



TEXT SUPPORT

Carolyn Weaver is the producer and host of Tech Books, in its third season on Tech TV, Book Television, Court TV, MSNBC Canada and Rogers Television. carolyn@fineprintonline.com



In conversation with
Trudee Romanek

THE TECHNOLOGY BOOK FOR GIRLS
AND OTHER ADVANCED BEINGS

RATING: ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

AFTER READING COMPUTING

Canada's Jan. 14 issue, in which women in the world of technology discussed the importance of reaching out to younger girls and women to open up the idea of a career in the technology industry, I wondered if there were any technology books specifically geared to younger female readers. Trudee Romanek's book is a great example of the sorts of books that we need more of. It is geared towards girls 8-12, helping them understand the science behind the technology they encounter in their lives.

Why did you want to write a technology book geared specifically to girls?

I know from my own experience that science isn't always presented in terms that make it interesting to girls. Too many

girls get turned off of science during their "tween" years. They often lose that sense of inquisitiveness as they become more aware of the social aspect of their lives. Given the turn toward technology that our world has taken, it's important to me that girls don't get left behind. The book is intended to remind them that science matters and reassure them that they can understand it.

The book has a lot of sidebar-styled information about the technology behind everyday items girls would interact with or notice in every day life. Why did you choose to include this sort of information in this format?

I'm generalizing of course, but many girls relate better to concrete things, actual applications of technology rather than the abstract technology itself. Explain to them that lasers scan library bar codes, for instance, and they'll be more interested in knowing what a laser is. And though the book is written to appeal to girls, many boys appreciate the contents as well. The concrete approach doesn't turn anyone away.

FAST 4

Favourite author
Timothy Findley

Favourite Web site
Google. Research is my life.

Finish the sentence. A good book...

Draws a picture so full, so clear there is no doubt in your mind that what it describes actually exists.

Guilty pleasure
Sushi

The same applies to the sidebars. If you give a young reader chunks of information, it is more digestible. Also when the topic is a bit complex, the information is not overwhelming if it is presented this way. Adult magazines use the same approach.

You explain the science behind lasers, and then you go from micro examples of the application such as bar codes, laser pointers and stereos to macro examples of how lasers are used in commercial and scientific mediums. Was it impor-

tant to you to have girls make the leap from the micro to the macro?

Building from the micro to the macro was definitely important — first, because the information is cumulative: Learn this and you know what you need to learn that. Second, I wanted girls to see the kinds of jobs women have that use these varied technologies. Discussing the more high-powered uses of the technologies gave me the opportunity to do that. And third, it exposed girls to some complicated technology that they could understand. I hoped it would empower them to feel technological understanding is not beyond their grasp.

Do you think that men who work in the technology field spend enough time encouraging their daughters, nieces and younger sisters to consider a career in this field?

It is true that girls as a group have not embraced technological learning and careers as boys have. I think more needs to be done than simply have men encourage their daughters. Science education needs to be reconsidered. In many schools,

we have female teachers, themselves unfamiliar with and intimidated by science, teaching young students and potentially passing along those same attitudes. Or we have male science teachers who understand the science in different terms and may not present it in the way most accessible to female students.

When you have read this book with young girls what sort of response did you get?

I've had very positive feedback from readers and teachers. The National Science Teachers' Association included it in their list of Outstanding Science Trade Books as well, which is very gratifying. Even more positive has been the feedback I get when I present to a group of girls. Showing them how a laser beam bounces along inside an optical fibre, proving that there really is a beam of infrared coming from their TV remote, those practical things seem to make the light bulb go on in their heads and take technology from the realm of the unexplainable to the manageable.



INSIDER

The decline of social engineering

THE SCIENCE OF SOCIAL ENGINEERING SEEMS TO BE at a low ebb these days. SE, as we'll call it, since we all know this industry needs another acronym, is essentially a series of best practices for hackers and virus writers. Using what they know of human nature — greed, lust, curiosity and other higher qualities — they manage to manipulate users into compromising their machines, systems and networks.

Take an e-mail message with the subject line "I love you." Who doesn't want to be loved? Wouldn't you be curious about who's crushing on you? Apparently, you were, or at least thousands of computer users worldwide were a couple years ago.

But — as demonstrated by the volume of cloned TV shows dominating the screen (*Law & Order: Smoke Break*) — nothing exceeds like excess, and the subtleties of social engineering have been bludgeoned by the cudgel of volume.

Take the Nigerian mail fraud — please. (*Rim shot*.) This is a veritably venerable old fraud, dating back to the fax machine, and before that, to mail and, one

supposes, stone engravings before that. (Picture a native beating the messaging drum to the tune of, "I am the widow of the great Zulu warrior king Shaka. I received your contact information from a mutual acquaintance.") But in those days, it was costlier and more labour-intensive to generously offer people millions of dollars for their co-operation in getting money out of whatever corrupt hellhole they claimed to be living in. Thus, the number of solicitations was lower, and therefore, the likelihood of a successfully socially engineered scam higher. I personally delete about 150 of them a month now. The likelihood of someone falling for it should be minimal.

I've had a rash lately. Sorry, of e-mail messages purporting to share Our Little Secret. "Okay, okay, here it is ..." the message reads, with an attached zip file. Likewise, I've had a ton of mailing errors lately, and the postmaster wants to describe them to me in enough detail to warrant a zip file. In fact, I've had more mailing errors than I've sent messages,



apparently. This is not convincing social engineering. And this reflects poorly not only on the virus writers, scam artists and hackers who have obviously lost touch with the art form, it reflects poorly on the user community.

Because — and I'm trying to be diplomatic here — if you receive a mailing error message from an address you have not e-mailed with a zip file attached to it and you actually open it, YOU ARE DUMB. But someone's doing it, or I wouldn't have that rash.

PSST! Got an inside scoop? Email us at insider@itbusiness.ca