Reviews

edited by Philip Barker

Mark Kerr, *How to Promote your Web Site Effectively*, London: Aslib/IMI, ISBN: 0–85142–424–4. Paperback, 87 pages, £13.99.

Most people involved in teaching and learning will have a number of Websites that they use in order to store and disseminate electronic materials. In my own case, for example, I have a research Website, several personal sites, an organizational Web location and several intranets. I use the latter for providing controlled access to both my teaching and learning materials and my library of 'cherished' electronic documents. Increasingly, as people move from paper-based to electronic writing, there will be a growing need actively to promote those sites that they feel are important for other people to know about. This useful 'little book' by Martin Kerr provides a number of helpful suggestions for achieving this.

The book is organized into nine short chapters, an appendix and a glossary. Following on from the author's introduction, the first chapter ('Why Promote?') goes through a list of reasons for promoting a particular Web site and discusses the need to identify the particular audiences at which a promotional campaign should be directed. The second chapter deals with 'the promotional strategy cycle' and then goes on to outline a 'toolkit' to support the activities involved. In Chapter 3, the author discusses various topics relating to how Web pages are indexed. Designers of Web pages need to know

about these topics so that they can design their HTML code in a way that makes a particular page 'jump out' of a database and climb to the highest positions in the list of search results. Considerable emphasis is given here to the appropriate selection of keywords for use with the HTML <META> tags. As well as relying on search engines and spiders to index a Website, another useful way of making a site known is by direct submission of its URL to a 'submitting service'. This approach is discussed in Chapter 4. Some of the other useful promotional techniques that are described in this book include: negotiating reciprocal links, using Web ring services, email and permission marketing, press releases and direct advertising – using techniques such as banner adverts and portals. Of course, once a promotional strategy has been decided upon and implemented, it is important to assess how effective that strategy has been. Throughout this book the author emphasizes the need actively to measure the effect that any given promotional approach has on a site's search engine 'ranking'. Because of the importance of this topic, in the final chapter of the book ('Monitoring and Measurement') the author discusses this issue in greater depth. He outlines various tools for measuring site activity and interpreting statistics relating to a site's search engine rankings.

Overall, I found this short monograph extremely useful. Not only does it provide a wealth of helpful tips and techniques, it also contains

many amusing anecdotes about the 'tricks' (both fair and foul!) that people get up to in order to gain a promotional advantage with respect to getting to the top of a search engine's hit list.

Philip Barker, University of Teesside

Elaine England and Andy Finney, *Managing Multimedia Project Management for Interactive Media*, Harlow: Addison-Wesley, ISBN: 0–201–36058–6. Paperback and CD-ROM, 423 pages, £27.95.

This book represents an unusually detailed and up-to-date account of the processes required for the successful management and delivery of multimedia projects. Drawing upon their extensive experience in the field, the authors provide a logical account of every step in identifying, resourcing and managing the development of interactive media throughout the project lifecycle. Acknowledging that there is no such thing as a 'typical' multimedia project, not least because the underlying technologies are constantly changing, the authors still succeed in providing a text that should be required reading for any aspiring multimedia manager.

Admittedly such praise is borne partly out of the distinct lack of similar guides in the field and this excellent book still has its weaknesses. Perhaps the greatest failing is that the book attempts the practically impossible – to provide an authoritative discussion of an enormous, multifaceted subject area in a single text. Of moderate length – 423 pages – the eager reader is initially engaged in sections such as 'What is multimedia' and 'Project manager's responsibilities'. This is where the true worth of this book lies – topics such as this are rarely discussed with adequate explanation for the beginner and sufficient detail to be of practical benefit. In this respect the authors deserve our thanks. However subsequent chapters of the book focus on the production of assets in different multimedia projects, including audio, video and graphics. 'Graphics asset production' for example only warrants 19 pages. Experienced readers will quickly recognize the superficiality of these chapters, but there is a risk that the enthusiastic but inexperienced student, or perhaps even the established manager moving into the field, might treat these chapters with the same respect and consideration as previous chapters. Perhaps this apparent disparity in chapter content is a consequence of dual authorship.

