To my wife and business partner, Sharon, for many years of love and support in our home and office.

To our grandchildren, Mitchell, Barry, Deirdra, and Spencer Galitz, Lauren and Scott Roepel, and Shane and Emily Watters. May one or more of them pick up the writing torch.
Wilbert (Bill) O. Galitz is an internationally respected consultant, author, and instructor with a long and illustrious career in Human Factors and user-interface design. For many years he has consulted, lectured, written about, and conducted seminars and workshops on these topics worldwide. He is now the author of eleven books, and his first book, Human Factors in Office Automation (1980), was critically acclaimed internationally. This book was the first to address the entire range of human factors issues involved in business information systems. As a result, he was awarded the Administrative Management Society’s Olsten Award. Other books have included User-Interface Screen Design and It’s Time to Clean Your Windows. He has long been recognized as a world authority on the topic of screen design.

Bill’s career now spans more than 45 years in information systems, and he has been witness to the amazing transformation of technology over this time span. His career began in 1961 with the System Development Corporation, where he was a Training Consultant for the SAGE North American Air Defense System. SAGE was the world’s first large-scale display-based system. Before forming his own consulting company in 1981, he worked for CNA Insurance and the Insurance Company of North America (now CIGNA), where he designed the user-interfaces and developed screen and interface design standards for a variety of business information systems. His work experience also includes an appointment at South Africa’s National Institute for Personnel Research and a number of years with UNIVAC (now UNISYS). At UNIVAC he performed the human engineering of the company’s first commercial display terminal and completed a pioneering study on the operational aspects of large-scale computer systems.

A native of Chicago, Bill possesses a B.A. in Psychology from Lake Forest College in Illinois and an M.S. in Industrial Psychology from Iowa State University. He currently resides in Surprise, Arizona.
### Contents

**Part 1** The User Interface—An Introduction and Overview 1

**Chapter 1** The Importance of the User Interface 3

- Defining the User Interface 4
- The Importance of Good Design 4
- The Benefits of Good Design 5
- A Brief History of the Human-Computer Interface 7
- Introduction of the Graphical User Interface 7
- The Blossoming of the World Wide Web 8
  - A Brief History of Screen Design 10
- What’s Next? 12

**Chapter 2** Characteristics of Graphical and Web User Interfaces 13

- Interaction Styles 13
  - Command Line 14
  - Menu Selection 14
  - Form Fill-in 14
  - Direct Manipulation 15
  - Anthropomorphic 15
- The Graphical User Interface 16
  - The Popularity of Graphics 16
  - The Concept of Direct Manipulation 17
  - Graphical Systems: Advantages and Disadvantages 19
  - Characteristics of the Graphical User Interface 24
The Web User Interface 28
The Popularity of the Web 29
Characteristics of a Web Interface 29
The Merging of Graphical Business Systems and the Web 39
Characteristics of an Intranet versus the Internet 39
Extranets 40
Web Page versus Application Design 40
Principles of User Interface Design 44
Principles for the Xerox STAR 44
General Principles 45
Part 1 Exercise 58
What’s Next? 58

Part 2  The User Interface Design Process 59
Obstacles and Pitfalls in the Development Path 59
Designing for People: The Seven Commandments 60
Usability 64
Usability Assessment in the Design Process 65
Common Usability Problems 65
Some Practical Measures of Usability 68
Some Objective Measures of Usability 69

Step 1  Know Your User or Client 71
Understanding How People Interact with Computers 71
The Human Action Cycle 72
Why People Have Trouble with Computers 73
Responses to Poor Design 74
People and Their Tasks 76
Important Human Characteristics in Design 76
Perception 76
Memory 78
Sensory Storage 79
Visual Acuity 80
Foveal and Peripheral Vision 81
Information Processing 81
Mental Models 82
Movement Control 83
Learning 83
Skill 84
Performance Load 84
Individual Differences 85
Human Considerations in the Design of Business Systems 87
The User’s Knowledge and Experience 87
The User’s Tasks and Needs 92
The User’s Psychological Characteristics 95
The User’s Physical Characteristics 96
Human Interaction Speeds 100
Performance versus Preference 101
Methods for Gaining an Understanding of Users 102
Step 1 Exercise 102

