INTERNET BASED REFERENCE SERVICE

by

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ABSTRACT

We are living in a digital world. The evidence is everywhere. We see digital camera, digital television, digital diary etc. around us. At the same time, information is also available in digital form at a large scale. Many publishers are publishing their publications in digital form. Some of these outstanding and valuable resources are freely available on Internet. Information seeking on Internet is very difficult. It is said that Internet is the place to find answer for a query in three days, which will require three hours in a traditional library. The present paper lists some of important resources available on Internet. The authors are using these sources to provide reference service in Pune University Library and have visited all the websites described in this paper. These websites are thoroughly studied and found that these are valuable to provide reference service.

Keywords : Reference Sources – Internet, Reference Services - Internet

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0   Introduction

According to Foskett, "Reference service is currently humanism in practice because the aim is to help people, in a way or other, to secure greater happiness through the possession of knowledge." Reference service has been defined in various ways and one of the most appropriate definitions has been provided by Wyer, that "Reference work is the sympathetic and informed personal aid in interpreting library collection for study and research." In the Glossary of Library Terms (ALA) it is defined as "that phase of library work which is directly concerned with assistance to reader in securing information and in using the resources of the library in study and research." Margaret Hutchins says that Wyer's definition is not comprehensive.

According to her "Reference work includes the direct personal aid within a library to persons in search of information for whatever purpose, and also various library activities especially aimed at making information as easily available as possible. Selecting and organizing materials with this end in view is an important part of reference work as their interpretation to the individual readers. Dr. Ranganathan has also said that reference service establishes contact between a reader and his document in a personal way. It culminates at in the integration between reading and reader.

These definitions taken together provide both a short term and long term views of this phase of library work. These definitions as such, bring into bright relief certain basic facts, that of human approach of preparation including collection and organization of material and the sense of responsibility for the provision of personal assistance to readers is offered directly and asked for and even when not expressed specifically by them.

1   Use of Internet

The Internet is not one network but a network of networks. It constitutes a network by virtue of the facts that a large number of separate networks can be linked to each other and data can be exchanged between computers connected to it. The communication and exchange of data between machines connected to the separate networks can take place because the computers on them employ identical software and each network is attached to device that root data between them. To keep pace with the technology the librarians have to use the Internet resources to meet the requirements of their users.

2   The Changing Role of Librarianship

One of the characteristics of the last few decades has been the remarkable growth in the technological means of collecting, processing and transmitting information. There is a rapid and continuous growth in the sources of information. The development of new techniques for handling information has focused attention on its quality as an asset of commercial value. According to McGarthy, " information is a commodity no less tangible than energy, if anything it is more pervasive in human affairs." A feature of this development of information as a commodity is the growth of new professions that of 'information scientist' whose task is to understand the sources of information and identify and retrieve what is required; and that of 'information engineer' whose task is to design, construct and maintain the new technological systems for communicating and processing information.

3   Types of reference sources

Reference books or sources differs from general books, due to the fact that, they are consulted for specific information and are not meant for continuous reading. Many attempts have been made to define a reference book. According to American Library Association's Glossary of Library Terms It is a book designed   by its arrangement and treatment to be consulted for definite items of information, rather than to be read consecutively, and it is a book whose use is restricted to the library building. Many publishers are publishing their resources in digital form. The Internet community also has started making it available the reference sources online. The entire range of reference materials may be categorized as follows –
   1) The general reference sources (fact finding resources)
   2) Dictionaries

3) Encyclopedias
4) Geographical resources
5) Year books and almanacs
6) Biographical sources
7) Directories
8) Bibliographies etc.

Each of them has a distinctive structural variety and a different identity. Some of the resources available on Internet are described below. The present paper deals with the some of the primordial reference sources available on Internet.

4   Information resources on Internet

4.1   General Reference Resources

The Internet is the world's largest library containing millions of books, artifacts, images, documents, maps etc. But there is one small problem that in this library everything is scattered on the floor. Librarians have to pick up the material, which is relevant to his users, and arrange it systematically so that whenever there is any query, librarian can immediately use that source to locate the information. In the present paper authors have listed such sites, which are useful to provide reference service using Internet. Some of the reference sources include dictionaries, encyclopedias, yearbooks, fact-finding sources, etc.

