
LIBRARY PORTAL : A GATEWAY OF INFORMATION

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Abstract

In the early days of the Net revolution most of companies launched their Net presence through corporate Websites. They used their websites to show their products and services with significant information content. As websites grew in number it became difficult for customer to locate or search the net for sites of their choice. Search engines thus emerged and went on to become key players, directing millions of surfers to various sites to get online search of their choice. However the phenomenal growth of search engines was accompanied by unprecedented choices opening up for the customer. This phase was marked by the transformation of search engines/directories into portals. Instead of competing on width offered by horizontal portals, players were forced to compete on depth. The libraries did not become aloof from the Net revolution. They also launched portals to attract the specific group of interest. This concept brought paradigm shift in the sense of "right information to right user from approaching relevant information", "save the time of users from separating irrelevant information", "educate the users for self search by arranging contents in specific manner".

Keywords : Library Portals, Gateway of Information, Types of Portals, Evolution.

1. Introduction

The Internet has brought about a paradigm shift in the way people communicate, find information, socialize and the entertained. Information seekers has become habituate to use search engines like google, askjeevs etc to find their required information. As websites grew in number, it became difficult for customers/information seekers to search the net for sites of their choice. Search engines thus emerged and went on to become key players, directing millions of surfers to various sites. Web commuters found a unique value addition, as they could go and search for any product or service or resource from any part of the world by just clicking on the mouse. The search engines facilitate information retrieval from segment of internet. Not thousands, but some times millions, of hits may be appeared if information seeker starts his/her search for specific words, group of words or phrase through search engines. No information seeker can browse all hits/websites/pages/files to read, to collect or to store relevant information of his/her required. In that case the precision ratio may be low and recall ration may be high. Search engines do not categorize the relevant and irrelevant information of surfer's query. They show exhaustive search results. This led to modify the designs of some search engines by putting information, resources, and products in different categories, in hierarchical form, adding core features like Web Searching, News, Reference tools, Access to Online Shopping venues and some communication capabilities (i.e., free E-mail and chat) which are begun to call 'Portals' the new name of search engines.

In the age of the internet revolution the portal became the medium of B2B ecommerce or the proliferation of vertical market portals (or vortals), there is constant buzz about portals and portals strategies. Libraries as well as information centres are not exceptional case from the web revolution. They developed their own portals for their users/clients rather than searching information and wasting valuable time of their users going in depths as well as vastness of the web world.

2. What is portal

Looking the term “portal” up in the dictionary (www.m-w.com) would results in :

Portal noun 1: door, entrance, esp. a grand or imposing one 2: the whole architectural composition surrounding and including the porches of a church. 3: the approach or entrance of a bridge or tunnel. 4: a communicating part or area of an organism

The research of some paper work resulted that there is no unique definition of the term “portal” in the field of information technology (IT). Hence, there are not only different types of portals, but also different definitions. Simplifying, the word portal “describes an entry point, or homepage, for accessing Internet content and services.”

3. How does Portal differ from Web site, and Search Engine

Internet Portals originated as the librarian of the Web. The word “portal,” meaning “door,” has been used to characterize Web sites commonly known for offering search and navigation tools. Circa 1996, a portal was used to catalog the available content from the Internet, acting as a “hub” from which users could locate and link to desired content. Now portals are more than just a launching pad to content at other sites. They offer a broad array of online resources and services. Although there is no single model for what constitutes a portal, all portals offer at least five core features:

- Web searching
- news
- reference tools
- access to online shopping venues and
- some communication capabilities (i.e. email, chats)

Whereas a Web site is a related collection of World Wide Web (WWW) files that includes a beginning file called a homepage. A company or an individual tells you how to get to their Web site by giving you the address of their home page. From the home page, you can get to all the other pages on their site.

Search engine is a specialized program that facilitates information retrieval from segment of the internet. Search engines attempt to help a user to locate desired information or resources by seeking matches to user-specified key words. The usual method for finding and isolating this information is to compile and maintain an index of Web resources that can be queried for the key words of concepts enter by the user. The indices are usually compiled during times of minimum network traffic. Different engines are appropriate for different kinds of searches, and most can be optimized for specific results.

4. Evolution of Portal Technology

In the early years, what we now call portals were called “search engines.” These search engines were based on Boolean technology applied to HTML documents. The value behind this search engine technology was to help people find things in the vastness of the Web.

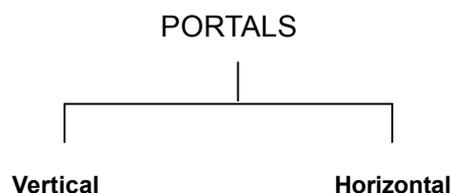
In the next stage of development, “navigation sites” became the term used to describe the functions available at Excite, Infoseek, Lycos, and Yahoo. During the first period it was assumed that users could

navigate through the Web by searching through associated links. It soon became evident that average users did not want to develop professional research skills to find information on sports, weather, and travel. To address this user frustration, navigation sites added the function of categorization. Categorization is the method by which popular sites and documents were filtered and put into pre-defined groups based on their content (sports, news, finance, etc.).

