An LJ *forum takes a byte into a burgeoning book market*

Getting with the Program(s):
Building a Computer Book Collection
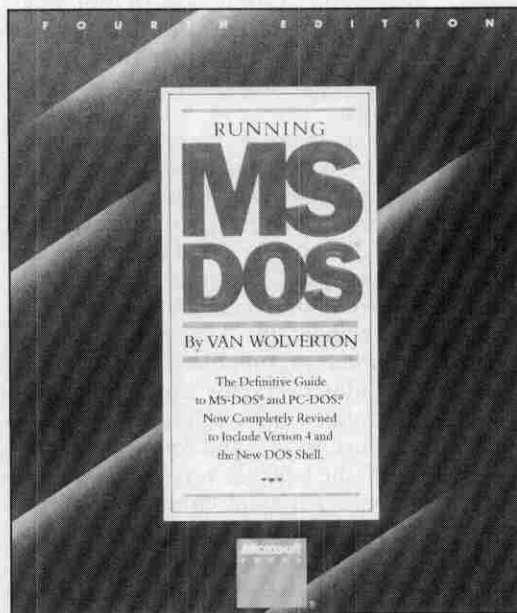
By Judy Quinn

"I T'S LIKE SAYING it's safe to go back in the water just as the shark is out devouring the latest swimmer." That half-serious comment comes from Brady Books publisher Michael Mellin about recent articles trumpeting the revived computer book market. But it's no joke for librarians wading through the current flood of computer books; they often feel at sea about the best choices for their collection.

"Sometimes it feels like we're playing pin the tail on the donkey," admits Meg Baker Eversen, an associate buyer for Baker & Taylor, who works with librarians in making their computer book selections.

How *can* librarians navigate collection development in this area? *LJ* recently brought together a forum of librarians, publishers, and distributors to explore the issue. During the discussion, some guideposts started to appear: Buy those new software manuals, they said, but supplement them with other reference and other subject area books. Most of all, try to stay informed on what's new and upcoming in the computer industry.

An important component of a collection, the *LJ* forum participants

Judy Quinn is Associate Editor, The Book Review, *LJ*

RUNNING
MS DOS
BY VAN WOLVERTON

The Definitive Guide to MS-DOS® and PC-DOS? Now Completely Revised to Include Version 4 and the New DOS Shell.

said, will be the new, growing crop of business software manuals. Unlike the first wave of computer books in the late 1970s and early 1980s, which emphasized a home use of computers that failed to really take off, the new general interest titles reflect the increased use of computers on the job. That phenomenon will only keep growing. People have to learn the company's operating system, word processing, database, and/or spreadsheet programs—and need software manuals to help them do so.

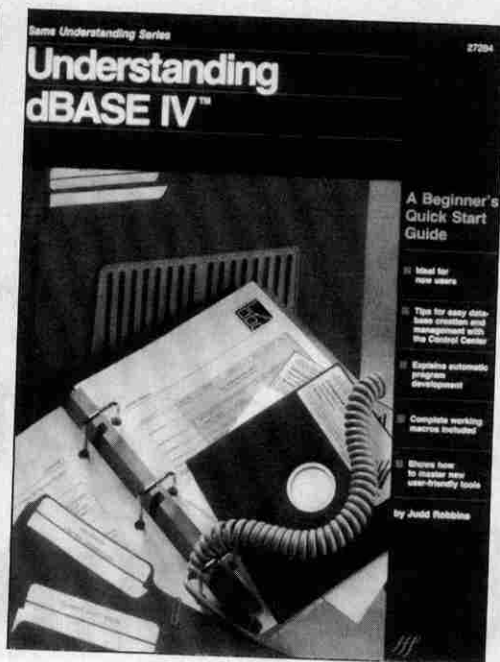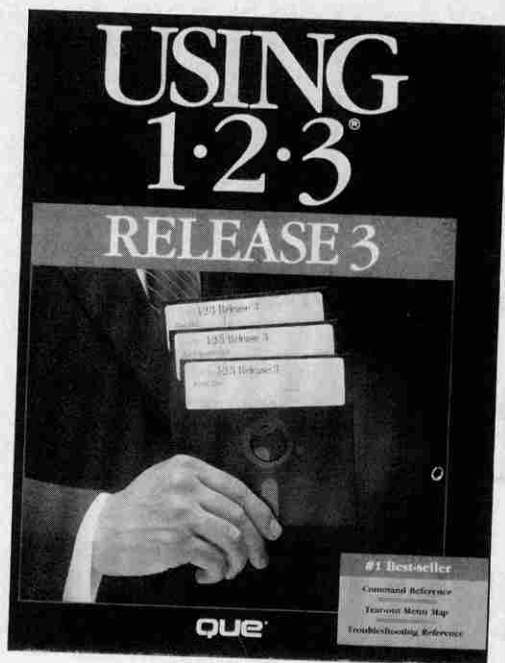These manuals come from a whole spinoff industry that developed

