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EXPLORING THE INTERNET: A TECHNICAL TRAVELOGUE by Carl Malamud (carl@malamud.com). Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, NJ 07632. Illustrated, Index. 379 pp., \$. 0-13-296898-3

REVIEW

Malamud is the consummate lobbyist. He gets paid to have fun coaxing information out of bureaucrats. If he steps on some toes, he apologises, convinces them that he meant no harm, and moves on.

"Exploring the Internet" began when Malamud started complaining (or in Internet jargon, flaming) on the Internet and in communications journals about the high cost and relative unavailability of the International Telecommunications Union's (ITU's) international standards documents. As Malamud's voice grew, he was joined by an ITU employee who agreed that the standards needed a wider availability at much less cost... even free.

Malamud, with an ally in the enemy camp, began to lobby for the standards to be uploaded to the Internet and made available by anonymous FTP (file transfer protocol) at no cost. Initially, a deal was made for Malamud to convert the ITU standards data in exchange for publishing it on the Internet and writing a book about the event.

The ITU gave Malamud half the standards data, lost the other half in formatting, and three months later canceled the agreement. The enormity of the Internet was just too bogging. The "academic toy" had too many people playing with it. The ITU still demanded the conversion and the document. This book is the document, and it's not exactly the technical report they had in mind.

Malamud got Interop (Interoperability Conference and Exhibition) Company to fund his travel, which ended up in a visit to twenty-one countries in six months, equivalent to going around the world three times.

A "technical travelogue" is an appropriate description for this book, as it contains descriptions of what level of communications technology each country Malamud visits has achieved, as well as being a well-written history of the global Internet.

While the pages are filled with difficult acronyms, (such as this passage: "A 56 kbps line to the University of Hawaii links this TCP/IP network into the Internet. SDN supports OSI applications such as FTAM and X.400, but usage was declining rather than increasing. Five years ago, in the middle of a large OSI push, 20 percent of the traffic was X.400, but the number faded to insignificance as users switched over to SMTP-based mail handlers."), the human factor is also readily evident, and this is where the book shines.

Malamud loves to walk into foreign hardware and printout-filled offices that are just like his. In them he has met hundreds similar techno-politicians and network builders, who are pushing for standards that can be understood and don't cost the equivalent of their annual earnings.

Putting standards online, Malamud says, still meets bureaucratic resistance, but I believe this very readable book will go far to educate them. Isn't that what lobbying actually is?