



**William Y. Arms. Digital Libraries.**

Cambridge, MA; London: MIT Press, 2000. x, 287p. ISBN 0-262-01180-8 (cloth). \$ 45.00; £ 29.95

The author of this ambitious volume is a professor of computer science at Cornell University and also the founder and Editor in Chief of *D-Lib Magazine*

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(<http://mirrored.ukoln.ac.uk/lis-journals/dlib/dlib/dlib.html>), the leading e-journal on all things digital. However, no need to worry – this book is in clear language rather than in *Computerese*, and its focus is the whole area of digital libraries, i.e. not just the computing technology involved, but also people and organisations. The intended audience includes librarians, technologists, publishers and end-users, and therefore the author has made the attempt to offer a very broad overview of the field. Inevitably, this includes a considerable amount of detail, project names, acronyms and so on, but basically the volume keeps on an introductory level and can be read by everyone trying to build up an informed view of this exciting area of our professional field.

The first chapter, *Libraries, Technology, and People*, starts not only with a (somewhat questionable) statement on the fascination of the present period, but also with a useful and simple definition of a digital library: “... a managed collection of information, with associated services, where the information is stored in digital formats and accessible over a network.” What follows are chapters on the Internet and the WWW, developments in libraries and (electronic) publishing, innovation and research, legal and economic issues, access rights and security, user interfaces, structural mark-up of textual information, descriptive metadata, methods and standards for interoperability in distributed computing, identifiers and structural metadata for the complexity of digital objects, and repositories and archives for long term storage of such materials. A chapter entitled *People, Organizations, and Change* discusses (briefly) the changing culture – creators, users, librarians, publishers, computer experts, libraries, consortia, etc. – in which digital libraries are emerging. Most chapters are of equal length (15–20 pages) and would lend themselves nicely to be converted into presentations or lectures for a one-semester course on the field of digital libraries.

As mentioned above, the book provides a wealth of details and facts – many of them in the form of panels or sidebars which describe and highlight certain projects (e.g. the ACM digital library), protocols (e.g. TCP/IP), programming languages (e.g. Java), case studies (e.g. the changing of the US library school curriculum), applications (e.g. new user interfaces such as *DLITE* and *Pad++*), historical developments (e.g. the history of copyright) and many other issues related to the digital library field. There is a noticeable inclination towards providing a chronology of intellectual developments and technological innovations which were/are relevant for digital libraries, however the author rarely takes the risk of making speculations about the future or predictions of forthcoming developments. Somewhat surprising is the absence of any documentation (publications, sources, URLs, etc.) or suggestions for further reading. All in all, however, the volume is certainly a very informative and well-presented state-of-the-art analysis that can be recommended to everyone seeking information about and insight into the present transition from the printed to the digital.

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