

Book Review

Online Searching: A Scientist's Perspective. Damon D. Ridley (The University of Sydney, School of Chemistry) Wiley: New York. 1996. xvii + 344pp. Softcover. ARP \$49. ISBN 0-471-96521-9.

G. Paul Savage

CSIRO, Division of Chemicals & Polymers, Private Bag 10, Clayton, Victoria, Australia 3168. Tel: 61-3-97580447, Fax: 61-3-95438160. Email: p.savage@chem.csiro.au.

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In order to be of any use computer software must be either easy to use or be supported by very well written manuals. Unfortunately, STN (previously CAS-Online) is neither. For this reason online searching is daunting to the first time user, and even seasoned online searchers may become frustrated with having to remember complex search procedures. The eagerly anticipated publication of Damon Ridley's book addresses these problems and brings the world of online searching within reach of all scientists and information technologists. It addresses the mechanics of online searching and explains the indexing policies used by the database producers.

The book is divided almost exactly in two parts: Focus on Keywords, and Focus on Substances. Part 1, Focus on Keywords, addresses issues such as indexing policy and database structure, search terms, basic searching, and patent information. This section emphasises the importance of understanding how information is indexed and stored, and how effective online search strategies must be developed to utilise the potential of the databases. It is clear that the author's extensive experience presenting

online searching workshops has been used to advantage in the numerous worked examples throughout this book. Part 2, Focus on Substances, is of even more interest to chemists in that it addresses the issues related to searching for substances by structure, name, and formula. The complexities inherent in multicomponent, polymer, chiral, alloy, coordination complex, mineral, isotopic, and undefined substances are clearly explained with examples. A section dealing with searching the newer reaction database is also included in Part 2.

Online Searching: A Scientist's Perspective can be used as a reference work as it is well indexed and thorough. The serious online searcher may also profit by reading it "cover-to-cover" although the overall tone is slightly condescending, and the overuse of bold text, italics, and exclamation points is a little distracting. These minor quibbles aside the book is highly recommended to any researcher considering online searching and should certainly be on the bookshelves of scientists who currently make extensive use of STN.