

Internet Librarian '97

The latest developments

by Naomi Lederer

The first Internet Librarian forum, primarily sponsored by *Information Today* in cooperation with the Special Libraries Association was held in Monterey, California, November 17–19, 1997.

Eleven hundred attendees enthusiastically sampled from “tracks” related to the Internet. Overall topics were: “Digitizing Resources”; “Tools & Techniques”; “Managing Organizational Knowledge”; “Virtualizing Services”; “Net & Web Management”; “Searching & the Web”; “New Technologies, New Roles”; “Captured by the Web: Library Systems, Training & the Net”; and “Net Strategies & Trends.”

A conversation with search engines

The session entitled “Librarians Talk to Search Engines” was extremely popular; representatives from major search tools explained why their search engines were the best, eliciting sounds of amusement from the crowd—surely they all can’t be the best search engine!

The language selection feature was highlighted by Lou Monier of Alta Vista. Searches can be narrowed to one of over 20 languages, soon to include Klingon (for those of you not in the know, a humanoid species on “Star Trek”) and Latin. There is a fresh index every four to six weeks, normal submissions added daily, and a constant removal of dead pages. Ed Anuff of HotBot promoted its over 80 million (100 million

soon) index as the largest search engine. Ten million are refreshed per day for a new database every two to three weeks. HotBot uses full-text indexing—all words on the page. Intended for serious searchers, NewsBot has the top 200 news Web sites and “Classifieds for 2000.” Representatives of other search engines highlighted their strengths.

Copyright issues were discussed by Laurie Gasaway, www.unc.edu/~uncnlg/gasaway.htm. Frans Lettenstrom from The Royal Library, National Library of Sweden described how his library is carrying out Sweden’s 1993 revision to the 1661 National Legal Deposit Act; the revision requires that Web materials be archived. A comparison of old vs. new revealed that Sweden’s first paper journal from 1645 is archived, but the first electronic journal has already been lost (www.kb.se/bibsam/). Amy Tracy Wells (Internet Scout Project) described how to access their resources: quick search, advanced, subject headings, and LC classification (<http://www.wsscscout.cs.wisc.edu/scout/>).

Pull and push

The session entitled “Filtering Tools: From Pull to Push,” featured Lauri Shafer, webmaster at Microsoft Corp. and Paul Pinella, director of Enterprise Product Management, Individual, Inc. Pull technology promotes self-service use of information via e-mail, Web, or other media; users select wanted information. Pinella described Push’s

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usefulness as a way to avoid information overload, keep current, combat the fear of missing something important, and avoid surprises. With Push, users set up profiles of interests; the technology searches multiple information sources (or providers—newspapers, etc.); a “smart” filter filters that information according to the profile; and the filter delivers, usually via daily e-mail, information that fits the profile. Personalization of these services insures a strong focus to relevant topic areas. Users can accomplish this objective in a similar fashion by setting up personal homepages with links to sites that interest them.

Net searchers' secrets

Reva Basch's (Aubergine Information Services) “Secrets of Super Net Searchers” presentation covered her findings from interviewing search experts. Experts find the Internet good for company news, current events, government reports, and alternative views. Search engines are regarded as one approach to locating materials, but “expert pages” are frequently more useful.

Web rings that have oversight are well regarded as centers of excellence (for example, FedWorld <http://www.fedworld.gov/> and Newspapers Online! <http://www.newspapers.com/>). In general, information quality is seen as questionable, and experts recommend “triangulation,” or finding two or three other sources with the same information. Copyright remains a major issue. Digital cash transactions may be the next wave on the Web as sites begin to require fees for access. Experts believe as the Internet becomes more commercialized the overall quality will drop, so Push technology will grow to do the necessary weeding.

Make it accessible for all

An important session, “Making Your Web Site Accessible,” addressed making sites accessible to users with disabilities. Paula Palmer, librarian, Library Media Center at Lake Washington Technical College, discussed the DO-IT (Disabilities, Opportunities, Internet-working and Technology) Program (<http://weber.u.washington.edu/~doit/>) at the University of Washington. Universal Access Design to the Web is important because it promotes equitable use.

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Some users cannot see graphics or hear audio because of visual or hearing impairments. Poorly organized sites are difficult to navigate by those with learning disabilities or for whom English is a second language. Voice output products read tables and frames left to right. Some users have trouble clicking on small icons/buttons, and slow connections and older equipment make it difficult to download large files. The Americans with Disabilities Act gives a legal incentive to make sites widely accessible. Basic Universal Design Principles address page design and the need to test a page through a variety of browsers, including at least one text browser. “Bobby” is one of the recommended HTML validator programs (<http://www.cast.org/bobby/>).

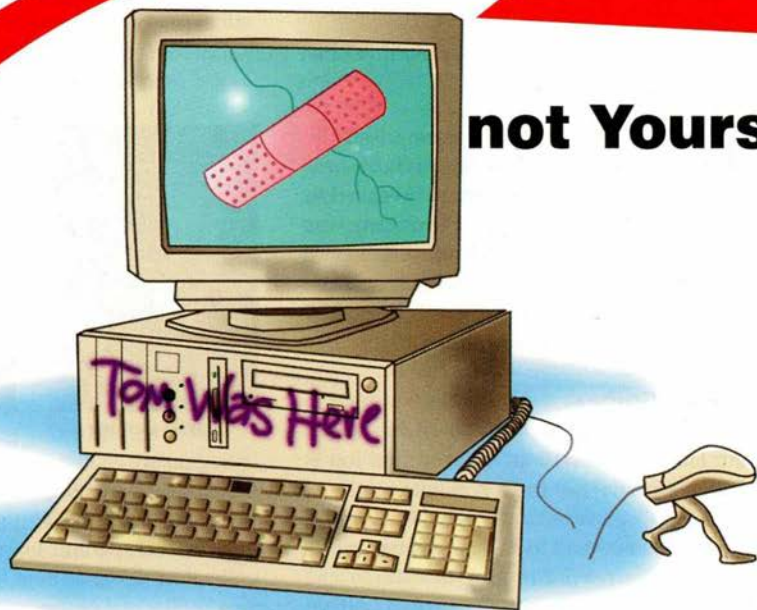
Corporate librarians heard talks focused on business uses of the Internet. Intranets help corporate librarians form alliances within a corporation, give them opportunities to offer training and support, and provide a means of creating and managing “knowledge” databases for an organization (noted from the proceedings, Mary Corcoran, The Knowledge Forum). Advertising on the Web is another rapidly growing business use. Other talks addressed teaching use of the Internet and using the Internet to teach.

The conference proceedings have 27 chapters (not all speakers contributed). Included were abstracts of presentations, presentation software displays (some with nifty graphics), and full papers. There were many vendors present, displaying Internet access to databases and other resources. In addition, there were a few terminals set up in the exhibit area for attendees who desired access to their e-mail at the conference.

Overall, Internet Librarian '97 was a cheerful conference. The World Wide Web is the current cutting edge of the Internet and there was much to discuss—and to learn. ■

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