By RON HRANAC

For the past several months I've been perusing a new reference that's found a home on my trusty engineering bookshelf: Modern Cable Television Technology: Video, Voice, and Data Communications, 2nd Edition, by Walter Ciciora, James Farmer, David Large and Michael Adams; Morgan Kaufmann Publishers, 2004; ISBN 1-55860-828-1. Like my copy of the first edition, this one is getting regular use, lots of sticky-notes as bookmarks, and the beginning of what will undoubtedly become a thoroughly tattered cover.

Bottom line: If you don't yet have a copy, get one.

What's new in the 2nd edition? Plenty. First is the addition of a new co-author, industry veteran Michael Adams. Second is size, nearly 200 pages more than the first edition; 25 chapters instead of 20; and a number of updates and material applicable to cable technology introduced since the book's first edition was published in 1999.

As with the earlier tome, I didn't sit down and read the book cover to cover. I have skimmed its contents, picked a few parts to read in-depth, and have been using Modern Cable Television Technology, 2nd Ed. as a job-related reference on a regular basis.

Glitches? A few that slipped past the editor, such as the misspelling of Ron Cotten's last name (that happened in the first edition, too); the occasional department of redundancy department, along the lines of "16-QAM modulation"; use of the term "acronym" where "abbreviation" would have been the correct choice; and "Cable-Tek Expo" (oops!). Ok, I really had to dig to find these nits, and they absolutely have nothing to do with the real gold in this book, its value as what is without a doubt the best cable engineering reference, period!

I found one possible technical gotcha, and I say possible because the formula I think is right might be wrong. The book's formula for modulation error ratio (MER) on page 179 is $\text{MER} = 10\log(\text{RMS error magnitude}/\text{RMS vector magnitude})$. One of my other references says it should be $\text{MER} = 10\log(\text{average error power}/\text{average symbol power})$. As a side note, the more formal mathematical definition of MER is a rather gnarly equation that I'll spare you and Communications Technology's editors. As usual, I digress.

Content overview

The second edition—much like the first edition—is divided into major sections. Each covers a general category and includes one to seven chapters, depending on subject matter. Here's an overview:

A quick side note: The very brief descriptions here cannot even come close to doing the book justice—even the table of contents is in-depth and comprehensive!

Whew!

The authors included a handy channel allocation chart and video waveform info in the appendix, as well as an expanded glossary of terms and abbreviations.
When I reviewed the first edition (June 1999 Communications Technology, [www.broadband-pbimedia.com/archives/ct/0699/ct0699s.htm](http://www.broadband-pbimedia.com/archives/ct/0699/ct0699s.htm)) I noted that my only real complaint was that the book wasn't big enough—even at more than 800 pages! Co-author Jim Farmer admitted back then that they would have liked to include a lot more, not an easy task when publishing a book of this magnitude. The second edition is much expanded compared to the first, and it could easily have been even bigger than its 1,053+ pages!

My comments in my 1999 review apply to the second edition:

"Modern Cable Television Technology will appeal to a fairly broad audience. The subject matter intentionally covers much of the material included in the Society of Cable Telecommunications Engineers’ certification programs and, as such, will be a good resource for exam preparation.

"For those in search of a truly comprehensive cable engineering reference volume, you simply won't find anything better. The overall writing style will appeal to most readers and is a reflection of the [four] co-authors’ excellent communication skills. If you've ever heard any of them speak at engineering conferences, you'll know what I mean. The book does contain a fair amount of math in places, offering a rigorous analysis of several topics."

I know the second edition has been in print for just a few months, but if the authors can be convinced to pen a third edition down the road a bit, here's my wish list: More reference information in the appendix; and expand the chart on page 170 (Figure 4.17) down to 1.0E-08 bit error rate (BER), which, incidentally, is the cable modem post-forward error correction (FEC) value in the DOCSIS Radio Frequency Interface Specification. Beyond that, it's hard to think of any way to improve upon the best.

Ron Hranac is technical leader, HFC Network Architectures, for Cisco Systems, and former senior technology editor for Communications Technology. Reach him at rhranac@aol.com.