1997

'Netrification': internet infiltration of a university library

Michael K. Organ

University of Wollongong, morgan@uow.edu.au

'Netrification': internet infiltration of a university library

Abstract

[Extract] The netrification of libraries across the board is obviously occurring to varying degrees, whether it be within the biggest government departmental library or the smallest school facility. However, as the current decade moves to a close, and Internet excitement waxes and wanes, the Web is almost certain to continue this process of infiltration. The jury is still out as to whether it is a case of 'Librarians leading the way', to quote ALIA's Library Week slogan, or the profession being led by the technological changes. It is probably a bit of both.

Disciplines

Arts and Humanities | Social and Behavioral Sciences

'Netrification' - Internet infiltration of a university library

Michael Organ, University of Wollongong Library

Has the Internet bubble burst? A passing fad perhaps? And what are the consequences of those heady days between 1994-6 when the World Wide Web was a new phenomena - a bandwagon to be hopped upon with due haste - exciting, challenging, dangerous, unknown, but ultimately enticing, with lots of coloured lights and sound, and the promise of amazing things to come.

Whilst the froth and bubbles may have subsided, the hangover definitely remains; and yes, the Internet is here to stay, with development and diversification continuing apace. But precisely what form is this infiltration taking, as individual libraries and archives come under the sway of the Net?

The University of Wollongong Library is perhaps a typical example of the changes being wrought as a result of the recent - and ongoing - information technology revolution. The Wollongong experience may provide some pointers to the future direction of 'netrification', as the Web increasingly becomes a part of everyday library processes, from acquisition to access, purchase to presentation.

During May 1997 a Web version of the Library's Innopac catalogue was launched, along with an updated version of the ubiquitous home page (http://www-library.uow.edu.au). Both sites operate from the Library's internal, Netscape powered, Web server. Also in May the old CD ROM lab - housing some 14 computers for use by Library patrons - was transformed into the InfoLab, with a new Internet (Netscape) front end providing access to both internal and external electronic databases such as the ERL suite, OVID's Compendex, and Firstsearch.

These innovations came about as the result of a rather intense 12-18 month period of planning and implementation, requiring the installation of new computer hardware and software, and the design and preparation of Web pages. And what are the repercussions of these changes?

Apart from the necessity for ongoing systems support, the actual implementation of this new technology calls for the reskilling of Library staff and patrons, which in the latter case numbers some thousands of students. Familiarity with the use of Web browsers is a new element within the information literacy equation. The payoffs are, however, substantial, and primarily relate to the provision of greater desktop access (both on and off campus) to Library information resources, whether via the catalogue, listings of Web pages, or direct connection to electronic databases.

The use of the Internet as a promotional / teaching tool for librarians is also an integral part of this process. Apart from the adoption of e-mail for communication and transfer of files, individual web pages can serve both as information resources for clients, and attractive presentation material for staff, thus negating the need for specific presentation software packages. With HTML able to accommodate colourful text and graphics, all that is required is PC projection facilities and appropriate browser packages.

Whilst the abovementioned examples specifically apply to the University of Wollongong Library, they do indicate the type of uses to which the Internet is being put in Australian academic libraries. The netrification of libraries across the board is obviously occurring to varying degrees, whether it be within the biggest government departmental library or the smallest school facility. However, as the current decade moves to a close, and Internet excitement waxes and wanes, the Web is almost certain to continue this process of infiltration. The jury is still out as to whether it is a case of 'Librarians leading the way', to quote ALIA's Library Week slogan, or the profession being led by the technological changes. It is probably a bit of both.