

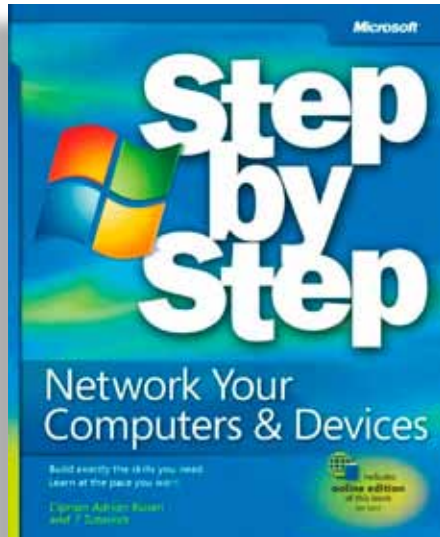
Network Your Computers & Devices

Ken Blake

Over the years I've written a fair number of book reviews here, and almost always they are about subjects about which I know a fair amount. Networking, the subject of this book, is one of my weakest areas, so I looked forward to the opportunity to read and review this book. This was not only because it would give me the opportunity to learn more about the subject, but also because I could assess the book from the point of view of someone who is far from being a networking expert.

As usual with such volumes, this a big book: 497 pages of text, a slim five-page glossary and a 16-page index. It's paperbound, but well-printed with lots of white space on the pages making it easy to read and lots of good size illustrations (mostly screenshots).

The book mostly covers networking in *Windows 7*, which of course is good in that it makes the book up to date, but which also makes it less useful for those readers who run older versions of Windows, or other operating



systems. It does (in dedicated sections) discuss interoperability between *Windows 7* and *Windows XP SP3*, *Windows Vista SP2*, *Macintosh OS v10.6*, and *UBUNTU v10.10*.

To be more specific, out of 15 chapters Chapter 1 is about setting up a router (of general use, regardless of what operating system you run).

Chapters 2 though 9 as well as Chapters 13, 14 and 15 are about *Windows 7*, Chapter 10 is about sharing between *Window 7* and *XP* or *Vista*.

Chapter 11 is about sharing between *Windows 7* and *Macintosh OS X*, Chapter 12 is about sharing between *Windows 7* and *Ubuntu*.

Is that appropriate for a book entitled *Step by Step Network Your Computers & Devices*? I don't think so. The title could readily lead someone who does not use *Windows 7* to buy the book and find it next to useless. A far more honest title would have been something like *Networking in Windows 7*.

True, there is a *Windows* logo on the cover, but the logo is used for *Windows XP* and *Vista* as well as for *Windows 7*. What the book is about should be conveyed by its title, not a logo. I didn't notice the logo until after I had written the preceding sentence.

I started with Chapter 1, the chapter about setting up a router. After nine pages of general but not particularly deep information, it goes into the specifics of installation for two popular routers: the Belkin N+ Wireless router and the D-Link DIR-615.

On one hand, for those who don't use either of those routers, there may well be objections that their router isn't covered, but on the other hand, there's no way they could possibly cover all the available routers. These sections are meant only to be examples, since the way to set them up is fairly typical of the way to set up routers in general. How did they choose those two particular routers? I don't know, but I'm suspicious it is essentially a paid-for advertisement for Belkin and D-Link.

As it happens, the particular D-Link router written about here is the one that I own and use (and like). I had set mine up without any difficulty, using the instructions that came with it and what's available on the D-Link web site. So I was interested in seeing whether the instructions in this book were any better than what I used.

There are nine pages of instructions for setting up the D-Link DIR-615. Most of those pages consist of nothing but a screen shot and a line or two of instructions saying essentially the same thing it says on the screen.

When it gets to the screen for the internet connection, the book says that the authors had to use a Static IP Address Connection, and the illustration

shows you the values they typed in: WAN IP Address 89.35.239.56, WAN Subnet Mask 255.255.255.192, WAN Gateway 89.35.239.77, Primary DNS 193.138.193.1, and Secondary DNS 193.138.193.2. But there is not a word about what these various addresses mean, where to find them or how to choose them. That's very disappointing.

