

Report on Internet Librarian '99

Internet Librarian '99: San Diego, California Nov. 7–11

This is the third year *Information Today* has sponsored the Internet Librarian conference. In the passing years the program has grown, like the Internet itself, in both size and content. This year the conference was too large to fit within the confines of the San Diego Concourse and overflowed into adjacent hotels. It has also grown into a multi-disciplinary conference of cutting edge discussions on Internet theory and practice.

Earth's Biggest Library (EBL)

Monday's full-day program on the Earth's Biggest Library (EBL) revolved around the idea of creating a unified network and database of the world's libraries. The concept sprang from an article by moderator **Steve Coffman** ("Building Earth's LARGEST Library: Driving into the Future," *Searcher* v7, n3 [March, 1999]:34 at <http://www.infotoday.com/searcher/mar99/coffman.htm>) proposing a virtual library built on the Amazon.com model. Coffman noted that Amazon has created a search engine that can

correct for spelling faults, a system that allows for browsing, and it has added several enhancements that are not available in most libraries: book covers for every title, table of contents for most books, full text of book reviews, author interviews and customer reviews. Libraries, in one way or another, may provide some of these types of enhancements, but not to the extent that Amazon is able to provide them on one Web site.

According to Coffman, a single Barnes and Noble store has more titles than 85 percent of all the public libraries in the United States—and often what the libraries do own they have out on loan. Patrons cannot find what they want at the public library 50–65 percent of the time. Here are his suggestions: 1) Do away with the local catalog; 2) Build a global catalog that allows patrons to search all the material in the local collection PLUS the 40+ million items available through ILL in the OCLC Worldcat database,

and, because the OCLC database doesn't pick up everything in print, toss in the three million items from the Amazon database for good measure. The technology is available, and Coffman has a great concept which will bring libraries up to the speed of commercial information services—but how would it work? The speakers in this track took on the practical aspects of starting up the Earth's Biggest Library.

Ralph LeVan (OCLC) reported that OCLC is already on the way to adding most of the titles that are on Amazon, and it is also working quickly to add the bells and whistles that Amazon has: book covers, chapter titles and contents notes, possibly even reviews and interviews. OCLC has an impressive worldwide ILL system already in place and an end-user interface in FirstSearch. In the future, OCLC is planning to include circulation information. This would require constant access to each library's catalogue in order to display current holdings information. The biggest problem that it faces is that many local systems are too outdated to support the Z39.50 or the Internet TC/IP connections that the network would require.

Bob Doran (Baker and Taylor) suggested that libraries do not need to take on the expense of creating a central catalogue. The EBL could purchase the Baker and Taylor database, which is actually the catalog that Amazon uses daily. The database goes beyond the items that B&T sells; it is a listing of what is available. Doran indicated that a big stumbling block to the creation of the EBL was that the cost of processing in libraries. For a library to process an ILL item, that cost was around \$27, whereas Baker and Taylor can process an order for under \$2.00 a book.

Mark Haas and **Ronald Wohl** (Library Express.org) discussed building a delivery system for the EBL, where items could be shipped (and for borrowed materials, returned) easily and at low cost using the U.S. Post Office, advanced packaging technology, and electronic document delivery.

George Relles (a library pricing consultant) and **Mary Ellen Mort** (JobStar Web site) talked about options for funding the EBL: third-party patronage, advertising, or fees. Relles and Mort suggested pulling out all the stops and using as many funding methods as possible. They recommended each of the following: partnering with corporations (i.e., using 7Elevens as access/ordering points), partnering with non-profits, advertising (selling ad space on book packaging or on the Web sites), and multi-tiered user fees.



Photos courtesy of
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The most chilling comment of the meeting came from **Cindy Cunningham** (director of the Browse Program of Amazon.com), who suggested that the libraries leverage their most valuable assets: their patron records, and barter them to commercial vendors in exchange for the most advanced technology. This statement seemed just as reasonable to the business consultants in attendance as it was offensive to the librarians.

The day ended on a positive note from **Roy Tennant** (the Digital Library Project of the University of California, Berkeley). While preparing for the changes coming in the future, libraries must be careful to pick a proper role model—and in his opinion we should avoid relying on Amazon as a model. Amazon has not made any money yet and has an investor base throwing money at it. Amazon is also not legally or ethically bound to protect the privacy of its patrons. Libraries are social organizations with a strong tradition of preserving privacy and striving to educate and improve the quality of their patrons' lives. Tennant reminded us that as librarians we have ethical obligations to maintain the core values of the library and the organization that the library supports.

Tennant suggested that we look instead at role models within the profession. OCLC, for example, may seem like a separate company, but it truly belongs to its collaborating libraries. If libraries can continue to work together to improve their services, they will be the 300-pound guerilla waiting in the closet. The obstacles that libraries face, though, are the lack of technology, the lack of cooperation, the lack of standards, the culture and politics of the individual institutions, and simple inertia.