The third and most recent stage of development introduced the new term of “portals.” In the current portal phase, sites not only provide search functionality and categorized content, but they also offer additional features. Some of these features include access to “communities of interest” (e.g. Yahoo! Financial’s threaded discussions), real-time chat, user-specified content (my-Excite!), and access to specialized functions (shopping networks, auctions, on-line trading, etc.).

The driving force behind all of this change was the idea that a person should have a single point of access from which they could make connections for all of their Web information needs.

5. Types of Portal



Vertical Portal

On the web, a vertical portal (sometimes called a vortal and which are also called “Enterprise Information Portals” (EIPs) or “Corporate portals” provide information for a particular group of specific interest. [Spitzer 2000]) is a website that provides a gateway or portal to information related to a particular industry such as health care, insurance, automobiles, or food manufacturing. A vertical industry is one that is focused on a relatively narrow range of goods and services. A term that might also be used is *interest community Web site* since any vertical industry brings together people sharing an interest in buying, selling, or exchanging information about that particular industry. Vertical portals are also seen as likely business-to-business communities - for example, small business people with home offices might be attracted to a comprehensive vertical portal that provided ideas and product information related to setting up and maintaining the home office.

Enterprise Information Portals or Corporate Portals:

Enterprise Information Portal or Corporate Portal is part of vertical portal. Enterprise portals are the intranet or extranet versions of Web Portals like Yahoo! Or Excite. Where Web “portals display sports scoreboard and stock portfolios”, EIP are portals embedding “tools for analyzing data, launching productivity tools, and conducting e-commerce.” An enterprise portal has to serve many purposes like to be a single point of access for employees, other businesses and last but not least the consumer. Enterprise portals may be referred to by the community they serve. For instance, an employee-facing portal may be described as a “Business-to-Employee” portal, or B2E portal. Other enterprise portal classification are “BtoC (Business-to-Consumer/Customer), “B2D” (Business-to-dealer/distributor), “B2B” (business-to-business/supplier), and “B2G” (business-to-government).

Some feature of enterprise portals are mentioned below:

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- Single Touch Point- the portal becomes the delivery mechanism for all business information and services.
 - Collaboration- portal members can communicate synchronously (through chat, or messaging) or asynchronously through threaded discussion and email digests (forums) and blogs.
 - Content and document management- services that support the full life cycle of document creation and provides mechanisms for authoring, approval, version control, scheduled publishing, indexing and searching
 - Personalization- the ability for portal members to subscribe to specific types of content and services. Users can customize the look and feel of their environment.
 - Integration- the connection of functions and data form multiple systems into new components/ portlets

Horizontal Portal :

Whereas a horizontal industry is one that aims to produce a wide range of goods and services. Because most industry tends to specialize, most industry tends to be vertical.

Horizontal portals like myYahoo! are also called “Consumer portals”, “Web portals” or “public portal” and *“provide a bit of information for everyone.”*

Library Portal :

Librarians, of course, were among the earliest inhabitants of the Web and, following their professional instincts. Immediately begun to create link collections on all sorts of subjects, including librarianship. There are hundreds, of perhaps thousands, of portals devoted to interests of librarians and their kin: online searchers, information brokers, knowledge managers, etc. Of these, only a dozen or so are true “megaportals” that strive to represent the entire range of library knowledge and practice. Some, like the Internet Public Libraries, emerged with the Web itself and follow a nonprofit, service model. Other, newer ones, like LibrarySpot embody a commercial portals.

The differences among these sites demonstrates the continuing elusiveness of a definition of “portal.” Nevertheless, there are traits that they share, including those that distinguish them from other vertical market portals. In the latter category, library portals are noteworthy for what they need not provide. Because their visitors are already electronic information experts and Web veterans, library portals don’t bother with common portal elements like email, stock quotes, weather reports, bulleting boards, etc.

Conversely, library portals should be comprehensive in covering their subject. Many portals are selective, in order to provide information novices with a manageable plateful, librarians, on the other hand, have no problem dealing with information overloaded, and want the most complete set of links possible on every library-related topic or subtopic.

The ideal library portal then, will have the most thorough coverage possible in several areas of library profession, for all types of libraries.

- Professional resources, such as practice manuals, standards, model programs, reports, and studies
- Organisations, from the large national associations to local and special interest groups

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- Publications, both print and electronic
 - Conferences and other events
 - Library Web sites, including Web catalogs
 - Communication channels, like discussion lists
 - Job announcements
 - The library marketplace, i.e., vendors of library-related products and services

6. Knowledge Exchange & Information Centre (KEIC) Portal : (a case study)

MICA is an academic institution that has been set up since 1991 to develop professional communication skills in India. The institute primarily aims at imparting relevant education to young men and women with a view to provide them with the expertise to become effective communications professionals.

