Publisher's Profile

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The McGraw Publishing Company was founded as a magazine publisher by James H. McGraw in 1899. Its first handbook, Standard Handbook for Electrical Engineers, was introduced in 1907. The Hill Publishing Company was founded also as a magazine publisher, by John A. Hill in 1902. The two joined forces in 1909 to form a book company, tossing a coin to determine whose name appeared first on the door. The companies merged all operations in 1917, following the death of John A. Hill, to form the McGraw-Hill Company. Today, The McGraw-Hill Companies is actually 116 companies, including such diverse organizations as Standard & Poor's, F.W. Dodge, Shepard's McGraw-Hill, DRI and magazines such as Business Week, BYTE, Chemical Engineering and Aviation Week, in addition to the book publishing operations

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limited to a fixed number of volumes; 3) inclusion of moving pictures and sound, which can complement and enrich printed text in ways still illustrations cannot; and 4) a price tag that is frequently much, much more affordable, i.e., multivolume print encyclopedias currently sell for between $600 and $1500, whereas the leading multimedia CD-ROM encyclopedias can be had for well under $100.

In 1996, three multimedia CD-ROM encyclopedias dominate the American market: Compton's Interactive Encyclopedia, Grolier Multimedia Encyclopedia, and Microsoft Encarta Multimedia Encyclopedia. Compton's, which has the distinction of being the first encyclopedia to include multimedia, was originally issued in 1989, followed by Grolier in 1992 and Encarta in 1993. Since that time, the Big Three have competed aggressively for top sales honors, with no clear winner yet crowned. As far as quality is concerned, Encarta (best interface and multimedia) tends to be the first choice of critics, followed by Grolier (best print content) and then Compton's (best text for youngsters). By way of documentation, see my article in Wilson Library Bulletin (May 1995, pp. 42-), which offers a detailed analysis of the three encyclopedias. More recently, three experienced librarians rated the encyclopedias in USA Today (November 1, 1995, p. 11D); two of the librarians "narrowly" chose Encarta as the best, one chose Grolier, and "all three experts found something they like and didn't like about each." Also, at the Charleston Conference this year I talked with Norm Desmarais, the reigning prince of CD-ROM reviewing in this country, and he volun-