Step 2  Understand the Business Function 103
Business Definition and Requirements Analysis 104
   Information Collection Techniques 104
   Defining the Domain 112
   Considering the Environment 112
   Possible Problems in Requirements Collection 113
Determining Basic Business Functions 113
   Understanding the User’s Work 114
developing Conceptual Models 115
The User’s New Mental Model 120
Design Standards or Style Guides 120
   Value of Standards and Guidelines 121
   Customized Style Guides 124
   Design Support and Implementation 125
System Training and Documentation Needs 125
   Training 126
   Documentation 126
Step 2 Exercise 126

Step 3  Understand the Principles of Good Interface and Screen Design 127
Human Considerations in Interface and Screen Design 128
   How to Discourage the User 128
   What Users Want 130
   What Users Do 130
Interface Design Goals 131
The Test for a Good Design 132
Screen and Web Page Meaning and Purpose 132
Organizing Elements Clearly and Meaningfully 133
Consistency 133
Starting Point 135
Ordering of Data and Content 136
Navigation and Flow 139
Visually Pleasing Composition 141
Distinctiveness 161
Focus and Emphasis 162
Conveying Depth of Levels or a Three-Dimensional Appearance 165
Presenting Information Simply and Meaningfully 168
Application and Page Size 178
Application Screen Elements 184
Organization and Structure Guidelines 220
The Web — Web sites and Web Pages 230
Groupings 323
Selection Support Menus 325
Phrasing the Menu 328
  Menu Titles 329
  Menu Choice Descriptions 330
  Menu Instructions 332
  Intent Indicators 332
  Keyboard Shortcuts 333
Selecting Menu Choices 337
  Initial Cursor Positioning 337
  Choice Selection 338
  Defaults 339
  Unavailable Choices 340
  Mark Toggles or Settings 340
  Toggled Menu Items 341
Web Site Navigation 342
  Web Site Navigation Problems 343
  Web Site Navigation Goals 344
  Web Site Navigation Design 345
  Maintaining a Sense of Place 367
Kinds of Graphical Menus 369
  Menu Bar 369
  Pull-Down Menu 371
  Cascading Menus 375
  Pop-Up Menus 377
  Tear-Off Menus 379
  Iconic Menus 380
  Pie Menus 380
Graphical Menu Examples 382
  Example 1 382

Step 5  Select the Proper Kinds of Windows 385
Window Characteristics 385
  The Attraction of Windows 386
  Constraints in Window System Design 388
Components of a Window 390
  Frame 390
  Title Bar 391
  Title Bar Icon 391
  Window Sizing Buttons 392
  What’s This? Button 393
  Menu Bar 393
  Status Bar 394
  Scroll Bars 394
  Split Box 394
  Toolbar 394
  Command Area 395
Contents

Step 6 Select the Proper Interaction Devices 423
Input Devices 423
Characteristics of Input Devices 424
Other Input Devices 436
Selecting the Proper Input Device 436
Output Devices 440
Screens 440
Speakers 441
Step 6 Exercise 441

Step 7 Choose the Proper Screen-Based Controls 443
Operable Controls 445
Buttons 445
Text Entry/Read-Only Controls 461
Text Boxes 461
Selection Controls 468
Radio Buttons 468
Check Boxes 478
Palettes 488
List Boxes 493
List View Controls 503
Drop-Down/Pop-Up List Boxes 503
Step 12 **Choose the Proper Colors** 691

Color — What Is It? 692
- RGB 694
- HSV 694
- Dithering 694

Color Uses 695
- Color as a Formatting Aid 695
- Color as a Visual Code 696
- Other Color Uses 696

