
Reviewed by Matthew Olsen, Information Literacy Librarian, Kent Library at Southeast Missouri State University

The Internet Book of Life addresses a simple fact of modern life: we use the Internet for everything. Americans go online to work, to play, to socialize, to shop, and to find all types of information. This book is intended to be a guide in using the Web for all of these things – on matters from birth to death and everything in between.

Irene McDermott is a reference librarian and systems manager for Corwell Public Library in San Marino, California. She is also well-versed in pointing out the best of the Internet. Since 1997, she has used her monthly “Internet Express” column in Searcher magazine to provide annotated listings of helpful websites structured around a theme like auto repair or holiday excursions. These columns strongly influence, both in format and content, The Internet Book of Life, just as they did her 2006 work, The Librarian’s Internet Survival Guide: Strategies for the High-Tech Reference Desk. However, unlike her earlier book, which was intended for other librarians, this work is aimed at a general audience.

The bulk of The Internet Book of Life is divided into five parts: Relationships, Parenting, Money and Home, Amusements, and Staying Healthy and Happy. Each part is divided into chapters that represent aspects of the life event or activity. For instance, “Parenting” has chapters on pregnancy and parenting tips, kids and homework, and websites for teens and college. The chapters are structured around websites addressing their subject area. In addition to listing a website’s address, there are one or two paragraphs explaining the purpose of the site, how best to use it, and any associated cost. Mobile apps appear where appropriate and screenshots of websites are interspersed throughout the text.

McDermott focuses on the truly functional rather than the trendy or obscure, and thus many of the websites and apps will already be known to librarians, including the ipl2, Purdue OWL and the Wolfram|Alpha app (which she incorrectly lists as free). Occasionally, her choices are curious. About.com sites appear far too often, and there is definitely a bias towards California focused information. For the most part the progression of chapters and the subsequent placement of sites are logical, but once in a while a site may have been better mentioned elsewhere. For example, Facebook and Twitter appear in the chapter on job searching rather than on relationships. Also, while the book is well-indexed, it does not provide a complete listing of websites. Such a listing would facilitate access and help overcome perceived misfiling.

What sets this book apart from other, perhaps more complete, works in the genre, e.g., Paul Burden’s A Subject Guide to Quality Web Sites (2010) or Randolph Hock’s The Extreme Searcher’s Internet Handbook: A Guide for the Serious Searcher (2010) is McDermott’s very
personal approach. She weaves stories from her life through many of the chapters, from the introduction of a topic, through the annotations, and to the conclusion. At times these stories are surprisingly personal, like when she describes her husband’s unsuccessful battle with cancer. However, they provide a kind of narrative glue to the book, and even the most serious topics are handled with a light touch.

The no-nonsense reader looking for a systematic, easily referenced Internet directory may find The Internet Book of Life wordy and inefficient, but a more patient reader will come away both enlightened and entertained. There may not be a lot new for a librarian here, but this book would make a great gift for a less savvy Internet user in your life.

**Additional Resources**

*The Internet Book Of Life* has a companion blog ([http://imcdermott.wordpress.com/](http://imcdermott.wordpress.com/)). It is regularly updated with links and annotations for interesting websites.