4.1.1   Reference Desk
            (http://www.refdesk.com)
This is the single best source for the facts on Internet. It lists resources under 21 categories including welcome to refdesk, reference site of the day, headline news, today's thought, facts of the day, search for the books and music, reference resources, facts at a glance, facts search desk, help and advice, top search engines, top reference tools, current news/weather/business/sports, subject categories, just for fun, and translation dictionaries.

Refdesk has three goals i.e. fast access, intuitive and easy navigation, comprehensive Content.

The listing of language dictionaries include English-German / German-English, Hungarian-English / English-Hungarian, English-Italian / Italian-English. Reference resource is another category which lists eighteen sub topics through which user can find information. For example 'Ask the expert' is the facility where you can find information by asking questions to expert in that field.

Facts-at-a-glance is a category, which lists 127 headings through which you can get information. Theses headings include area code information, biography.com, chiefs of state, general and subject dictionaries, encyclopedias, find a college, find a house, find a doctor, global statistics, how far is it? (Distance between two cities) maps; USA and world, who's alive/who is dead, world atlases/geo. facts etc.

4.1.2 Caltech General Reference Page
(http://library.caltech.edu/reference/default.htm)

This is a useful and manageable set of links to various resources. There are links to language resources, encyclopedias, maps of the USA, an article database, sources of current news reports, geographic resources, maps of different parts of the world, electronic texts, internet search engines, information sources about individuals (telephone numbers) and area (zip/codes) and medical and weather information.

There are 23 categories, which include quick references, awards and prizes, etc. Subject collection is a category, which provides information on 23 science subjects covering from aeronautics to physics. In quick reference section there are 34 headings which includes Books in print, Currency rates, Dollar directory, Encyclopedia Britannica, Guinness world record, Information please almanacs, Oxford English Dictionary, Zip codes etc. The provision to buy online books is available in the Books and publishing section. You can search information on used and rare books in the same section. In the directory section users can find information on global telephone directory, International Calling Codes, Zip codes, Who where etc.

4.1.3 The Internet Public Library General Reference Collection
(http://www.ipl.org/ref/RR)

The IPL General reference collection is a collection of Internet resources gathered together with the needs of the Internet community. It is not a comprehensive hot list of all sites on every subject, but an annotated collection, chosen to help answer specific questions quickly and efficiently. Sources are selected according to ease of use, quality of information, frequency of updating and authoritativeness. This page includes links to almanacs, biographies, census data, encyclopedias, geographical information, quotations and addresses. The list includes following categories:

- Business and economics
- Education
- Health and Medical Sciences
- Law, Government and political science
- Science and Technology

- Computer and Internet
- Entertainment and Leisure
- Arts and Humanities
- Regional and Country inf.
- Social Sciences

The list under each category is far less comprehensive than those referenced above. Specific terms can be searched using the option of the query box.

4.2 Dictionaries

4.2.1 Dictionary.com

This site is composed of information about words, its meanings, synonyms, antonyms, grammar etc. This is divided into 13 categories which includes Ask Doctor Dictionary (if you have any question about words, grammar or language, then click on this section), Community (This section provides information on periodicals, news papers and other classical texts), Cool Tools (Here you can find information on free software that works

with dictionary.com and thesaurus.com), Fun & games, Help, Roget's Thesaurus, Store, Translator, Web Directory, Word of the Day, Writing Resources, other Dictionaries (Links are provided to German, Greek, Latin, Spanish and other language dictionaries) and wireless (This is a special facility which allows you to access dictionary.com through your mobile phone).

4.3 Encyclopedias

4.3.1 Free Internet Encyclopedias
(http://clever.net/cam/encyclopaedia.html)
This encyclopedia is divided into two sections, paralleling the structure adopted earlier by encyclopedia Britannica's macro and micro references. The macro-reference contains references to large areas of knowledge, FAQs and pointers to relevant areas of the micro-references. The Micro reference contains short bits of information and references to specific subjects, sometimes with instructions on finding the subject inside a general reference. In the micro reference section the information is alphabetically arranged providing links

4.3.2 The WWW Virtual Library: General Reference Encyclopedia
(http://hom.istar.ca/~obyme/ency.html)
This site covers the general and subject encyclopedias. Users can access information from any site as links are provided to them. You have to select the encyclopedia and just click on it to search the information. Each category gives the brief information about that source. It includes scope of the source, number of articles available on this source, and publisher who has published that source. This site provides access to 33 encyclopedias. The sources included in this site are authentic and have a comprehensive coverage.