as computer users found software's original documentation unintelligible. "Often I'll throw out the documentation right away and grab a manual," says Baker Eversen. While documentation is improving, manuals often refine on the abilities of computer software. "Most documentation only tells you what's there; the books tell you how to do things with what's there," says Mike Miller, marketing manager for the Que Corporation, publisher of computer books.

"You have to have these manuals for the patrons who can't afford them," says Ron Petrusha, a computer book editor at Bantam and a former computer book buyer for Golden-Lee Book Distributors Inc. Baker Eversen sees the manuals serving as a "test drive market," much in the way a travel guide collection does. "Patrons may want to take 14 books on a program home and test them out to decide which suits them best, and maybe buy that one," she says.

The best basics

But which manuals to buy? *The Software Encyclopedia* (Bowker, 1988) lists over 29,000 microcomput-

USING 1·2·3 RELEASE 3
#1 Best-seller
Command Reference
Tearout Menu Map
Troubleshooting Reference
que

Understanding dBASE IV™
A Beginner's Quick Start Guide
by Judd Robbins

er software packages, an astounding number to even consider supporting with books. Que's Miller provided *LJ* with data on what are the major PC applications and programs and the percentages of their use (see charts and definitions of programs, p. 52-53). Buying a corresponding mix of computer books would be a good start on a collection, or, on a smaller scale, to buy one standard book on the major operating system, word processing, spreadsheet, and database programs. When *LJ* asked for the best books in these areas, the forum participants, surprisingly, all quickly came up with the same four titles: *Running MS-DOS*. 4th ed. (Microsoft Press); *Using WordPerfect*. Series 5 Edition (Osborne/McGraw-Hill); *Using 1-2-3 Release 3* (Que); and *Understanding dBASE IV* (Sams).

Miller also cites *Using 1-2-3* as an example of good format for a software manual. "What's important in this industry is not so much the publisher or the author—although there are authors and publishers who seem to consistently do better books—but the information in the book and how it's set up. The best books are a good introduction to the software, being comprehensive as well as a complete reference. The first half of *Using 1-2-3* is a step-by-step tutorial; the second half, a reference of all the commands."

"Take a good look at the manual," Baker Eversen advises librarians. "Does a computer user need to have it constantly near the computer, or is it a book to consult three or four times? If it's the first, you might shy away from getting it for your library."

Beyond the bookstore

As Baker Eversen's comment suggests, libraries sometimes have different and additional choices than just the popular titles stocked by bookstores. Library distributor Baker & Taylor's list of current computer best sellers is not just made up of the manuals that dominate the bookstore shelves.

For example, by having a collection of books on older versions of computer systems, librarians are performing a real service to patrons, who often can no longer find these books in bookstores. Librarians say they still get circulation from and requests for books about the Timex Sinclair and Commodore computers, on dBASE II (the latest versions are IIIplus and IV), Lotus 1-2-3 version 1.2 (the latest versions are 2.2 and 3), or WordPerfect 4 (the latest is version 5). Gladys Shapera, assistant director of technical services at the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh, says that, for example, a 1986 computer book title, which one would think has become "outdated," has as much as 60 circs on it.

"There's a large number of people out there using good, basic products who don't have the money, the time, or the inclination to get the new enhancements to the programs," says Gloria Rohmann, assistant chief of New York Public Library's Science and Technology Research Center. "You need to have the older books for them."