Every Searcher Gets Them: Tools to Answer the Universal Questions

Tuesday morning's discussion reviewed special hints for doing legal, health and business research. **Cindy Chick** (Graham and James) started the program with a discussion of legal research. Her search strategy entailed using meta-sites, direct sources and alternative sites. In the early days of the Web, Chick kept her own list of legal sites, but when the list grew past 20 pages, she gave up and

started using meta-sites. Her current favorites are Findlaw and Cornell.

If she can not find an answer from a meta-site, she looks for "direct sources." These are sites that specifically house the legal information (i.e., Thomas [<http://thomas.loc.gov>] contains congressional material). Only after she exhausts the meta-sites and the direct sources does she look at "alternative sites," also known as general search engines. Chick's favorite is Google.

Some useful health sites that **Micki McIntyre** (Librarian at the UMDNJ-Health Science Library) discussed were:



- Columbia University: Home Health Guide (<http://cpmcnet.columbia.edu/texts/guide/>);
- NOAH: NY Online Access to Health (<http://www.noah.cuny.edu/>);
- MEDLINE Plus: NLM (<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/>); and,
- Medscape (<http://www.medscape.com/>).

She divided her talk into three topics: 1) looking for health information; 2) looking for information about tests; and 3) looking for information about doctors. Overall she still prefers Medline searches, even for finding a doctor referral. A patron can pick a doctor by searching Medline for all doctors that have written on a given topic. The patron can then limit the results to pinpoint a desired type of doctors or one from a specific geographic location. By the way, her favorite general search engine is also Google.

In the business talk, **Jan Davis Tudor** (an independent business searcher for JT Research) discussed the distinction of searching for company information,

industry information, market information, and information about international companies. She talked about using LEXIS, Dow Jones, Hoover's, and Thomas Register online. She mentioned that she does use free Edgar, but there are times when the advanced search capabilities of "for fee" Edgar are worth the expense. She also uses Northern Light extensively. As with the others, she valued the commercial providers over free databases. Her two main exceptions are Yahoo, with its free access to company information, and Google.

Analyzing Search Engine Results (Wednesday)

Peter Scott's (University of Saskatchewan Library) presentation informed the audience that URL addresses may no longer be useful in determining the authenticity or reliability of information on the Web. He demonstrated how to easily create a URL re-redirect. Using a re-redirect, a URL that appears to be from a non-profit .org or .edu Web site could easily be housed in a commercial Web server barely connected to the organization. Similarly, the re-redirect could send people to a commercial Web site that is selling a product while still maintaining the non-profit or .edu URL!

This re-redirect is especially interesting in light of the new trend of commercial linking in e-commerce. For example, online stores like Amazon.com may contact a book author who has also created a Web site. The online bookstore then has the author create a link from the book's Web site to the bookstore. The author gets a small fee for every person that follows that link to the seller's Web site, and the author would get a larger royalty if the person purchases the book from that specific bookseller. Scott has listed a number of re-redirect services on his Web site (<http://library.usask.ca/~scott/p/sandiego/url/7.htm>).

Russ Wyllie (Infoseek Corp.) demonstrated some tricks Web page authors use to fool search engines. Authors will use these tricks in order to rank their site higher on search engine results. Some of the methods he discussed were hiding repeated search terms on a Web page in the same color as the background color, using duplicate URLs for the same page, or overloading metadata.

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The closing program by **Stephen Abram** (IHS Micromedia) and **Ulla De Stricker** (de Stickers & Associates) was a rousing pep rally discussing the future of librarianship—that business and society are gaining a greater appreciation for librarianship. They commented about the increasing number of popular articles published on the topic of librarianship, and a most interesting factoid—that the fastest growing salaries in American are those of librarians.

Reflections

As interesting as the programs were at Internet Librarian '99, we found that the conversations beyond the meetings were as valuable as the formal events.

The convention was full of such opportunities, with evening meetings, workshops, extensive vendor exhibits, and a golf tournament. What made this conference unique was that it was so interdisciplinary, giving us a chance to see what other professionals are doing outside of law libraries. The meeting was much smaller than the ALA, but more diverse than AALL. It was a wonderful opportunity to talk to professionals in related fields, such as business or health. Too often law librarians are focused on legal issues, and miss the trends in other libraries.

On a practical level, we learned specific search tips for finding information in other disciplines, but we also learned about trends in the corporate/business world that could have implications for law librarians—such as the continued development of knowledge management through intranets. The most significant trend was the rapid growth of automated online services, such as business databases that automatically present search results in professionally formatted reports.

These highlights only touch on the surface of the full conference. It was a valuable experience that both of us would recommend to all law librarians who are interested in Internet issues. We hope we see you at next year's meeting in Monterrey.

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