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by Burton Callicott (Reference Librarian, College of Charleston) <callicottb@acadcomp.cofc.edu>

The Oxford University Press has recently come out with a new CD-ROM version of the celebrated Oxford English Dictionary. For those of you who are unfamiliar with the “OED,” it is perhaps the ultimate English dictionary. The second edition has over a half a million definitions and 2.5 million illustrative quotations. As stated in the preface “the aim of this dictionary is to present in alphabetical series the words that have formed the English vocabulary from the time of the earliest records down to the present day, with all the relevant facts concerning their form, sense, history, pronunciation, and etymology.” At 23 volumes that take up four feet of shelf space and weigh over 85 pounds, many would say that they have achieved their aim. Even for those who only have a passing interest in lexicography, the Oxford English Dictionary is a fascinating document and a truly unparalleled achievement.

“But a CD-ROM?!” you might ask, “who uses those anymore?” Well, considering that you can get the complete 2nd edition of the OED with updates for $295.00 in a searchable electronic format, it could prove to be a great value and a very usable product at home or in a small to mid-size library (the print version is $995.00 plus shipping). Version 3.0 of the OED has essentially the same look and functionality of the more expensive online version. You can get an idea of what it looks like by going to the OED’s Website http://dictionary.oed.com/ and clicking on their “free tour.” The main difference between the online version and the CD is that there are links to news and a timeline for uploads of new words that are not available on the CD. As noted in the promotional literature version 3.0 of the CD, it offers the ability to use “the more powerful and flexible functions—Boolean searches, extraction character searches, search by pronunciation, and many more useful options” that were not available on the earlier versions. However, perhaps the most important improvement version 3.0 has to offer is the ability to load the entire content of the CD onto a PC hard drive. This means that once the contents have been copied onto a computer, which is a fairly easy process (I was able to do it without any problems in any case), the disks are no longer needed for regular day-to-day use. As anyone who has tried to keep up with two or more CDs knows, especially in a library, this is a very good thing.

In order to have the OED on your PC, you do need to have suitable equipment and hard drive space in order to accommodate it. Specifically you will need at least 32 megabytes of RAM (preferably 46 MB’s) and at least 1.7 gigabytes of hard disk space to install and run the CD-ROM. Most relatively recent computers should be able to handle the requirements of this product. Mac users may want to stop reading this review at this point.

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Test Driving CD ROMs

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point for it appears that the product is compatible only
with a Windows® platform (95, 98, NT4, 2000, or XP). Those
who have not been assimilated by IBM and its clones will have to
rely on the online or the print version at this time and perhaps
forever. According to OED reps, there are currently no plans to
develop a Mac compatible edition. Another consideration, at least
for potential library purchasers, is that for some reason, either
technical or legal, the CD may not be networked such that multiple
PCs can access the contents from a central location. I am happy to
report that within these parameters, the CD functioned well on my
rather standard issue Dell computer. The package includes a very
concise, user-friendly manual complete with a license agreement
and description of the sixty-day warranty.

One curious thing I noted about the CD version is that it
defaults to having the “word of the day” enabled. This means
that when you click on “search” you are presented with an en-
try for a word—a word of the day—selected by the disk. It
struck me as a bit odd to feature an application with such a
quotidian component, as it would seem to bring attention to
the main drawback of having a dictionary on CD rather than
online: the inability to get instant regular additions or emenda-
tions as you would with the online version. In other words,
when the CD is “burned” and in your possession, it is virtually
the same as having a monograph in terms of its ability to be
updated. For updates you will have to buy new editions or
rather, upgrades. (In this case, the upgrade is $125.00.) I
regard this as a very minor drawback, however, as the OED
has never been known as a primary source for new words.
You can easily find definitions and examples of words such
as “d’oh,” “cramming,” and “gangsta,” in plenty of other
sources online and in print.

Adventures in Librarianship — Misfortune

by Ned Kraft (Ralph J. Bunche Library, U.S. Department of State) <kraftno@state.gov>

ATG investigative reporters have discovered that the ALA Executive Direc-
torate proposed but later abandoned an idea to distribute promotional fortune
cookies at the recent summer convention. Sammy Feng, of Feng’s Fortunes Lim-
ited, leaked the story to ATG. Mr. Feng is understandably angry about being left
out of this coup that involved tens-of-thousands of fortune cookies designed for a very specialized
market. He had spent many hours coming up with gems such as:

• Be quiet in the library
• Your lucky number is 54782, in the library
• Go to the library now, or you’ll be sorry
• You are a special person, and a librarian

Mr. Feng’s fourteen-year-old son, Ray-Ray, assisted with the project and delivered
a higher degree of creativity nurtured by seven years in Montessori school and two years in
a military academy. “Dad keeps telling me I write well,” says Ray-Ray, “but I think he
really means that I write legibly.” Ray-Ray’s oeuvre includes:

• The stars are aligned to bring missing books back home... in one crushing
  wave
• Present a pleasant face to the world and you will be rewarded with sneering
  mockery
• All information can be found on the Internet... time to look for a new job
• You have no lucky number

• You will meet new people and never learn their names

Fortunately for Mr. Feng, his wife, Maria Contralto Feng, works part-time in
Eastwood Public Library and added a level of expertise and insight to the
project that he and Ray-Ray could not. Maria contributed:

• Serial titles change but you are not afraid
• The Friends of the Library are your friends too
• Your lucky call number is PR6053.O425
• MARC tags are inadequate to describe your many qualities
• The stars will align for love and for increased circulation statistics

Mr. Feng has advised ATG that these “limited edition” fortune cookies are available for a
very low price, and he guarantees a shelf life of five years. “I don’t like ALA,” says
Feng, “because who is going to buy so many library cookies?” We thought for a moment,
but could not come up with an answer.