Computer books publishers recognize this; most maintain a strong backlist, even though a bookstore may choose not to carry older titles. Libraries are finding they keep a strong "backlist" on computer books collections as well.

"I probably won't get rid of much," says Bonnie Brant, a collection development specialist at the Prince Georges County Memorial Library System (Maryland). She is developing weeding procedures for the system's computer book collection. "It's a relatively new collection, and the circulation figures for most of the books still justify having them on the shelves."

Brant says her library system, since it is in the Washington, D.C. area, also has books on the programming languages used by the Department of Defense and other government agencies. Indeed, a library's surrounding population may skew its collection away from the popular manual choices toward these special interests. Ronnie Cosel, a senior librarian at the Port Jefferson Free Library (New York) is just starting her computer book collection and plans to purchase a liberal number of books on UNIX, since the nearby university community uses this operating system.

The Carnegie Library serves as a "source of last resort" for the surrounding Pennsylvania counties, says Shapera, so she has to buy "across the board." "We need books on software/software applications, computer history, computer literacy, uses for a PC at home or in small business, how to buy a computer, how to repair a computer, computers for children, computer careers."

In addition, Baker Eversen sees artificial intelligence as a growing area that a public library should have a book or two on, and Miller says that desktop publishing, and the accompanying graphics programs and laser printers and other peripherals, is "now coming about to be useful, affordable, and relatively easy to use. We're starting to publish more books on it."

Tracking the trends

This is just what librarians need to hear about: more "hot topics." As Brant wearily says, "Buying computer books can be a full-time job." But it is not a full-time job for most, although Rohmann says that keeping up on this area may be easier for librarians than bookstore owners. "Librarians are perhaps more open to it than an equivalent population of

booksellers. They learned computers in library school. It's become part of the mystique of being a professional librarian.''

Trend-tracking cannot be done the traditional way, i.e., reading evaluative reviews. This is to some extent because the books just don't get consistently reviewed in either the computer magazines or professional journals, and, as Que's Miller says, ''by the time you get a review on a book, it's too late.''

''Right now, for example, you probably should be stocking your books on Lotus 1-2-3 versions 2.2 and 3.0,'' he says. ''You probably won't see reviews on these books for three months and you'll miss the initial push of patron demand.'' In place of reviews, librarians rely on colleagues, publishers, distributors, and even retail bookstores to help them make their decisions.

Rohmann is in an ideal position in that NYPL receives review copies of computer books to be annotated in the library's *New Technical Books* publication, which is published six times a year. (For subscription info, write: *New Technical Books*, NYPL, Science and Technology Research Ctr., 5th Ave. and 42nd St., New York, NY 10018.)

She and the rest of the NYPL staff can pick which they feel are appropriate for NYPL's collection, and they divide up the writing of the annotations. ''We don't call them reviews,'' she says, ''because we don't have the time, nor are we subject specialists to that extent, to really review each book.'' Instead, they try to stay up on the subject by reading computer magazines and the technology sections of newspapers and sharing their information. ''We try to determine what are the popular computer applications and those are the ones we're going to support,'' she says. ''It's a judgment call on our part.''

Peer group wisdom

In this subject especially, librarians are consulting colleagues. Cosel, for example, has asked an academic librarian, Donna Albertus at Stony Brook's Computer Science Library, to provide the Suffolk County Library Association with a list of recommended computer books [*LJ* will publish the list when completed.—Ed.].

And publishers—who, after all, want to see sales of their computer books, are making extra efforts to educate their buyers. Que book buyers get free computer glossaries and other educational materials, and

Brady publishes a free quarterly trends magazine called *BradyLine*.

Shapera says that, in the absence of extensive reviews, the publishers' catalogs are even more important. ''The publishers that provide us with the most information, that give us information about the audience of a book, are the ones we buy from.''