Possible Problems with Color 696
- High Attention-Getting Capacity 696
- Interference with Use of Other Screens 697
- Varying Sensitivity of the Eye to Different Colors 697
- Color-Viewing Deficiencies 697
- Color Connotations 698
- Cross-Disciplinary and Cross-Cultural Differences 700

Color — What the Research Shows 700

Color and Human Vision 701
- The Lens 701
- The Retina 701

Choosing Colors 702
- Choosing Colors for Categories of Information 703
- Colors in Context 703
- Usage 704
- Discrimination and Harmony 704
- Emphasis 706
- Common Meanings 706
- Location 707
- Ordering 708
- Foregrounds and Backgrounds 708
- Three-Dimensional Look 709
- Color Palette, Defaults, and Customization 710
- Grayscale 711
- Text in Color 712
- Monochromatic Screens 712
Step 13 Organize and Layout Windows and Pages 727

Organizing and Laying Out Screens 728
- General Guidelines 728
- Organization Guidelines 729
- Control Navigation 748
- Window Guidelines 749
- Web Page Guidelines 750

Screen Examples 761
- Example 1 761
- Example 2 762

Step 14 Test, Test, and Retest 767

Usability 768
- The Purpose of Usability Testing 768
- The Importance of Usability Testing 769
- Scope of Testing 770

Prototypes 771
- Hand Sketches and Scenarios 772
- Interactive Paper Prototypes 774
- Programmed Facades 775
- Prototype-Oriented Languages 776
- Comparisons of Prototypes 776

Kinds of Tests 777
- Guidelines and Standards Review 779
- Heuristic Evaluation 780
- Cognitive Walk-Throughs 786
This third edition of The Essential Guide to User Interface Design is about designing clear, easy-to-understand-and-use interfaces and screens for graphical and Web systems. It is the eighth in a long series of books by the author addressing screen and interface design. Over the past two decades these books have evolved and expanded as interface technology has changed and research knowledge has expanded.

The first book in the series, called The Handbook of Screen Format Design, was published in 1981. It presented a series of screen design guidelines for the text-based technology of that era. Through the 1980s and early 1990s the book’s content was regularly updated to reflect current technology and published under different, but similar, titles. In 1994, graphical user interface, or GUI, systems having assumed interface dominance, the newest version of the book, which focused exclusively on graphical system interface design, was released. It was titled It’s Time to Clean Your Windows. The follow-on and updated version of It’s Time to Clean Your Windows was the first edition of this book, The Essential Guide to User Interface Design. The impetus for these newer editions of The Essential Guide to User Interface Design has been the impact of the World Wide Web on interface and screen design. This new edition incorporates an extensive compilation of Web interface design guidelines, and updates significant general interface findings over the past several years.

Is Good Design Important?

Is good design important? It certainly is! Ask the users whose productivity improved 25 to 40 percent as a result of well-designed screens, or the company that saved $20,000 in operational costs simply by redesigning one window. (These studies are described in Chapter 1.)

What comprises good design? To be truly effective, good screen design requires an understanding of many things. Included are the characteristics of people: how we see,
understand, and think. It also includes how information must be visually presented to enhance human acceptance and comprehension, and how eye and hand movements must flow to minimize the potential for fatigue and injury. Good design must also consider the capabilities and limitations of the hardware and software of the human-computer interface.

What does this book do? This book addresses interface and screen design from the user’s perspective, spelling out hundreds of guidelines for good design in a clear and concise manner. It blends the results of screen design research, knowledge concerning people, knowledge about the hardware and software capabilities of the interface, and my practical experience, which now spans 45 years in display-based systems.

Looking ahead, an example of what this book will accomplish for you is illustrated in Figures P.1 through P.4. Figure P.1 is an actual interface screen. It looks bad but you do not realize how really horrible it is until you look at Figure P.2, a redesigned version. The same goes for Figure P.3, an original screen, and Figure P.4, a redesigned version. This book will present the rules for the redesigned screens, and the rationale and reasoning that explains why they are much friendlier. We’ll fully analyze these screens later in this text. Sprinkled throughout the pages will also be many other examples of good and bad design.

