

Librarians now making decisions that must consider the relative merits of SNA, X.25, SDLC, Ethernet, multiplexing, and other specific technical issues cannot expect much help from this book. — *William L. Basinski, Data Resources, Inc., Lexington, Massachusetts.*

Holder, Alan. *Video Discs—Their Application to Information Storage and Retrieval*. 2d ed. NRC D Publication no.17. Herford, Herts, Great Britain: National Reprographic Centre for Documentation, 1981. 50p. ISBN 0-85267-199-7 hardcover; 0-85267-200-4 microfiche.

Barrett, R. *Developments in Optical Disc Technology and the Implications for Information Storage and Retrieval*. British Library Research and Development Reports, no.5623. Wetherby, West Yorkshire: The British Library, 1981. 80p. ISBN 0-905984-71-4. ISSN 0308-2385.

One candidate for the topic most discussed and debated during 1982 by those involved in the application of technology to libraries is bound to be that of videodiscs—and how

they are likely to be used in the next decade. It is being discussed by all manner of people: those who give advice at the national policy level, those who design and implement library computer applications, foundation program officers, and many others in between.

The wide-ranging interest is easy to understand when one analyzes the functional characteristics of a videodisc: the ability to store text in the billions and trillions of characters at low cost; a high storage density resulting in modest use of physical space; and, most important, the potential for high accessibility and deliverability through the use of computers and high-speed telecommunications. A videodisc is nothing less than an alternative publishing medium, yet it gives rise to descriptions of libraries without walls. The appearance of these two reports is timely, given the degree of interest in this technology both here and abroad, and especially given the scarcity of material on this topic that is understandable to a nontechnical person.

The Holder report traces the history of video playback systems and focuses quickly

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on videodisc technology, contrasting between mechanical, magnetic, optical, and capacitative approaches. A small collection of system specifications is presented, each giving a thumbnail sketch of the salient features and availability of those systems now on or approaching the marketplace.

Also included are descriptions of current or potential applications, a review of some major research and development projects in which this technology plays a central role, and the author's assessment of future opportunities (some insurmountable) that are likely to present themselves.

Last, but by no means least, the author presents a list of 117 cited references, accompanied by another 66 relating to the subject of videodiscs. Any reader whose interest is whetted to the point where more detailed study is called for will find papers cited on just about any aspect of the topic.

The report by Barrett is similar in outline to that of Horder, but contains substantially more descriptive material relating to the technology itself. Of special interest are Barrett's comments on the aspects that require more development. The correctness of the author's views on a time frame for resolution of the problems he cites remains to be seen, but the reader is given a good feeling for the current state of the art and likely future directions.

Some of the terminology employed would probably be opaque to the nonengineer, but Barrett uses it sparingly: a layperson can gain a general sense of how these devices work. The structure of the report, however, is not easily discernible from the section headings, making it somewhat difficult to assimilate.—*John R. Schroeder, The Research Libraries Group, Stanford, California.*

User Fees: A Practical Perspective. Ed. by Miriam A. Drake. Littleton, Colo.: Libraries Unlimited, 1981. 142p. \$17.50. LC 81-6032. ISBN 0-87287-244-0.

This is a collection of eleven pieces related to the subject of fees in libraries. It is divided into five sections: "Review of the Issues"; "Opposition Views"; "Fees in Public Libraries"; "Fees in Academic and Special Libraries"; and "Fees for Service through Information Brokers." It also contains a

selected bibliography. The first two sections present pro and con arguments concerning fees and the remaining sections describe some actual charging practices in various types of libraries.

Four of the papers were prepared for a workshop on user fees sponsored by the Indiana chapter of the Special Libraries Association. Two more of the articles were prepared for this volume. The remaining five were previously published elsewhere, three of them in *Special Libraries*.

In the first article, Miriam Drake presents a convincing argument that libraries must "undertake serious efforts to justify economically the claims by libraries on our scarce resources or else see a continued erosion of the real resources devoted to producing library services." It is presumably her conviction of this imperative that underlies the selection of papers included here.

Drake's paper is followed by a good presentation of the economic rationale for library fees by economist Richard Pfister. Not the least of these arguments are the continuing reductions in available public funds and the idea that user fees could bring about more user-responsive service. Marketplace mechanisms are proposed to promote efficiency in resource allocation, to make those who use services pay for them, and as a means of library survival.

One wonders whether, governed by the market, library services and collections may then come to reflect the plastic "shopping mall" quality we find in those segments of our lives already controlled by market mechanisms. One can hope that technological developments will allow for greater diversity of information sources despite the tendency of market mechanisms to reduce things to the lowest common denominator.

One of the opposing views is presented by Fay Blake. She points out that the fee issue is only an issue in *publicly funded* libraries. In a typically rousing paper, she raises her concerns about the availability of information and the place of publicly available information in the kind of society we want to have.

The other paper opposing fees is a brief argument that challenges the view that the main purpose of the public library is to supply light reading. Presenting an English perspective, Roger Stoakley argues that intro-