Luckily for librarians, many publishers dropped out of the market during the 1984 sales slump, making the list of computer book publishers easier to contend with. *Computer Publishing & Advertising Report*, a biweekly newsletter (Communication Trends, Larchmont, N.Y.), regularly tracks

the output of the following publishers:

Addison-Wesley; Bantam; Brady/Simon & Schuster, which also distributes Ashton-Tate books; McGraw-Hill/Osborne; Macmillan, which distributes Que, Sams, and Hayden; Microsoft; Prentice Hall; Sybex; TAB; and Wiley. (Other publishers in the field include Cobb, Compute! Pubns., Dow Jones-Irwin, IEEE Press, Intel, M&T Press, MIS: Press, Scott Foresman, etc.)

Expect the list to get smaller. Michael Mellin, who conjured up that shark analogy, says publishers will soon be getting devoured in the competitive waters of this marketplace.

MAJOR APPLICATIONS

These charts, courtesy of Que Corp., show percentages of use of the major PC applications and programs, first by general categories (spreadsheets, databases, etc.) and then within each category. A corresponding mix of books on these subjects would be a fairly accurate reflection of the popular demand for PC information.

APPLICATION SOFTWARE MARKET

Word Processors 19%

Spreadsheets 19%

Databases 15%

Other 7%

Desktop Publishing 8%

Languages 5%

Graphics 7%

Integrated 8%

Business 14%

Software Publisher's Association--1988

OPERATING SYSTEMS

The operating system controls computer hardware, manages system resources, runs programs, and supervises the interaction between the system and the user.

DOS, including MS-DOS and PC DOS

DOS is the operating system used by more than 25 million IBM-compatible personal computer users. DOS is available in both generic MS-DOS and IBM-specific PC DOS versions.

Macintosh OS

Macintosh and Apple computers run on this operating system, which is not compatible to IBM-DOS.

Windows

Microsoft Windows is an operating environment than runs in conjunction with DOS. Windows has more than two million installed users.
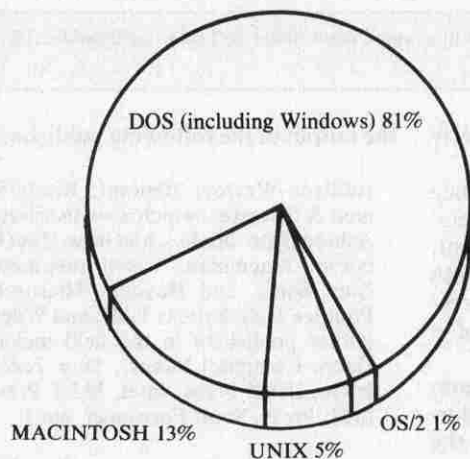
UNIX

This operating system, found primarily in technical and scientific environments, is making steady advances into the PC world.
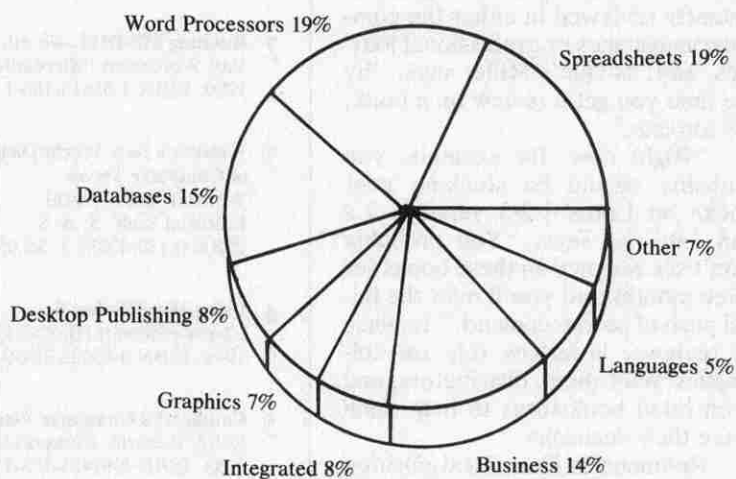
OS/2

