

# Book Review

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***Neal-Schuman Library Technology Companion: A Basic Guide for Library Staff, Seventh Edition.*** By Robin Hastings. Chicago: ALA Neal-Schuman, 2025. 224p. \$64.99 softcover (ISBN 979-8-89255-290-5).

The most recent edition of the *Library Technology Companion* published by ALA has been fully revised by a new author, Robin Hastings. This guide has been in publication for over twenty years and Hastings brings an attention to detail and eye toward the future as a library professional with a background in information technology.

This seventh edition follows the same structure of its predecessors and provides a general overview of library technologies, notes the mission critical technologies needed in libraries, describes how to build and maintain the environment for library technologies, and discusses how to stay informed about technology to adapt to future developments. The end of each chapter provides a comprehensive list of sources for more information on a topic, should readers wish to branch out further.

The companion is similar to other publications from the ALA Neal-Schuman imprint that provide broad surveys of library technologies, such as the *New Top Technologies Every Librarian Needs to Know*.<sup>1</sup> This book provides a broad, but never exhaustive overview of technologies used in libraries. The overview encompasses legacy and modern technologies—from shelving and card catalogs to library systems and electronic resources—as well as current technologies such as makerspaces, social media, and brief discussions throughout the book on artificial intelligence (AI) in library tools.

These updates on technology in the seventh edition make some of the information timelier. Most notably, this edition briefly touches upon the ways that AI is beginning to appear in general search engines such as Google, as well as library tools. It also notes the shifting landscape of library technology during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, and accounts for the impact this had on library e-resources and other services that were able to be used by patrons online. These current issues are discussed in a section on the 2023 Public Library Association (PLA) annual technology survey and the overall increase in digital resources. Among some of the data shared that showcases the increasing technology needs in public libraries are these statistics: “47 percent of public libraries now offer some form of mobile internet access...nearly 95 percent of public libraries offered some sort of e-resource to their patrons, with 85 percent providing streaming access to materials through partnerships with vendors...95 percent of public libraries offer some sort of digital literacy training these days!” (11).

Among the strengths of the book, one is a clear delineation of the numerous technologies encountered in libraries. Working in electronic resources and systems myself, I appreciated the way that the author was able to articulate in plain language the complex and interconnected landscape of different library services, such as free online tools, subscription databases, discovery layers, and the library systems that organize and present these services to our patrons. I also found the Library Insights interspersed throughout the book to be helpful. These short narratives provide anecdotes from a variety of library employees and their direct experiences working with the various technologies that are presented in each

section. Such snippets of real experience combined with some of the chapters that provide guidelines on the process of testing and adopting new technologies could be a useful starting point for libraries with small staff looking for a framework to adopt a new service.

One area that I did take issue with is some of the technology that is noted in chapter 14 (“The Death of Technologies: Preservation Issues and Saying Goodbye”). I feel this is one area where the generally broad strokes of the book fall short when describing “The dead, the dying,” and the “next likely to hit the chopping block” (148) technologies. That said, it is noted by the author that “my declaration of death or illness does not mean that your library should be completely free of these technologies. But these are formats to think about removing or replacing if you have not yet done so” (148). Amongst other media, they go on to list compact discs under dead formats, DVDs amongst the dying, and ebooks that cannot be downloaded as next likely to hit the chopping block. I agree that CDs and DVDs are dated formats, but have worked in libraries with collections of each that still retain high usage, particularly audiobooks on CD and DVDs of recent movies being popular among patrons that do not personally subscribe to multiple streaming platforms. As for ebooks, the intricacies of digital rights management (DRM) for each publisher can be frustrating. Particularly in academic contexts, there is no guarantee that a license means that a patron will always be able to download the full book on their mobile device without some caveats. Aside from those few sticking points, I found that this latest *Library Technology Companion* serves as an excellent quick guide and point of reference for library staff working with technology and is also ideal for introductory classes that would include library technologies as part of a broad survey in Library and Information Science programs.—*Pete Steadman* (psteadma@iwu.edu), *The Ames Library, Illinois Wesleyan University, Bloomington, Illinois*

## Note

1. Kenneth J. Varnum, ed. *New Top Technologies Every Librarian Needs to Know*. Chicago: ALA Neal-Schuman, 2019.