![Text Properties](image)

**Figure P.1** An existing screen.
**Figure P.2** A redesigned screen.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>TEXT PROPERTIES</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ Courier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ Helvetica</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ Sans Serif</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ Times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pitch</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ 10 CPI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ 12 CPI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ 15 CPI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ Proportional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Border</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Size</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ Small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ Large</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Style</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Bold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Italic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Underline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Color</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ Blue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ Green</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ Red</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure P.3** An existing screen.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>PIF Editor</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Program Filename:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Window Title:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optional Parameters:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Start-up Directory:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video Memory: ○ Text ○ Low Graphics ○ High Graphics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memory Requirements: KB Required KB Desired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMS Memory: KB Required KB Limit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XMS Memory: KB Required KB Limit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Display Usage: ○ Full Screen ○ Windowed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Execution: ○ Background ○ Exclusive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close Window on Exit</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Purpose of This Book

This book’s first objective is to present the important practical guidelines for good interface and screen design. It is intended as a ready reference source for all graphical and Web systems. The guidelines reflect a mix of human behavior, science, and art, and are organized within the context of the GUI design process. The specific objectives are to enable the reader to do the following:

- Understand the many considerations that must be applied to the interface and screen design process.
- Understand the rationale and rules for an effective interface design methodology.
- Identify the components of graphical and Web interfaces and screens, including windows, menus, and controls.
- Design and organize graphical screens and Web pages to encourage the fastest and most accurate comprehension and execution of screen features.
- Choose screen colors and design screen icons and graphics.
- Perform the user interface design process, including interface development and testing.

The book’s other objective is to provide materials that, when applied, will allow our users to become more productive—and more satisfied—using the interfaces we produce. A satisfied user also means, of course, a satisfied designer.

How This Book Is Organized

This book is composed of two parts. Part 1 provides an introduction to the human-computer interface. Chapter 1 examines what an interface is, its importance, and its history. Chapter 2 reviews the two dominant user interfaces today: the graphical user interface (GUI) and the World Wide Web (WWW or Web). GUI interfaces are looked at in terms of their components, characteristics, and advantages over the older text-based systems. Web interfaces are compared to both GUI interfaces and conventional printed documents. The differing characteristics of three distinct Web environments—the Internet, intranet, and extranet—are also summarized. The second chapter concludes with a statement of the basic underlying principles for interface design.

Part 2 presents an extensive series of guidelines for the interface design process. It is organized in the order of the development steps typically followed in creating a graphical system’s or Web site’s screens and pages. The 14 steps presented are:
Step 1: Know Your User or Client. To begin, an understanding of the most important system or Web site component, the user or client, must be obtained. Understanding people and what they do is a critical and often difficult and undervalued process. The first step in the design process involves identifying people’s innate and learned characteristics, and understanding how they affect design.

Step 2: Understand the Business Function. A system or Web site must achieve the business objectives for which it is designed. To do so requires an understanding of the goals of the system and the functions and tasks performed. Determining basic business functions, describing user activities through task analysis, understanding the user’s mental model, and developing a conceptual model of the system accomplish this. The system’s conceptual model must fit the user’s view of the tasks to be performed. Step 2 also addresses the establishment of design standards or style guides, and the definition of training and documentation needs.

Step 3: Understand the Principles of Good Interface and Screen Design. A well-designed screen must reflect the needs and capabilities of its users, be developed within the physical constraints imposed by the hardware on which it is displayed, and effectively utilize the capabilities of its controlling software. Step 3 involves understanding the capabilities of, and limitations imposed by, people, hardware, and software in designing screens and Web pages. It presents an enormous number of general design guidelines for organizing and presenting information to people.
Step 4: Develop System Menus and Navigation Schemes. Graphical systems and Websites are heavily menu-oriented. Menus are used to designate commands, properties that apply to an object, documents, and windows. To accomplish these goals, a variety of menu styles are available to choose from. Step 4 involves understanding how menus are used, and selecting the proper kinds for specific tasks. The principles of menu design are described, and the purpose and proper usage of various menu types are detailed. In this step guidelines for Web site navigation are also presented. Topics addressed include the elements of Web navigation such as links, navigation aids, and search facilities.