The book is divided into twenty chapters. Following a worthy introduction, the reader is rapidly brought up to speed on issues surrounding the manager-client relationship in chapters such as 'Scoping a project', 'The proposal' and 'Contract issues'. Subsequent chapters acknowledge the importance of a properly selected and managed project team. Following the aforementioned brief description of issues surrounding the acquisition, manipulation and use of audio, video and graphics assets, the authors conclude the book with three chapters entitled 'Testing', 'Archiving' and 'Marketing and marketing research'. These relatively short chapters can only facilitate somewhat superficial discussion of these important issues. Fortunately the authors usually remain focused on the subject of 'project management for interactive media', so ensuring that their comments and observations, however brief, are worthy of attention. In most cases the recommended reading lists that accompany each chapter are also useful.

The book is also accompanied by a CD-ROM that claims to be both a companion to, and an extension of, the book itself. Reflecting the practicality of content throughout the entire publication, the authors have avoided producing the companion CD-ROM in a particularly high-tech format. Instead of exploiting the latest authoring software – duly discussed elsewhere in the book – the authors have chosen to deliver this content as an HTML document. This mode of delivery ensures the broadest compatibility with users' computers and conveniently serves to illustrate some of the production issues discussed in the text. Rather surprisingly, there is a persistent (yet easily rectified) problem with the positioning of the interactive menu throughout the CD-ROM's contents.

The CD-ROM contains a variety of additional materials to illustrate the book's text. For example, the support materials for Chapter 8, 'Selecting the media and techniques: the treatment' entitled 'Theory into practice' include a hypothetical tutorial on changing a car windscreen wiper blade. The reader is asked to compare the relative merits of alternative methods of electronic delivery. These range from a series of static diagrammatic images (with which most amateur mechanics are familiar!) to an animation with accompanying soundtrack. Elsewhere on the CD-ROM there resides a variety of useful document templates, such as contracts, licence agreements, project checklists and questionnaires. These, together with an

extensive hyperlinked glossary mean that the CD-ROM is genuinely useful. The authors even invite users to customize the interactive contents page, acknowledging the practical value of this particular resource to teachers in the field. Finally the book has an associated Website (*http://www.atsf.co.uk/manmulti*) which supplies additional resources and which will provide you with a greater insight into the book's scope and contents than possible in this review.

A final (very minor) gripe: in my opinion the book's cover fails to distinguish it from the ever expanding range of computer books on sale in your local bookshop. This is a shame, because whilst dealing with an undeniably specialist subject, by providing practical advice and insiders' tips for designers, producers and programmers in today's multimedia industry, this book deserves the attention of anyone with more than a passing interest in the application of modern communications and information technologies.

Brian Boullier, University of Bradford

Michael Potts, *An A to Z of Training and Development*, London: Kogan Page, ISBN: 0–7494–2563–6. Hardback, 284 pages, £40.00.

This *A to Z of Training and Development* states on the flyleaf that it is 'the essential reference book for anyone involved in training and development'. Furthermore, the author 'sets out to give a concise explanation and guide to the many facets of training and development in an organisation'. Michael Potts has indeed succeeded in presenting a large number (in excess of 300) of related and relevant topics that can be easily accessed.

The 'A to Z', as its name implies, is laid out alphabetically and contains 22 chapters. The contents section is detailed, listing each main and sub-topic. Where these are discussed as part of a larger subject, re-direction is clearly indicated within the main text. Alternatively, direct access is provided from the comprehensive index. That so many topics are covered in a book of 273 pages indicates that coverage is by no means exhaustive; rather the information given is an overview. A high proportion of the text consists of bullet points, with these and the narrative being augmented with tabular information, example forms and a few simple black and white diagrams.

Three loose divisions of information can be made with respect to the contents. First, details are provided about many existing European and UK government organizations (often including contact addresses), programmes and initiatives. Second, current legislation is summarized and occasionally specific case references are cited. Third, practical advice and instruction are given regarding training and staff development issues, this being the largest division.

Organizations range from the European Social Fund to the Training and Enterprise National Council. General initiatives such as those of the European Commission are only touched upon, while national programmes and initiatives including Investors in People (IIP) and National Education and Training Targets are afforded a little more detail. Some of the sources of funding for training that are briefly covered include Career Development Loans and Small Firm Trading Loans. Information regarding national courses is quite detailed and includes National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) and General NVQs, the Scottish Vocational Qualifications, modern apprenticeships and traineeships and the Youth Training Scheme.

