interesting read.

Increasingly the Web is seen as the first tool for information so it's imperative that all students are information literate. It is commonly recognised that Google is the most popular search engine – though not necessarily the best, so professionals need to raise awareness of specialist search engines. However, the advanced search facility of Google can be exploited much more. Another gem for schools suggested by the author is the use of copyright-free images. We are also reminded that metasearch engines are better than single search engines, and are advised to try Dogpile or Ixquick.