Although not yet widely used, OS/2 is thought by many to be the operating system of the future since it is the operating system for IBM's new (but not yet dominant) PS/2 computers and PS/2 compatibles. OS/2 also runs on Intel Corp.-based 80286 and 80386 microcomputers developed by Microsoft and IBM.
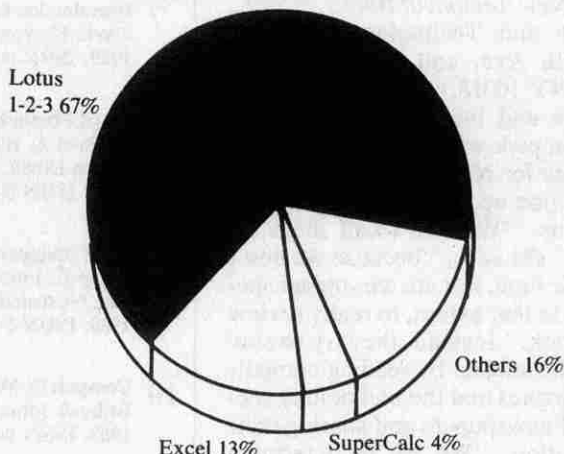
OPERATING SYSTEMS MARKET

DOS (including Windows) 81%

MACINTOSH 13%

UNIX 5%

OS/2 1%

From various sources

DOS SPREADSHEET MARKET

Lotus 1-2-3 67%

Others 16%

Excel 13%

SuperCalc 4%

Source: Computer Intelligence

SPREADSHEETS

A spreadsheet uses a matrix consisting of rows and columns to perform calculations on numerical data. Spreadsheets are widely used in most businesses to perform both simple and complex financial computations.

1-2-3

The most popular spreadsheets come from Lotus. 1-2-3 products hold about a 67 percent share of the IBM-compatible spreadsheet market. At present Lotus markets two products: 1-2-3 Release 2 and 1-2-3-Release 3. Release 2 can run on all IBM-compatible computers. Release 3, however, can only run on today's most powerful machines.

Excel

Microsoft Excel is an advanced spreadsheet for power users. The IBM version of the software—like 1-2-3 Release 3—will only run on today's most powerful machines.

SuperCalc

New SuperCalc5 offers many of the features of 1-2-3 Release 3 in a program that will run on all IBM-compatible computers.

WORD PROCESSING

Word processing is typewriting with a computer. Words and letters are manipulated electronically, making it easy to copy and edit text.

WordPerfect
WordPerfect is the most popular word processing program. Versions of Word-Perfect (the latest is version 5) are available for most popular computers. Yearly sales exceed 750,000 copies.

DisplayWrite
DisplayWrite is a word processing program marketed by IBM and popular in corporations. Yearly sales exceed 200,000 copies.

Microsoft Word
The second-best-selling word processing program is also available for both IBM-compatible and Macintosh computers.

MultiMate Advantage, WordStar, Professional Write
Other popular word processing programs.

WORD PROCESSING MARKET

- WordPerfect 58%
- Other 10%
- Professional Write 2%
- WordStar 4%
- MultiMate 6%
- Microsoft Word 8%
- DisplayWrite 13%
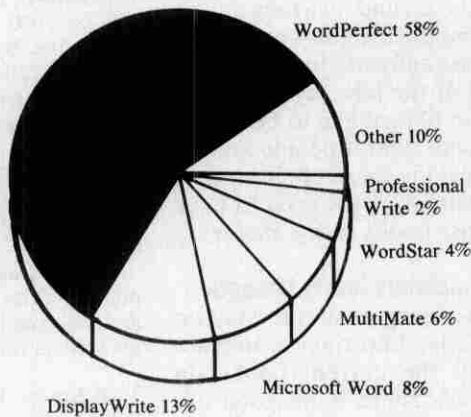
Source: Computer Intelligence

DATABASES

With PC-based database management programs, users can store and manipulate large volumes of data. Database programs can be used to create day-to-day applications, such as inventory management programs and mailing lists.

dBASE
The most popular IBM-compatible databases are the dBASE series of software from Ashton-Tate. Two different generations of the product are currently being sold: dBASE III PLUS and the recently released dBASE IV. A Macintosh program from Ashton-Tate, called dBASE Mac, is also available.