Information pertaining to relevant legislation has been carefully edited in order to ensure coverage of the most important aspects. Statutes and regulations upon which focus is greatest include disability, racial and sexual discrimination, equal opportunities (with cases cited as examples), trade union rights (including those for employee representatives) and health and safety regulations (particularly, regarding the use of equipment).

The training and staff development contents fall under numerous headings. They do, however, share an emphasis throughout the 'A to Z', namely that they are an integral part of business and therefore are required to show an appropriate return on investment. To this end there are a number of topics relating to the financial aspects of training, including budgets, possible levels of improvement due to training input for top performers, short-term plans and strategies for human resources. Methods of evaluation (both summative and formative) are discussed together with performance appraisals and guidelines are provided for quantifying gains in terms of increased production levels. Qualitative benefits, due to appropriate training and staff development initiatives, such as improved morale, communication and motivation are discussed, although these again are, where possible, viewed in monetary terms. Assessment of training needs is covered within the topics of designing, identifying and strategy, each being based upon

details determined by the differences between the requirements of the job and the knowledge and skills of the employee. Practical advice for specifying the standards and objectives of a particular position is given, including a section on management development that emphasizes a different focus in training for the more senior employees. Techniques for analysing skills include the use of competency check lists and psychometric tests. The latter, as the author points out, are expensive and usually require specially trained staff to implement, but do tend to have evidential levels of reliability and validity, which in-house checks may lack.

The required outcome, subject taught, particular employee and costs are factors that need to be considered when assessing the type of training needed. Training delivery should reflect the group's needs and the individual learning styles. Learners are considered to fall within one of four classifications – activists, pragmatists, reflectors and theorists – and trainees should be encouraged to use all facets of learning, not just the one they favour. A cycle of learning is described. It encompasses experience, reflection, analysis and planning, with learning occurring from reinforcement, feedback and observation. Who will be responsible for the training is also considered, as is the extensive administration requirement for staff development. Some sample form templates are included.

The alphabetical nature of the contents does lead to some repetition of points where they are relevant to more than one main topic and to the need to read more than one section to gain an overview of a specific subject, for example, training evaluation. A feature that could be added is a section of references to other, more in-depth sources of material. However, the book achieves its aim of providing an overview of a particularly large subject and in this respect it can be considered comprehensive for this manner of coverage. It is a reference book that will be of considerable use to those within the staff development field.

Kate Garland, University of Bristol

D. Bickerton and M. Gotti (eds.), *Language Centre Integration through Innovation – Papers from the 5th CERCLES Conference*, CERCLES, Plymouth: University of Plymouth, ISBN: 1–84102-054-0. Paperback, 290 pages, £12.00.

Language Centres: Integration through Innovation is a collection of papers from the fifth conference of the Confédération Européenne des Centres de Langues de l'Enseignement Supérieur (CERCLES). The conference was held in Bergamo in September 1998. The conference theme 'integration through innovation' highlights the main thrust of the papers collected here, that the achievement of a trans-European approach to the learning of modern foreign languages will necessarily involve not only sound but innovative approaches to language pedagogy, but also an awareness of intercultural factors that may impact on the learning environment.

In general the standard of the papers is quite high although the fact that the conference was held in September 1998 does mean that some of the information is a little dated. This takes away very little from most of the papers, but does suggest that interested readers may wish to pursue references and contact information in order to see what further progress has been made in the intervening time.

Similarly, it is in the nature of such collections that not all the papers will be uniformly interesting to all readers. However, the book's organization lends itself to a selective approach to its contents. The collection contains seventeen papers divided into five sections: the innovative role of language centres, cultural integration, innovations in learning, innovative use of technology, and innovations in assessment.

The two papers in the first section, 'The Innovative Role of Language Centres', concentrate on the potential of language centres to act as change agents in support of a better integrated Europe. For example, Edith Esch in 'Centres de langues: innovation pédagogique et integration européenne' finds that, despite their potential to support social and cultural integration, to date their contribution has been modest. Similarly, John Sinclair in 'New roles for language centres: the mayonnaise problem' cautions that the many differing pressures on centres to adopt new roles may lead to fragmentation, if, like an over-hastily prepared mayonnaise, progress is not made carefully step by step.

The three papers in the second section, 'Cultural integration', continue the inter-cultural theme. Maria Grazia Guido discusses the emergence of a 'European English' as used by competent ESL speakers that is a distinct subset of English perhaps not unlike 'American' or 'Australian' English. Similarly Raffella Negretti reports on the analysis of online conversation amongst ESL

students; while Michaél Ó Dúill reports on a study of communication in German firms in Ireland.