(a) <u>**General Encyclopedia:**</u> - In this section nine encyclopedias are listed. They are as Britannica.com, The Catholic encyclopedia, The Columbia Encyclopedia, Encarta online Encyclopedia, Encyclopedia.com, and Encyclopedie

(b) <u>**Subject Encyclopedias:**</u> - This section lists 24-subject encyclopedias. These cover multidisciplinary subjects. These subjects range from botany, English literature, Human anatomy, Medline, Philosophy to World of Mathematics.

4.4 Geographical resources

4.4.1 The World fact book 2001
(http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/faxtbook/index.html)
This is the electronic edition of an annual publication compiled by the United States, Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). It is largely descriptive in orientation. A linked document explains the methodology adopted. There is an entry for one country, which provides quite extensive information relating to their economic, political and institutional circumstances. This site also contains the information on major political institutes of the

country, basic demographic information, names of members of government, major political parties, economic statistics, and current international disputes.

4.4.2 Date and Time Gateway: -
(http://www.bsdi.com/date)
This site provides the date and Greenwich Mean Time at the moment of access. You have to select any country, or US time zone by city and it returns the date and time at that location at the time the query was entered.

4.5 Biographical Resources

4.5.1 Biographical Dictionary
(http://www.s9.com/biography)
This resource contains more than 28,000 entries. The information recorded against each name tends towards the minimalist end of the continuum of biographical reference materials. Each record provides information on date of birth and death, country of origin/residence, major achievements and position held. To search the information you have to type the surname/first name in a query box. The dictionary.com can be searched by birth years, death years, position held, profession, literary and artistic works, achievements and other keywords.

4.5.2 Cambridge Biographical Encyclopedia
(http://www.biography.com)
The database covers around 25,000 individuals. The entries are considerably more detailed and professionally written than those in above-mentioned resource. The entries are cross-referenced which links to other associated information. This resource is divided into five section namely Biosearch, Top ten bios, Biography section, Born on this day, This week on biography. Biosearch allows searching more than 25,000 entries of past and present of greatest lives. Entering keyword in the query box can seek out these lives. Top ten bios provide the detailed and exhaustive biography of some eminent personalities like J.K.Rowling, Martha Stewart, Bill Gates, and George W. Bush etc. Biography section, born on this day and This week on biography provides biographical sketches of some eminent persons who were born on that particular day or in that particular week.

4.6 Articles and printed books

4.6.1 Uncover (Ingenta full text delivery)
(http://uncweb.carl.org) or (http://ingenta.com)
Ingenta is a greatest research gateway serving the online information needs of 1.4 million visitors a month. It provides a free online search service of published content from reliable research sources. This site offers access to summaries from over 25,000 publications linked to the full text of 5,200 titles. The search can be queried by keyword, author, and title and can be narrowed by using Boolean or logical operators.

You can search the required document either by keyword, author or title. If you select title, the document downloaded includes the title, the journal and the cost of purchasing the article through ingenta.com. (To get the article "preservation and digitization in ARL libraries" you have to pay $ 14.50). Ingenta also has a subject title database that list all journals subsumed under specific subject headings. Another very useful service offered is 'Reveal'. You have to pay $25 per year and Ingenta will deliver via the electronic mail the table of content of up to 50 journals of your choice.

4.6.2   Find articles.com
(http://www.findarticles.com)

Findarticles.com is a specialized search engine designed to help you quickly and easily find published articles on the topics that interest you. This database has hundreds of thousands of articles from more than 300 journals and magazines dating back to 1998. You can find articles on any subjects. The site has listed some categories, which includes business, health, society, entertainment, sports etc. You can search article by subject or by name or keywords

5   Conclusion

The cost of printed reference resources is increasing every year. It is not possible to every library to acquire theses resources. To provide the better reference service within the limited financial sources the Internet is the best solution. Now librarians have to learn how to use Internet and   to retrieve relevant information . There are many reference sources, which are freely available through Internet. If you select and organize these resources properly you can save the time of users and can provide latest, current and updated information effectively and efficiently.

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