Paradox
From Borland, new Pardox 3 is the second-most-popular IBM-compatible database program.
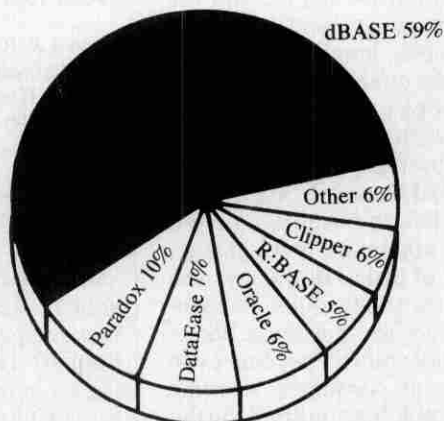
DataEase
DataEase is a user friendly database that is the third-most-popular IBM-compatible database program.

Oracle, R:BASE, Clipper, Reflex, dBXL
Other IBM-compatible database programs.

DATABASE MARKET

- dBASE 59%
- Other 6%
- Clipper 6%
- R:BASE 5%
- Oracle 6%
- DataEase 7%
- Paradox 10%

Compiled from various sources

DESKTOP PUBLISHING/ GRAPHICS

Desktop publishing programs convert normal text into professional-quality publications. Presentation graphics programs enable users to create high-quality charts and graphs.

Ventura Publisher
Ventura Publisher is the most popular IBM-compatible desktop publishing program. New Version 2.0, along with the Professional Extension, produces typeset-quality output.

PageMaker
PageMaker is the No. 2 IBM-compatible desktop publishing program, and the dominant Macintosh desktop publishing program.

PFS: First Publisher
This is a low-priced desktop publishing program.

Harvard Graphics
This is the best-selling graphics program.

INTEGRATED SYSTEMS

An integrated program combines the features of freestanding software into one easy-to-use whole. Most integrated programs feature word processing, spreadsheet, and database modules.

Smart, including SmartWare II
Smart is a high-end integrated program. SmartWare II is a newly released version.

Q&A
Q&A integrates a critically acclaimed word processor with a versatile database management module.

Enable, Enable/OA
Enable/OA is the latest version of a program popular among corporate and government institutions.

Symphony
From Lotus, the developers of 1-2-3, comes this high-end integrated program.

PFS: First Choice, Microsoft Works, FrameWork III
Other integrated programs for IBM-compatible computers.

Microsoft Works and AppleWorks
Other integrated programs for Apple computers.

PROGRAMMING LANGUAGES

Advanced computer users use programming languages to create their own programs/applications.

C, including Quick C and Turbo C
C is the most popular programming language among personal computer users. Software companies produce various compilers for C programmers; the most popular C compiler is Borland's Turbo C.

Pascal, including Turbo Pascal and Quick Pascal; BASIC, including Quick BASIC; Assembly Language
Other programming languages.

"There will definitely be a shakeout in the industry like the one in 1984," says Mellin. "There is a lot of overpublishing, and some publishers won't survive it," agrees Mike Nicita, computer book buyer for Golden-Lee. "But that doesn't mean computer books aren't here to stay. They will continue to be important to libraries."

What books rise above this surfeit of information? Often, they are seen in the selections offered by computer book clubs. These clubs offer not only the titles of the particular publishing house, but representative titles from others as well. Librarians can join these clubs, or, at least, carefully read their advertisements for book ideas. "I've seen buys on titles from small computer book clubs that are remarkably close to prepub trade. The people buying for computer book clubs are probably among the smartest buyers around," says Mellin.

Distributors also can serve as educational clearinghouses. "I like the way Ingram organizes their computer book catalogs; they represent a variety of publishers and they provide annotations," says Shapera. Baker & Taylor is starting a twice-yearly supplement called *Computer Press Update* (*CPU*), which, along with trade advertising, will have a trends column. Other major distributors like Blackwell North America, Brodart, and Golden-Lee also provide support materials and help in building this subject collection.

Looking at bookstore collections can help, too. Brant likes to go to the computer book room at the Maryland Book Exchange bookstore and see how much shelf space is devoted to each subject. Specialty computer bookstores are worth a visit, and the bookstore staff can usually make knowledgeable computer title suggestions.

