



Craig S. Mullins Articles

Database Performance Management

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The Managers Publication of Data Solutions



A Basic IT Library

by Craig S. Mullins

Printed words on dead trees is still the preferred way for most of us to receive information. Though it is true that the web is growing at an alarming pace (by some accounts almost 2 million new web pages come online every day), the vast majority of the world still uses printed material to learn--books, magazines, newsletters, tabloids, and newspapers.

I am a huge fan of technical books. I believe that there is no better mechanism for digging in and learning a new subject than to wrap your hands around a book and to start reading. Now it appears that there are companies looking to replace the book with hand-held gizmos that simulate books. For example, the Franklin Rocket eBook allows users to download books into the device, which is about the size of a paperback novel. The device provides a simple interface for paging through the ebook to read it. But it will never replace the good old ink on paper of a real life book.

Don't get me wrong. I think there is a place in our future for products like the eBook. In fact, I will buy one. But until it is as flexible as a book, it will never replace them. The book is portable, accessible the way you want it to be, never runs out of battery power, can be highlighted, marked up, and dog-eared, and is cost effective. An electronic book may be easier to search and take up less space, but it isn't as

easy to use. Furthermore, though I admit this is a problem that will probably resolve itself over time, there are very few titles available.

Back to the Topic

But, enough about the eBook. Since I am such a fan of printed books, I thought I would introduce a basic library of IT books that every computer professional should own. These books are classics in the field, or should be. I have excluded books on narrow topics like specific programming languages, operating systems, and database management systems. All of the following books are useful to anyone who is employed as a professional in the field of Information Technology.

The first book any IT professional should own is [*The Mythical Man-Month*](#) (Addison-Wesley Pub Co; ISBN: 0201835959) by Fred Brooks. Fred Brooks is best known as the father of the IBM System/360, the quintessential mainframe computer. This book contains a wealth of knowledge about software project

management including the now common sense notion that adding manpower to a late software project just makes it later. The 20th anniversary edition of *The Mythical Man-Month*, published in 1995, contains a reprint of Brooks' famous article "No Silver Bullet" as well as Brooks' reflections on the twenty years since the book's publication. If software is your discipline, you absolutely need to read and understand the tenets in this book.

Another essential book for technologists is [*Peopleware*](#) (Dorset House; ISBN: 0932633439) by Tom DeMarco and Timothy Lister. This book concentrates on the human aspect of project management and teams. If you believe that success is driven by technology more so than people, this book will change your misconceptions.

A more recent classic is Nicholas Negroponte's [*Being Digital*](#) (Vintage Books; ISBN: 0679762906). First published in 1995, *Being Digital* challenges the reader to rethink reality. The book weaves the history of media

technology and ponders the future of the human interfaces to technology. The book is not technologically challenging, and some of the discussion is outdated, but *Being Digital* is a book that will challenge you to think differently about the world and technology's place within it.

Information is the cornerstone of IT, so we should understand the difference between data, information, and knowledge.

Information Anxiety by Richard Saul Wurman is the best book I have read to accomplish that. Unfortunately, the book is out of print, but you should scour used and online book stores for a copy of this awesome text. The book explains how the world is awash with data and yet most of us are starved for understanding. The book is unique in the way it is written and presented—full of charts, quotes, and examples to clarify his points. *Information Anxiety* will open your eyes and make you think twice about all of the data you receive on a daily basis.

Finally, because I am a database proponent, I think every IT professional needs to understand database technology. And the best introductory text for achieving that is Fabian Pascal's [*Understanding Relational Databases*](#). This book presents the basics of relational database technology in a simple, easy to understand style. It does not get bogged down in proofs and theory, instead covering the facts about relational database technology that most IT folks will need to know. Additionally, Mr. Pascal has a new book titled, [*Practical Issues in Database Management*](#) that is well worth seeking out, too. It covers many practical aspects of database technology sadly lacking in most texts and articles these days.

Synopsis

These five books should be on your bookshelf. Well, actually, they should be in your hands and you should be reading them. The knowledge contained in these pages will make

each and every one of you a better IT professional.

Of course, I don't mean to suggest that these are the only books you should buy. You will need others that help with your chosen niche. For example, if you are a DBA you'll need to own at least Chris Date's seminal book [*Introduction to Database Systems*](#), Fleming and von Halle's [*Handbook of Relational Database Design*](#), as well as books about the specific DBMS you are using (DB2, Oracle, etc.). Or, if you are a software engineer then you will surely want Donald Knuth's three volume series [*The Art of Computer Programming*](#), Ed Yourdon's [*Death March, Structured Analysis and System Specification*](#) by Tom Demarco, as well as books on your programming language of choice ([C](#), [Java](#), [Visual Basic](#), etc.).

But the bottom line is that books promote knowledge. And knowledge helps us do our jobs better.

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