Step 5: Select the Proper Kinds of Windows. Graphical screen design consists of a series of windows. Step 5 involves understanding how windows are used and selecting the proper kinds for the tasks. The elements of windows are described, and the purpose and proper usage of various types of windows are detailed. The step concludes with a discussion of Web browsers.

Step 6: Select the Proper Interaction Devices. In addition to the keyboard, a system or Web site might offer the user a mouse, trackball, joystick, graphic tablet, touch screen, light pen, or some other similar device. Step 6 consists of identifying the characteristics and capabilities of these various control mechanisms and providing the proper ones for users and their tasks.

Step 7: Choose the Proper Screen-Based Controls. The designer is presented with an array of controls to choose from. Selecting the right one for the user and the task is often difficult. But, as with interaction devices, making the right choice is critical to system success. A proper fit between user and control will lead to fast, accurate performance. A poor fit will result in lower productivity, more errors, and often user dissatisfaction. Step 7 consists of identifying the characteristics and capabilities of these various screen-based controls and guidelines for providing the proper ones for users and their tasks.

Step 8: Write Clear Text and Messages. Creating text and messages in a form the user wants and understands is absolutely necessary for system acceptance and success. Rules for writing text and messages for systems and Web sites are presented.

Step 9: Provide Effective Feedback and Guidance and Assistance. Effective feedback and guidance and assistance are also necessary elements of good design. This step presents the guidelines for presenting to the user feedback concerning the system and its processing status. It also describes the system response times necessary to meet user needs. Step 9 also describes the kinds of guidance and assistance that should be included in a system, and presents important design guidelines for the various kinds.

Step 10: Provide Effective Internationalization and Accessibility. People from different cultures, and people who speak different languages may use graphical systems and Websites. Guidelines for accommodating different cultures and languages in a design are presented. People with disabilities may also be users. Design considerations for these kinds of users are also described.

Step 11: Create Meaningful Graphics, Icons, and Images. Graphics, including icons and images, are an integral part of design. Design guidelines for various types of graphics are presented. Icons are described, including a discussion of
what kinds of icons exist, what influences their usability, and how they should be
designed so they are meaningful and recognizable. The elements of multimedia
presentation are also reviewed. Guidelines presented include those for images,
photographs, videos, drawings, animation, and audition.

**Step 12: Choose the Proper Colors.** Color, if used properly, can emphasize the logical
organization of a screen, facilitate the discrimination of screen components,
accentuate differences, and make displays more interesting. If used improperly,
color can be distracting and cause visual fatigue, impairing a system’s usability.
Step 12 involves understanding color and how to use it effectively on textual and
statistical graphics screens, and in Web sites.

**Step 13: Organize and Layout Windows and Pages.** After determining all the compo-
ponents of a screen or page, the screen or page must be organized and its elements
presented clearly and meaningfully. Proper presentation and organization
will encourage the quick and accurate comprehension of information and the
fastest possible execution of user tasks. Step 13 addresses the rules for laying out
all screen elements and controls in the most effective manner possible.

**Step 14: Test, Test, and Retest.** A host of factors must be considered in design and
numerous trade-offs will have been made. Indeed, the design of some parts of the
system may be based on skimpy data and simply reflect the most educated guess
possible. Also, the implications for some design decisions may not be fully appreci-
ciated until the results can be seen. Waiting until after a system has been imple-
mented to uncover any deficiencies and make any design changes can be
aggravating, costly, and time-consuming. To minimize these kinds of problems,
interfaces and screens must be continually tested and refined as development
proceeds. Step 14 reviews the kinds of tests that can be performed, and discusses
creating, evaluating, and modifying prototypes in an iterative manner. It also
reviews final system testing and ongoing evaluations of working systems.