Further, the institute also aims to conduct research in communication as applied to the needs of the communications industry. Through such research, the intent is to create and share new knowledge in this fast growing and increasingly important field. As part of its agenda, MICA also means to collaborate with other institutions, both Indian and foreign, to jointly work on expansion of the knowledge base in the field of communication and its related areas.

MICA offers three types of programmes- the Post Graduate Programme (PGPC), the Professional and Executive Development Programmes (PDPs/EDPs) and the Career Development programmes (CDPs).

To fulfill the goal of MICA and its human capital including students, faculty, research associates, alumni and staff, the Knowledge Exchange & Information Centre (KEIC) has been established since 1994 with the basic objective of harnessing the huge body of information available throughout the world on all aspects of people in their role as consumers and on all forms of communication. KEIC tries to make its portal as "One Stop Search" so that its users can search and access the KEIC resources through "LIBRARYONLINE". Following contents have been managed to make resources accessible in Wi-Fi environment.

7. Knowledge Exchange & Information Centre (KEIC)

About Us:

Dictums
Charges/Overdues
Database Overview
Hours
Calendar
Organisation Chart

MICA in Media

MICA in News

Services

Article Alert
New Arrivals
Information Services

KEIC Databases :

AAA
Book
Bound Volume
Case Study
Commercial (TV)
Commercial (Radio)
Dissertations/Reports(Bib)
Dissertation (Full Text)
Issue
Newspaper
Non Books Material
Periodical
Print Ad
Stakeholder

Outsourced Databases

ABC
CMIE-EIS
EBSCO
Express Healthcare Mgt.
Indiastat.com
ISI Emerging markets
MAGIndia.com
Intl. Commercials
Questia
Vans
Indiainfoline
POPLINE

Useful Websites

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| Product/Clients Membership | Students' Output DCM CCC Photography | Intl. Organisations Indian Organisations Online Dailies Online Periodicals Radio Television Channels |
| MICA Publications MICA Comm. Rev. MICA Research Review MICANEWS (Newsletter) CHRYSALIS MICA Reckoner 2004 | Creative Collection | Others National Accounts Stat. India Citing Reference (APA) TAM Dictionary/Encyclopedia Search Engines |
| User Education | Convocation Speeches | |
| KEIC Presentations | Membership/MoU MoU International Association National Association | |
| Periodicals Updates (The list of latest journals are scrolled up which are received by KEIC) | | Suggestion/Feedback Google Search Engine |

8. Users/Clients and Portal

The basic idea behind the creation of portal is to simplify the access of resources with minimum help of others. Library portal should be simple to understand and use. Users/Clients need automatic access of resources of their library from one and only one place that is referred to portal. Having some features like customization for clarity, simplicity of use, self-evident of links and readily information retrieval and flexibility of personalization options the portal help the users/clients as follow.

- save the time and anxiety to finding information
- increase the self-confident in the information search process
- aware to current updates in their field. e.g. Article Alert (List of articles appeared in recently periodicals), New Arrivals (List of news books added in the library)
- seamless access of students Output, cultural activity, convocation speeches, MoU with other national and international institutes ect.
- access Restricted users (Faculty) can access, download their required information from anywhere.

Library (Library Staff) and Portal

- library staff are becoming computer savvy due to portal environment
- Current updates on portals keep the library staff well aware
- keen to adapt to even faster changing technological environments
- maintain the desire to work independently and co-operate constructively
- develop and maintain good relations with faculty as well as students (entire users group)
- develop and maintain user focus
- maintain a high degree of curiosity
- maintain healthy skepticism of technology
- develop new skills, transit to a lifelong learning framework

9. Conclusion

Information is considered as product. It is saleable, and there is a constant market for it. Like all other products, to be saleable, information has to be what the customer want and in a form that they can easily use. It is also self-regenerating i.e. having given/sold it the giver/seller and the recipient both retain it, and this process can on forever. In the age of information technology information seekers do not wish to spend their most of time in searching information, information generators (authors, associations, publishers, government, institutes, researchers etc) want to do marketing of their products/intellectual properties, libraries, information centres, data warehouses keen to provide access and marketing (awareness) of their resources for their users/clients/stakeholder. For all above aspects, the portal is like a boon for an individual or community of group. Educational portals have capacities to aware their users from their resources. Government portals deal with communities/public, Enterprise portals concern with consumers and business personnel. Basic concept behind the portal technology to save the time of information seekers while searching their require information. There are thousands of portals in the world, to describe each and every portal is not easy task and also not require but how the portal helps the users while searching information it does matter. KEIC Portal is playing an important role as an agent, which transform the library into a leaning organization between actual users and library resources. Within the campus it enables the user to access, download, exchange, the information through LIBRARYONLINE.

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