Similarly, under Security you are shown that you have a choice of WPA or WPA2. You are told "Select WPA2," but are told nothing about what the differences are between them or **why** you should choose WPA2. I found this chapter very disappointing. The DIR-615 manual I downloaded from the D-Link web site and printed out is much more informative.

The next two chapters deal with setting up user accounts and libraries (on *Windows 7*, of course). Interesting? Perhaps, but they have next to nothing to do with networking.

Just as an example of weaknesses in the book, under the subject "Quick Sorting the Content of a Library," I noted the following statement: "To access these quick sorting criteria, click the down arrow next to Arrange by."

That's accurate of course, but if I were writing the book, I would certainly not talk about the subject of sorting without even mentioning that you can easily sort on any field simply by clicking the header of that field (in all folders, not just libraries).

In Chapter 4, "Creating the Network," we finally get to something about networking. It's forty pages of decent information (about *Windows 7*). Oddly, however, it talks only about workgroups and doesn't even mention homegroups or domains. Here's one of its sentences: "A workgroup is the name assigned to a group of computers connected in a network."

That's of course not true, since homegroups and domains are two other types of groups of computers connected in a network. Since the homegroup is what will be selected by default, and since it will work only if all the computers in the network are *Windows 7* computers, its omission is a serious problem.

Chapter 5 is "Customizing Network Sharing Settings in *Windows 7*." It's about six pages long. The information it presents isn't bad, but this is one

of the areas where people have the most problems. The book would be much more valuable if it went into details about the problems people have and what the solutions to them are.

Chapter 6 is "Creating the Homegroup and Joining *Windows 7* Computers." Finally! I don't strenuously object to its being here in a separate chapter rather than in Chapter 4, but at the very least Chapter 4 should have provided something like "see Chapter 6 for information on Homegroups." I also think this chapter should have immediately followed Chapter 4, since it's largely a continuation of what Chapter 4 presents.

The information here isn't bad but what is flagrantly missing is a discussion of the differences between homegroups and workgroups and how someone setting up a network should make the choice between them.

Chapter 7, a fairly long chapter, is "Sharing Libraries and Folders." Again, not bad, but I would also suggest a change in the chapter order here. This should have followed Chapter 5.

Chapter 8 continues the subject of sharing with "Sharing and Working with Devices." The information here looks good.

Chapter 9 is about streaming media. Although it's partially about streaming over the network it's mostly about using *Media Player 12*. That's not particularly a network subject.

Chapters 10, 11, and 12 are about sharing between *Windows 7* computers and computers running other operating systems. For a book about *Windows 7* it makes sense to put these chapters in the rear of the book, almost as appendices.

But for a book entitled "Step by Step Network Your Computers & Devices," it doesn't make sense. These chapters should have been moved forward to be with the other chapters on the subject of sharing.

The last three chapters are about network security, parental control, and network troubleshooting. These are all major subjects, and potentially could contain some of the most valuable information in the book.

Like so much of the book, the security chapter isn't really about network security. It's not even about *Windows 7* network security. Since not all

of it is about networking it's really more a chapter on *Windows 7* security in general. Here are sections on User Account Control, Windows Update, Windows Defender, Windows Firewall, and Windows Action Center. These are all security features, but have little if anything to do with networking.

The book's final chapter on troubleshooting networks has a little helpful information, but not much.

My overall opinion of the book? First, as I said above, its title does a terrible job of describing what the book is about, so it will be a very poor choice for someone who doesn't run *Windows 7* and doesn't realize that that's who the book is for.

Second, for *Windows 7* users, the book isn't terrible, but the information it provides is not all about networking, and it's almost all on the slim side, despite how physically large the book is.

Surely there are better books on networking available, and surely there are web sites with more and better information than this book contains.

The book also provides the owner with a searchable online edition.

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