Because Part 2 is organized into what appear to be nonoverlapping linear tasks, this
does not mean to imply, however, that the actual design process will fall into such neat
categories—one step finishing and only then the next step starting. In reality, some
steps will run concurrently or overlap, and design iterations will cause occasional
movements backward as well as forward. If any of these steps are omitted, or care-
lessly performed, a product’s foundation will be flawed. A flawed foundation is diffi-
cult to correct afterward.

The readers of the first edition of this book will note that the order in which the steps
are presented has been slightly modified in subsequent editions and the number
of design steps was increased from 12 to 14. The most notable reordering change is the
repositioning of the step “Organize and Layout Windows and Pages” to near the end
of the development process. This was done to accommodate the much greater import-
tance of graphical components in Web site design. The increase in the number of steps
resulted from material previously covered in one step being separated into three steps.
“Write Clear Text and Messages,” “Provide Effective Feedback and Guidance and
Assistance,” and “Provide Effective Internationalization and Accessibility” are
addressed separately to emphasize the importance of each of these activities.

This book is both a reference book and a textbook. A set of related bulleted listings
of guidelines, many with illustrative examples, are first presented in checklist form.
Each checklist is then followed by more detailed explanatory text providing necessary rationale and any research upon which they are based. The reader can use the narrative to gain an understanding of the reasoning behind the guidelines and use the bulleted listings as a checklist for design.

Scattered throughout the book are many illustrations of design, both good and bad. These illustrations have been made as generic as possible, without intending to reflect any one graphical product or system. In view of the ever-changing interface landscape, this seems the most practical approach. The screen examples, however, were created using Microsoft’s Visual Basic, so an illustrative bias will exist in this direction.

Research citations are confined to those in the last decade or so. Older citations have been included, however, when they are extremely relevant to a guideline or a guideline’s discussion. Finally, also sprinkled throughout the book are a collection of design myths to be discounted and maximums to be adhered to.

**Companion Website**

A companion Website for this book exists at www.wiley.com/college/galitz. Exercises for Part 1 and for each Step in Part 2 can be found at this Website. Answers and solutions for these exercises will also be found there.

In addition, the companion Website includes additional screen examples for Steps 4 and 13.

**Who Should Read This Book**

This book, while essentially an introduction to interface design, will be useful for any GUI system or Web page developer. For the developer with limited experience, a reading of its entire contents is appropriate. For the more experienced developer a perusal of its extensive contents will undoubtedly identify topics of further interest. The experienced developer will also find a review of the bulleted guidelines useful in identifying topics to be read more thoroughly. All readers will also find the bulleted checklists a handy reference guide in their development efforts.

**From Here**

Thank you for your interest in interface and screen design. The reader with any thoughts or comments is invited to contact me.

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P.O. Box 1477  
Surprise, Arizona 85378  
(623) 214-2944
My gratitude to Bob Elliott of John Wiley & Sons, Inc., for steering this book through three editions. I would also like to thank my development editor, Ed Connor, and my copy editor, Mildred Sanchez, for guidance and support throughout the writing and production processes.

My gratitude is also extended to the multitude of user interface researchers and designers without whose work this book would not have been possible.

I would also like to acknowledge and thank for their contributions several people who have been instrumental in the shaping of my long career. They are: Ralph Notto, Gaithersburg, Maryland, who many, many years ago gave me my first job in the not-then-widely-practiced field of user interface design; Jack Endicott, Chicago, Illinois, who provided me with the opportunity to write my first book; Ed Kerr and Larry Grodman, Wellesley, Massachusetts, who made it feasible for me to establish my own company; and Bob Bailey, Salt Lake City, Utah, and Michael Patkin, Adelaide, SA, Australia, colleagues who have provided me with many useful insights over the years. Thanks also to Rob and Trish Barnett, Canberra, ACT, Australia, who provided important logistical, and technical support when it was needed.

Finally, I would like to thank the many organizations and individuals who have used my services over the past years. Without your support, this book, and others, would not have been possible.