

# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Fred T. Hofstetter. *Multimedia Literacy*. London: McGraw-Hill, 1995. xxiii + 360 pp. \$62.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-07-911956-8.

Reviewed by Roy Johnson

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“Everything you need to know to get started in multimedia”: How often have you seen this claim on one of the three-inch thick tomes jamming the shelves of bookshops these days?

Hofstetter starts by offering basic definitions of the components of multimedia. These are rather brief: I think most people would probably welcome more than four short paragraphs on CD-ROM players, for instance. However, they have the virtue of being jargon-free and admirably clear. His definitions are then followed by descriptions of some proprietary multimedia applications, and examples of the way they are used in education, entertainment, medicine, and government. At times these read like thinly disguised ads for the companies who have provided the software [who he acknowledges] but at least it provides a convincing degree of authenticity. He is talking about commercial products which actually work—though I wonder just how many people would wish to select their *shoes* from a virtual shopping mall!? This commercial slant to the book also contributes to some rather unreflective statements such as “Corporate downsizing has greatly increased the need for just-in-time training.” In other words, prepare for your own redundancy.

He goes on to look into the future of multimedia and offers valuable advice on how to make well-informed judgements when choosing equipment. On the vexed question of keeping up with new developments and changing standards, he is bracingly uncompromising: “You have no choice other than to learn to live with the uncertainty. Because of the fast pace of change you have

to jump in quick and get to market fast, before the technology base shifts out from under you.”

The last sections of the book provide step-by-step tutorials in creating your own application with text, graphics, sound clips. These are supported by an accompanying CD-ROM [glued uncomfortably inside the back cover] which has all the basic data you require. It also contains a generous offering of software programmes [such as the excellent Paint Shop Pro]. This would seem to make the book ideal for use in schools and colleges as well as the ambitious independent reader.

He ends with the editing of digital video and creating advanced multimedia applications—so he seems to fairly match his claim to being comprehensive. The book is well illustrated, has a reasonable glossary, a bibliography, and [of course] full details of manufacturers and their products. Hofstetter may have one foot in the commercial gutter, but you can’t altogether dislike someone with the cheek to offer his own marriage proposal as a book dedication.

The accompanying CD requires any computer that meets or exceeds 4 megabytes of RAM, 386SX processor, hard disk drive with 4 megabytes of storage free, CD-ROM drive, 8-bit waveform audio, 640x480 color display, Windows 3.1 or higher.

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