Traversing the trellis work of the Internet

Government information on the net

Australian government organisations (with some outstanding exceptions) have been slow to mount information resources for Internet access. Of course, children of all ages from many countries have chuckled at the bird calls from the Australian Botanic Gardens Web server (http://155.187.10.12:80/sounds) and the Tasmanian Government has two Web servers operational, but there aren't many other organisations who've done anything.

This should change soon with the establishment of a Commonwealth/State Internet Working Party with the South Australian, Tasmanian, Northern Territorian, Queensland and Commonwealth Governments participating. The Working Party will work towards establishing recommended practices for the presentation of information services, by identifying good examples from overseas. The contact point for the Working Party is Ian Barndt from the Common-wealth Department of Finance (Ian.Barndt@finance.ausgovfinance.telememo.au).

Fortunately, there are many good examples of government information services overseas. A recent issue of *Network news* (a listserv-based newsletter originating in Minnesota) summarised the information servers operated by US State governments. All of the links to the servers are available at http://garnet.msen.com:70/0h/vendor/maven/inet1/nnews/states.html

Thirty-one of the fifty States are included in the list, with significant contributions from California and Texas. The report refers to the 'citizen sugarcoating' found in many services and makes some good suggestions — using sensible naming conventions (i.e. www.state.us or gopher.state.us); limiting images of State seals, department logos, governors; and (most importantly) including 'real information along with the usual government manual and PR stuff'.

Canada, too, has put an amount of government on the Net. The Canadian 'Open Government' server (http://debra.dgbt.doc.ca:80/opengov) contains pointers to a number of federal government departmental and provincial government services, as well as significant government documents and treaties (GATT, NATO, NAFTA).

In the broader context of government information, a moderated list has been established to discuss the US Government Information Locator service (GILS). GILS is a federal initiative to enable users to locate, access and acquire publicly-available federal information resources. The service uses the Z39.50 and other relevant standards to support the deployment of Internet-accessible information locators.

While its initial thrust is within the US government, this will clearly be a development that will be picked up throughout the world, and the list (known as the GILS Forum) will be of interest to a range of agencies, librarians, systems vendors and the general public. To join the Forum, send the following message to: LISTPROC@CNI.ORG, SUBSCRIBE GILS <your name>.

Internet Room at Information Online and On Disc 95

Unfortunately for those who kept checking the Internet Room at the NZLIA/ALIA Conference, it never got working. But the good news is that there will be one at the Online Conference, and it will be operating. So the advice that we gave in August still applies — you'll have to telnet to your host computer (the one that runs your post office) to read your mail, so be sure that you know the address of that computer, your sign on and password, and how to read your mail on it.
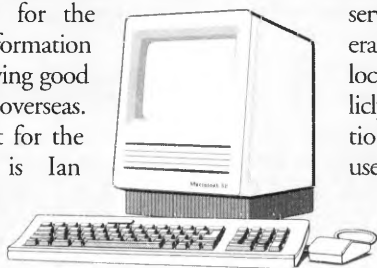
Cooperative developments on the Net

The Internet is not just about providing information services for global access. One of its greatest contributions has been in bringing groups of people together from many places to work on a project — people who may never meet in person. Thus software such as Mosaic can be developed at one site, distributed to many others quickly and cheaply, improved as a result of massive feedback and finally released in a useable state to the world.

Another recent example in co-operation appeared on a list dealing with American civil war history. A contributor idly wondered whether it would be possible to have tables of contents for relevant journals posted to the list. Within a couple of weeks (and following some hectoring from the list owner) volunteers had been found to provide this information, and now this information for a couple of dozen journals appears regularly and is archived at the list host site. No doubt similar activities are occurring in other fields of interest.

LISTSERV information on the Web

In a previous column, we talked about how to find out about what lists were available for subscription. It has been

New IFLA Internet connection

IFLA (the International Federation of Library Associations) has announced a list on the Internet that will facilitate an electronic exchange of information between IFLA and its members. Robert Wedgworth, IFLA President, noted that 'IFLA's objective is to liberate its member communications from the barriers of time and place.'

SilverPlatter is supporting IFLA in establishing this LISTSERV by providing technical support and computer space in its US office. Gerry Hurley, Director of Educational Services at SilverPlatter, assures participants that '...as the host of this Internet connection, we have no other role than to help with the technical implementation and maintenance.'

In addition to IFLA-L, IFLA conference papers, newsletters, and other material will be accessible through SilverPlatter's WWW page. These documents will also be available on SilverPlatter's FTP server and via e-mail.

To subscribe to IFLA's electronic conference, Internet users should send the following message to: LISTSERV@SILVERPLATTER.COM, subscribe IFLA-L <your first and last names>.