

Information resources on the Internet : its selection and organisation

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Abstract

Internet contains a large amount of information resources from all fields. The many utilities on Internet such as E-mail, USENET, OPACs, electronic publications etc., are very much useful to libraries in providing information services to users. The authors describe the alternative ways of organising information about the information on the Net i.e. information about relevant sites, in ones' own computer to search, locate and disseminate the relevant information in time. They suggest that to take the full advantage of INTERNET potential, the librarians need to become more knowledgeable about the options available and they need to develop special skills to use new tools and facilities.

Introduction

To the libraries Internet is really a boon. It contains a large amount of information resources from all fields. So irrespective of the type of library, the library professionals should be familiar with the various information tools and resources that are available on the Net to meet the increasing needs of the users.

Even in developing countries like India, many institutions such as Business organisations, Research institutes, Universities, Colleges and to some extent a few schools, libraries etc., have got access to the Net. In this context, the question, when should a library go for Internet is very significant one as far as the collection development of a library is concerned.

For example, today *Encyclopedia Britannica* is available in different forms- Print, CD-ROM, and On-line. An On-line Britannica may not be selected by library, because network will be very slow at times or a network break may occur at any time. At the same time a CD-ROM version will be preferred since it consumes less space and maintenance cost compared to the print version. And to add to this today technology allows to use a single CD-ROM by multiple users at a time.

This is only the case with some of the important reference sources. If the user really wants to know something about the recent development in his subject area, or if he wants to know what are the available materials on his topic in other libraries, the best option is to search on the Net i.e., a need has come to shift the emphasis from ownership to access.

What is there on Internet ?

There are numerous utilities on Internet such as E-mail, USENET, OPACs, electronic publications etc., which are extremely useful for libraries to provide information services to their user community. Some of the important utilities are discussed below.

E-mail

Electronic mail, more commonly called E-mail, helps users to communicate with each other through computer networks expeditiously.

Usenet

USENET is homogenous group of professionals in the net. They communicate together using the Internet facilities to discuss various problems related to their subject areas. Currently, on the Net there are different types of USENET services. Mailing lists is one among them. To discuss various problems relating to library and information science there are a number of mailing lists. Among the mailing lists itself there are separate groups for discussing the different aspects of the subject such as a group for classification, cataloguing, automation etc. A member of mailing list can put his findings and problems to a central organization who manages the mailing list, this organization in turn, sends this message to all other members belonging to that group and the members will E-Mail their suggestions and possible solutions directly to the inquirer or central organisation (or person concerned). A good number of free newsletters and publications can also be owned by being a member of various discussion groups.

On-line Public Access Catalogue (OPAC)

On-line Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) is another important service available on the Net. Using this service many of the library catalogues can be searched On-line. The OPACs belonging to some University press, Book traders, and Publishers allow to do keyword search by the content pages of current periodicals and facilitates On-line ordering to single articles is also possible. On-line ordering to single articles is available in many sites such as OCLC, BIDS (Bath Information and Data Services),

Uncover etc. Proper Exploitation of individual article supply services and effective use of free journals available on the networks will to a great extent help the libraries to overcome the so called serial crisis.

Besides this, many of the Universities, Institutions, Organisations, Associations, etc. are hooked to the Net. Surfing through these sites would prove useful in getting various information such as electronic journals & other publications available, new projects, current research topics, forthcoming conferences, free news letters & other publications, E-mail addresses of professionals, their achievements in different fields etc.

The vast amount of information that is available on the net and limitations of the existing search techniques has made it difficult for library professionals to search for relevant information and disseminate it in time. So the only way out is to organise information about relevant sites in our own computer.

Organising information about the information on the Net in our own computer

One of the basic functions of librarians is to help the users to locate his/her information. Over the years many search tools such as catalogues, indexes, information retrieval software etc. have been developed to attain this goal.

Suppose a user comes with a particular query, and if that query is put onto a search engine it may retrieve a number of sites. To find out the relevant site one will have to go through a good number of them and in some cases there will not be any relevant information. If there is no relevant information one may try with other search engines. This is really a time consuming job. Tomorrow again this same information may be needed by the same user or by another user and the library professional may spend the same amount of time to locate the information. Some of the solutions to overcome this problem are

1. Download and index each of the relevant information that has been searched for the users.
2. Create a database of information about the relevant Internet items and give a link to the respective locations.
3. Create an index of relevant items on the net and give a link to the respective locations.

