

BOOK REVIEW / CRITIQUE DE LIVRE

Internet Cool Tools for Physicians. By Melissa L. Rethlefsen, David L. Rothman, and Daniel S. Mojon. Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 2009. 154 pages (soft cover). ISBN-10: 978-3-540-76381-9, ISBN-13: 978-3540763819. CAN\$35.95.

The Internet is brimming with information and the tools to find and manage that information. But where can busy physicians turn to learn about the tools that would be most useful to them? Authored by two health information professionals and a physician, *Internet Cool Tools for Physicians* offers readers some insight into both well-known Internet tools like Google and Wikipedia, and a large number of potentially less familiar tools.

At 154 pages, *Internet Cool Tools for Physicians* is intended to be a starting point for physicians to discover and learn about the Internet tools at their disposal. The authors discuss, at varying levels of depth, Internet searching; PubMed and various third party PubMed tools; current awareness tools; podcasting; blogs; wikis; “collaboration tools”, such as free online word processing and spreadsheet software; social bookmarking; and social networking. The authors place a great deal of emphasis on Google and its many products (the Google Search engine, Google Health, Google Scholar, Google Reader, iGoogle, and Google Docs), but they also provide information on other tools that perform the same functions. The authors include tools, such as people search engines, that are useful in an international context and clearly indicate when a tool is only useful for a specific geographic area.

The authors go beyond simply providing how-to instructions by giving recommendations, mentioning the pros and cons of particular tools, and providing points for the reader to consider before deciding whether to try a new tool. At times the how-to instructions are somewhat sparse, and the ever-changing nature of the Internet may result in differences between what the reader sees in the book and what they see online. This makes a willingness on the reader’s part to jump in and experiment with the tools, rather than rely solely on the book for guidance, essential. Certain sections, such as the discussion on PubMed searching and a brief section on critical appraisal of wikis, have a certain library instruction flavour to them, which is unsurprising given there are two librarians on the author team. The presence of a physician on the author team provides a health care practitioner’s experience and perspective, and knowing that these tools come recommended by one of their own may boost the credibility of the book among physicians. The examples used throughout the book focus primarily on the use of Internet tools for professional practice, but some instruction on how to search for everyday information such as weather, flight information, and movies is also included, which would likely appeal to physicians as well.

Internet Cool Tools for Physicians is organized largely by devoting chapters to particular types of tools, although there are some chapters that are based on performing a task. Each chapter contains a short list of core messages at the beginning to give the reader an idea of what the chapter is about.

This is a nice feature for those who do not want to read the book from cover to cover; however, at times these core messages sound somewhat like a sales pitch rather than a summary of main points. There is no index, but a detailed table of contents is available to help the reader find a particular section.

The two weaknesses of *Internet Cool Tools for Physicians* are poor proofreading and poorly thought-out use of figures. There are numerous copy errors in the book, which can become an annoyance and does not reflect well on the amount of care that was put into the work. The use of figures is a more serious matter, as this title is billed as an “illustrated guide” on the back cover. There are sections in the book where the addition of screen captures would have been useful to help the reader visualize the steps being described. In other areas the authors include figures with debatable usefulness, such as featuring the logos for the tools under discussion and using a black and white figure to illustrate the appearance of colour coding (p. 58). While the lack of figures in certain sections of the book could result in some confusion, this difficulty may be eased if the reader were to sit down at the computer to explore the tool at hand while they read.

The two strengths of this book are the variety of tools and techniques discussed, and the authors’ consideration for Internet rookies. The book introduces the reader to a wide variety of Internet tools that fill a number of different functions, making it useful for readers with varying needs and interests. A basic level of computer literacy is required of the reader, but the authors do not assume that the reader necessarily has much prior experience with Internet tools. The authors mitigated the potential for intimidating readers who are anxious about using computers by using a conversational tone for their writing and including cartoons at the beginning of each new chapter. The book also logically begins with a chapter explaining how search engines work and the basic principles of Google searching before continuing on to more advanced search tools and techniques. A glossary of basic terms is included in the introduction, and additional vocabulary is included, where relevant, later on in the text. Useful tips from the authors and direction to other sources of information and online tutorials for particular tools are also scattered throughout the text.

Internet Cool Tools for Physicians gives the reader a broad overview of a variety of Internet tools and searching techniques, without including so much information as to be overwhelming. With so many items covered, any reader is bound to find a new “cool tool” that piques their interest. This book would be suitable for both large and small medical libraries.

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