

feel of how to present this subject matter to secondary students in a manner which they can understand. It gives an Australian perspective to information technology that is often missing in other books. *Computer Studies for Australian Schools* deserves a place on the bookshelf of all teachers working in this area, and should be seriously looked at if selecting a text for an introductory computer studies class.

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Information Technology and You: People, Processes and Systems by Wendy Bell and Robert Sanderson
(Edward Arnold, Melbourne, 1991), pp. xiv + 289, \$19.95, ISBN 0-7131-8383-7.

Manuals, computer journals and text on IT applications often tend to be written for those with some technical training and expertise. It can be difficult to locate up-to-date explanations, in terms comprehensible to non-technical readers, of matters such as data communications or the characteristics of different types of software. However, this textbook on information technology, intended for use in secondary schools, provides an excellent introduction to the subject area. The book can be studied with considerable benefit also by readers other than secondary school students, for example IT users who may never have acquired an understanding of the technologies underlying the systems they employ.

In eight chapters the authors cover the theory of information and information systems, hardware and software, data processing and communications, the basics of programming, and the social and organisational aspects of information technologies. In-depth discussion of particular topics is contained within 'frames' throughout the book. Each chapter is followed by questions and exercises, and suggested 'project work'.

The lack of references or a bibliography is not likely to be a drawback in this particular context. Technologies and systems are discussed in generic terms: rapid changes in the IT area make it necessary for teachers to supplement a textbook with material covering new applications and other recent developments. In spite of the inevitable dating of certain sections almost at the time of printing, overall the book should remain topical and useful for teaching purposes for several years. The style, editing and presentation is excellent throughout. Some technical sections will of course require more concentrated study, and may not be suitable for all students.

The final chapter addresses the impact on people and organisations of information technologies. The authors suggest that concerns raised in the 1970s and early 1980s as to the likely negative effects of computer applications (unemployment, etc.) have been shown to have been largely mistaken. Examples are given of applications beneficial to the disabled, those living in remote areas, and also to workers in industry. Current issues such as the nature of changes in job design and working conditions are presented for discussion and further investigation by students. The overall impression from a reading of this chapter is of information technology as a force with a very exciting potential, with little likelihood of unwanted social and economic consequences in the longer term. It can be suggested that the perspective in this chapter is somewhat too rosy,

considering, for example, the vexed question of the impact on productivity of Australia's large-scale import of hardware and software during the 1980s. However, this is not a major criticism: the authors do raise the key issues which need to be addressed, and invite students to explore these further, and they emphasise that the social and organisational context of IT is of primary significance. The sense of excitement generated by spectacular examples of applications is very appropriate in a textbook of this kind: students embarking on careers in IT-related areas should indeed be encouraged not to focus narrowly on technology but to have an outlook which encompasses social ends and benefits.

Much of the illustrative material throughout the book is Australian, such as the air traffic control system at Melbourne airport or the Imparja television channel owned and controlled by Aboriginal people, and transmitting via satellite from Alice Springs. Considering the dependency of Australia and other smaller nations on technical developments in the world's major economic centres, it should be gratifying and stimulating to Australian students and teachers to be able to study information technology in the Australian context.

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Price Caps and Incentive Regulation in Telecommunications *edited by M. Einhorn*

(Kluwer, Boston, 1991), pp. xi + 239, \$US55.00, ISBN 0-7923-9113-6.

This collection of papers originated in a day seminar at the Columbia University Centre for Telecommunications and Information Studies in 1987. Four seminar papers were augmented by seven invited by the editor, plus the editor's introduction.

The papers cover a range of current issues in regulation. Three of the 11 are mildly econometric, one is pragmatic, another uses a satisficing principal-agent model, the other six are explorations of equilibrium properties of variations on the neoclassical theme, with certainty about exogenous factors up to a probability distribution. The book thus illustrates the claims of conventional welfare economics in the context of perceived market failure in telecommunications.

The authors are either academics (9), Bell research staff (5), regional Bell staff (2), or a consultant (whose paper is jointly authored by Bell staff). Two academics are or were recently members of regulatory bodies, and one academic is also a Bell staffer. Four of the 12 papers are Bell authored. The importance of Bell in financing the debate about regulation is obvious; not only from this collection. The regulatory-capture hypothesis may well be a useful one to have in mind when looking at this and other works on public regulation.

What can be called the mainstream of the debate is over the efficacy of price capping in the transition to unregulated contested markets. Brennan's paper concludes that price caps cannot be effective second best solutions unless they are merely that. The firm will behave strategically to frustrate the social planner. Nonetheless, Vogelsang continues to present further elegant elaborations of his