Downloading all the relevant information

This option is nearly impossible since it consumes a lot of disk space. At the same time librarian can have a few number of such files which

seems to be very relevant, so that users can be better served with the copy of those files even if that information is moved from the present Internet site.

Creating a Database of information about the Internet items

If the information about the relevant items is stored in a database it will be very easy to retrieve the information. But unfortunately, the commercially available information retrieval softwares do not have any provision for linking any field of a record to the Internet. This provision for linking is necessary in the case of a database of Internet resources because here one of the field will be the URL address of the resource. If this linking facility is not possible, the user has to carry the URL address to a browser to go to actual resource site. This can be a cumbersome job for the user since the URL addresses of files are often very length. The following example shows the complexities in noting down URL addresses:

http://www.yahoo.com/Reference/Libraries/Library_and_Information_Science/Institutes/
http://webcrawler.com/cgi-bin/WebQuery?text=research+in+libraries&src=wc_results/

Creating an Index file

We have seen that the creation of a database or downloading all the information is not practically viable. So the third alternative which can be thought of is to create an HTML file containing the URL addresses which are linked to the respective items and arranged under the alphabetically arranged standard key terms. Standard key terms or subject headings can be taken from any of the Vocabulary control devices.

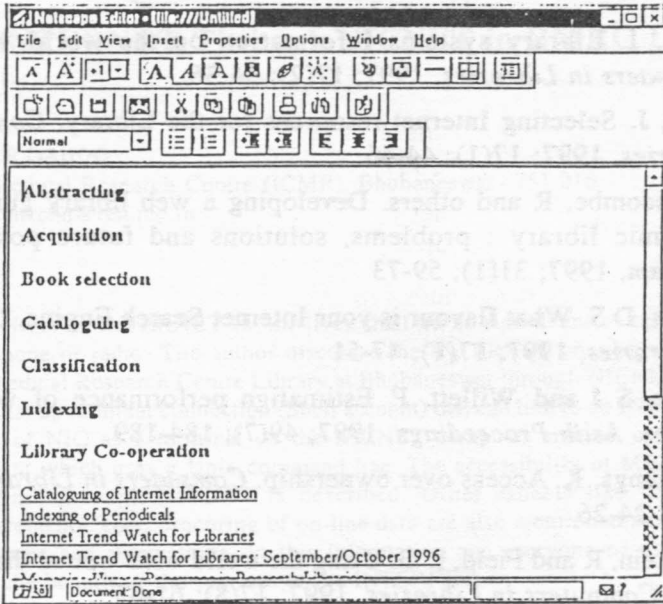
How to prepare an Index file ?

The browsers like Netscape or Internet explorer etc. have an option called bookmark or favorites where user can create book marks of his/her favorite sites so that whenever he wants to revisit the site he can go to respective location by just clicking on the bookmark addresses.

We can make use of this bookmark facility to create an index file with out even knowing much about HTML codes. For this we require the browser Netscape Navigator Gold. It can be downloaded free of cost from Netscape download sites.

For this, first of all one has to open the bookmark file of the Netscape Navigator Gold in its own editor mode. After opening the book mark file in edit mode we can put there all the standard index terms in their alphabetical order that we had identified earlier. Now we can close this

file and start searching on the net using the browser. Whenever we come across the relevant item bookmark it. After finishing the search open the bookmark file again in the edit mode. So we view it as follows:



In the picture we can see that the links were created while we bookmarked the relevant items just after the end of the key terms that we had entered. All that we have to do now is cut each of the links and paste it under the appropriate index terms. We can also give an abstract of the subject content of the links just under each link. Since this bookmark file is an HTML file we can take a copy of it and link it with libraries home page so that users can search under the key terms and click on relevant items. We can make this Bookmark file more powerful by adding a few more features.

Preparing an index file is a continuous process since the volume of sources on the net is vast and ever growing and requires frequent efforts to update the indexed file. In this way without much effort we can organize the relevant Internet resources in our own computer and provide links to the actual resources.

Conclusion

All these are new and extra jobs apart from the daily routines which ofcourse should not and cannot be over looked. To put it briefly, to take the full advantage of this potential, librarians need to become more

knowledgeable about the options available and they need to develop special skills to use new tools and facilities.

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