Larry Price, Ingram's director of marketing, also suggests visiting the local software store for ideas. "They may even be interested in donating books to you, putting their name inside the book jacket. It could save the library some money," he says.

Even consulting all these outside sources won't make trend-predicting an exact science. Knowing what software will survive prerelease hype, for example, is never a sure thing, and, indeed, is the reason publishers experience a high book return rate in this area and sometimes enact last-minute title cancellations.

"You don't always know what subjects are going to be hits," says Que's Miller. "Some have a nice blip in the beginning and then die. Sprint, for example, looked strong, but then it didn't take off."

So, proceeding with caution on new technology isn't necessarily a bad move, especially for a small library with limited funds. "A lot of people do have that wait-and-see attitude," admits Miller.

The current example of tricky trend prediction is OS/2, the new operating system that IBM expects will replace DOS. "I bought everything on sight on OS/2, and no one is asking for it," says Rohmann. Publishers agree that these first-generation books were often DOS books reworked for OS/2 users, and that, as Rohman says, "DOS will be around for a long time."

But jumping the gun—or gettting on the wrong software bandwagon—is just part of the job, says Shapera. "The public library has to be reflective of society, and if people are going to be making these choices, mistakes, or whatever, we need to have some of those books on the shelves."

Current complaints/future changes

As frustrating as it is to stay on top of trends, librarians complain more about the current books on their shelves. There is no good all-around dictionary of computer terms, they say; the ones out there get outdated quickly. Something with looseleaf updates would be welcome.

Even more problematic is that many computer books come in paperback only. "Not only do they fall apart, but when you try to replace them—and you can't always if a publisher has gone out of print—there's a whole processing time before they're back on the shelves," says Rohmann, whose collection at least has less than typical wear-and-tear since it is in closed stacks.

The solution for NYPL and the Carnegie Library is to bind paperback computer books immediately. Publishers still do offer some hardcover versions of books, many of which are given to the computer book clubs.

Another computer book dilemma is not so easily erased: many now come with a disk or diskette. To avoid a cataloging nightmare and damage, loss, or theft of disks, Brant says she just does not buy disk books. Publishers, however, warn that these books are here to stay and will become even more popular as consumers become more comfortable learning right on the computer, rather than from a manual. Bantam's Petrusha cites the popular Microsoft disk/book *Learn C Now* as the kind of a successful interactive tutorial book "that is going to become much more widespread." He admits, however, "These sort of books aren't perfect for libraries, unfortunately."

Or are they? Rohmann says the NYPL is toying with the idea of creating a media center with PCs, where patrons can use these sort of books. "We feel we shouldn't exclude things strictly on the basis of format. We can be a place where people can try out new technology. That's another important role libraries play."

Computer Book Clubs

McGraw-Hill Book Clubs
Box 582
Hightstown, NJ 08520-7825
609-426-5000

Has the Byte Book Club for popular computer titles and the Electronics and Control Engineers' Book Club for more technical titles.

Macmillan Book Clubs, Inc.
Front and Brown Sts.
Riverside, NJ 08370
609-461-9339

Has the Small Computer Book Club for popular titles and Library of Computer and Information Sciences club for more theoretical titles.

TAB Books, Inc.
PO Box 10
Blue Ridge Summit, PA 17214
800-233-1128

Has the Computer Book Club for popular computer use and Electronics Book Club for more technical titles.

Specialty Computer Bookstores

McGraw-Hill Bookstore
1221 Ave. of the Americas
New York, NY 10020
212-512-4100

Powell's Technical Bookstore
32 NW 11th St.
Portland, OR 97209
503-228-3906

Kroch's & Brentano's General Store
29 S. Wabash Ave.
Chicago, IL 60603
312-332-7500 or (800) 833-BOOK

How do you think *LJ* should cover computer books in the future? In a quarterly trends column? Occasional articles covering a particular subject (for example, a comparative review of the current dBASE books)? Those interested in sending us comments, and in possibly reviewing or working on future articles, please write to Judy Quinn, Associate Editor, *LJ*, 249 W. 17th St., New York, NY 10011.