The third section, 'Innovations in learning', again contains three papers but the focus is more clearly on pedagogical issues. Marina Mozzon-McPherson examines some aspects of the pedagogical application of computer-mediated communication (CMC) in 'Encounters of a third kind: an analysis of the use of the computer-mediated environment in relation to learner autonomy'; while Franca Poppi considers the changing role of the language teacher as an adviser or counsellor who directs a student's learning. Finally in this section Marina Dossena reports on the use of electronic corpora in language learning.

The next section, 'Innovative use of technology', is the largest section containing five papers. These range from Evelyne Namenwirth's consideration of the utility of the new technologies through papers discussing multimedia authoring tools (Brigitte Dold and Christine Hoffman), the use of the Web (Gilles Couzin and Vita Falbo-Ellis) to Tony Stenton's arguments in favour of the in-house production of hypermedia resources to support language learning. Although there is certainly some very interesting work reported in this section, it is, unfortunately, the section that perhaps suffers most from the delay between presentation and review. Many of the technologies referred to have significantly moved on in the two years since these papers were presented.

Interestingly, this is less true of the last section, 'Innovations in assessment'. Although three of the four papers in this section report on technologically moderated assessment issues and assessment technologies have advanced, the differences between now and 1998 are perhaps less pronounced in this area. Perhaps still more importantly all three of the technologically orientated papers in this section report on assessment tools being used for diagnostic purposes. Thus even where the technology may have moved on the diagnostic strategies remain relevant and interesting. For example, De Grigorio and Fischer report on the DIALANG project which offers an Internet-mediated system designed to test levels of attainment in all of the EU's principle languages and thus aid students in achieving the EU's stated goal of proficiency in the three languages. Similarly, Carole Rozzonelli's 'StartUP Entry Test: un logiciel de tests de niveau en langues' offers an approach to

the assessment of language proficiency. Ray Satchell's report on the BULCATES project, on the other hand, looks at how the system developed at Bristol University is integrated into the language centre's pedagogical strategies. Finally, Stickler, Lewis and Speight in 'Taking students seriously: the use of self-assessment and peer-assessment on a University-Wide Language Programme' provide a valuable analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of formally integrating student evaluation into the assessment process.

Bruce Ingraham, University of Teesside

Eta de Cicco, Mike Farmer and Claire Hargrave, *Activities for Using the Internet in Primary Schools*, London: Kogan Page, London: ISBN: 0-7494-2989-5. Paperback, 181 pages, £29.99.

Using the Internet is a particular challenge for primary schools. Of concern to head teachers and class teachers are ethical, technical and educational issues. The presence of 'unsuitable material' is well known and teachers seek ways of ensuring pupils do not access these. Unlike in a secondary school, there may be limited technical expertise on hand and, consequently, there is the need for an information source which is logically structured, clear and comprehensive in coverage. Also, while the Internet contains much that may be of value in primary schools, the sheer quantity of sites can lead the inexperienced into the frustration of extended periods of activity which is not fruitful.

This bright, well-structured and comprehensive guide is designed to meet the needs of primary teachers and, in the main, meets them well. Notably, the authors have tackled the issue of disappearing and moving sites by maintaining an associated Website themselves which updates all the links published in the text.

With nine sections covering the main curriculum areas – literacy, numeracy and mathematics, science, geography, history, science, design and technology, art, music and religious education – and an extensive technical section, this book offers a comprehensive guide and reference.

Each section offers suggestions for suitable Websites and how pupil activity can be built around the information found there. All pupil activity is based on photocopiable worksheets. This should prove very popular with teachers.

At the heart of the book are the curricular sections. Though mostly of good quality, there is

inevitably variation. The history section, for example, includes activities on Roman, Viking and Victorian Britain: all popular topics in primary schools. A useful addition might have been the excellent Public Records Office site which is rich with pupil-level material on a wide range of topics. The mathematics and science sections are particularly strong with, in the latter, activities likely to promote meaningful and active pupil involvement on plants and animals, melting, teeth, flight and the solar system. The mathematics section looks very useful as a way of providing meaningful contexts and of offering pupils fun. Less impressive is the religious education section which suggests few sites and which might have included reference to the very extensive set of links to Islamic sites held by the University of Wales, Lampeter.

