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Your Technology

'Mouthsounds' CD delivers an eyeful

by Allan Hoffman
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Twenty-five years ago, when "Mouthsounds" was published, the book came with a square piece of vinyl to remove from the book, place on your turntable, and listen to audio of the boings and pops the book teaches you how to create.

At the time, the record-in-a-book was viewed as a publishing innovation -- a way to expand the book beyond ink on the pages.

Now the publisher of Mouthsounds, has updated the idea. The latest version of Fred Newman's "Mouthsounds: How to Whistle, Pop, Boing and Honk for All Occasions ... and Then Some" (Workman Publishing, \$13.95) includes an interactive CD with video demonstrations by the author.

I admit to being skeptical when Mouthsounds arrived in the mail, maybe because I love books even without other paraphernalia attached to them -- and I guessed the CD would be nothing more than a novelty. But I was wrong. The "Mouthsounds" CD surprised me, and if it hints at what publishers may have in the works.

As Susan Bolotin, editor-in-chief of Workman, put it: "We wanted to give people two things for the price of one."

Mouthsounds, as you probably gathered from the title, is a guide to producing all sorts of sounds with your mouth. With chapters such as "An Excursion into the Mouth" and "Animal Sounds," the book provides step-by-step instructions directing readers how to make sounds such as a champagne pop, an ocean-liner blast, a frog croak, a blow dryer, a violin and a bowling alley.

And while Mouthsounds does a wonderful job of detailing the contortions required to produce these sounds, the book doesn't talk -- until you pop the accompanying CD into your personal computer or audio system.

The Mouthsounds CD can be played as a standard audio CD, letting you listen to scores of sounds. But when you place the book into your PC you also get video demonstrations by Newman, a wizard who has appeared on public radio's "A Prairie Home Companion" and elsewhere.

In the videos, Newman provides instructions ("You breath through your nose and tap on your cheek") and then performs for you. The CD captures the fun of the book, but it provides an additional, quasi-instructional element.

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