The technical section is full, with twenty-seven sub-sections covering topics from bookmarks to URLs. While much of this is more technical than the majority of teachers would ever require, it makes sense to cover as many possibilities as possible.

Perhaps surprisingly, the authors have not included a section offering advice on the avoidance of 'unsuitable material'. While there are helpful pieces of advice on such matters contained within the text of particular activities, many readers would I am sure, have expected to be able to go quickly to a discrete section which summarizes the issues and which offers guidance.

Accepting the inevitability of continuing change which will leave any printed text behind and the impossibility of identifying all of the best sites, this book offers primary teachers a timely and very well-written guide to Internet use.

John Robertson, University of Paisley

Abby Day, John Peters and Phil Race, *500 Tips for Developing a Learning Organisation*, London: Kogan Page, ISBN: 0–7494–2912–7. Paperback, 125 pages, £15.99.

The notion of the learning organization has come to the fore in recent years, although the general level of understanding of the characteristics of a learning organization appears to lag behind the enthusiasm of the published advocates. Part of the problem, no doubt, is that busy managers are unable (or unwilling) to take the time to understand in some depth the implications of seeking to reposition their

organization as a learning organization, and I have seen examples of what might be termed 'management by in-flight magazine', where there is evidence that the headlines about 'the learning organization' have been assimilated but little else. Hence this book is to be welcomed, since it offers considerably more than headlines and is a storehouse of suggestions as to how the transformation to a learning organization might be aided.

However, one disadvantage of the '500 tips' approach is that it risks promoting surface learning at the expense of deep learning: the learning organization as a 'quick fix' rather than something more organic and slow-growing. If those in the organization perceive management's attempts to create a learning organization as simply changing the wrapping on the parcel, then the transformation will be doomed.

One way of countering the risk of superficiality is to point the reader to the rich literature which underpins the concept: however, only a limited amount of further reading is suggested. The authors place high value on flexibility in learning, for well-understood reasons. Had this text been produced electronically, many of the tips could have been linked to elaborations of various kinds, thereby allowing the (presumably hard-pressed) manager to follow up relatively easily those tips s/he was interested in. One such type of elaboration would be examples of precepts in practice, since Wolf's (1995) work strongly suggests that exemplification is critical to the development of understanding of what relatively abstract statements and expectations imply for practice.

A related disadvantage is that the tips are implicitly being presented as 'right', rather than as contestable propositions. At a number of points I found myself wondering whether I agreed with what was being said. For example, in Section 40 the reader is told 'Don't benchmark against other organizations'. As someone who has studied benchmarking, I disagree: benchmarking offers the possibility of widening one's perspectives (a classic example being Southwest Airlines which looked at pit-stop practice in Formula One motor racing in order to see if this carried any implications for apron turnaround at airports) and/or of making instructive comparisons with the practices of cognate organizations. In the higher education context, benchmarking harmonizes with the tradition of collegial information-sharing and the transfer

and/or adaptation of good practice (bench-marking as currently being promoted by the Quality Assurance Agency is another matter entirely).

One matter which writings on the learning organization tend to underplay is the influence of politics and power in organizations. There is an often implicit rationalist assumption that, if everyone would only see things the same way, the learning organization would take off. The trouble is that the world is untidier and more fragmented than the advocates of the learning organization often admit. 'Thinking and acting organizational' requires 'thinking and acting political'. So at the heart of the learning organization there is a paradox: a manager needs to espouse commonality/communality whilst at the same time practising political differentiation.

Academics in higher education have divided loyalties. The majority would probably assert that their greater loyalty lies with their subject discipline rather than with their institution. The tension is clearly visible when, for example,

academic organizational matters cut across the modus operandi of the subject discipline. For some staff, then, the learning organization is to be found in their community of academic practice as much as in their own institution. The manager of academics, as a consequence, has a doubly difficult task.

This review has turned into the beginnings of a dialogue with the text (one might, I suppose, expect this of an academic). There is much useful material in the book, but there are also points at which the implicit assertiveness of 'tips' has to be questioned. The authors say, correctly, that each organization is unique: the corollary is that the reader should use the text as a prompt towards the development of appropriate practice rather than make the mistake of using it as a set of *ex cathedra* rules.

Mantz Yorke, Liverpool John Moores University

Reference
Wolf, A. (1995), *Competence-based Assessment*, Buckingham: Open University Press.