

ALIANet

Like the historic frontier of the Wild West, it [the Internet] is boundless, uncharted, revolutionary, uncouth, highly cooperative, hypersonic, profoundly efficient, deeply conflicted and breathtaking in the scope and depth of its potential' writes Bill Washburn in the February edition of *Internet world*. So it was with a sense of the pioneer that we at ALIA embarked on our own adventure of establishing a Web site at ALIA House in the suburb of Deakin, Canberra. And the aphorism that one must learn to crawl before learning to walk has genuine applicability to our endeavours. Cyber junkies and Net Surfers have a lexicon all of their own which, at first exposure, appears impenetrable.

What then will be the 'net effect' of our current project — ALIANet? How does it all work? If, like me, you have been intimidated by the technology and the jargon yet have fallen under the spell of the miracle of digitised communications or been entranced by the preachings of the likes of Bill (Microsoft) Gates, you'll want to know more. And we need to know more if we are to work with these technologies and communicate with our children.

The initiative to develop ALIANet came from the enthusiastic Associate Librarian at the University of Canberra, Linda O'Brien during her period as President of the ALIA ACT Branch in 1994. Linda believed that we could provide e-mail addresses for our members and supply information

on ALIA activities and projects in electronic form. To do this we would need to build our own *World Wide Web* site. We would need a host computer set up as a *Web server*, with software which translates incoming requests for information and sends back the required information. We would need to format all the messages we send out in *HyperText Markup Language*, better known as HTML. This is a tedious process at the moment but before too long we will be able to use a piece of software, called a HTML converter, to change our text documents into the correct format.

Once our document is in the right format we can mount our information as a series of *Web pages* onto our host computer. The *Information architecture* that we employ includes the layout and content of individual pages and the hierarchical document structure. The table of contents to our pages of information is called the *Navigational page* and serves the same purpose as it does in a hard copy publication. When the receiver has all the appropriate equipment the Navigational Page can be used to point and click on the information required and the appropriate page will appear on the screen.

The person who makes sure that all of this technology performs as intended is the *WebKeeper*.

At this point, to make sure we can extract value from the technology, we must provide quality content. We already know a great deal about the information need of ALIA members

because we provide much of that information in hard copy.

We will be making information available on such matters as salary scales, enterprise bargaining, competency standards and other professional issues. We will be mounting information about conferences, seminars and other professional development programs. We will publish agendas and summaries of General Council meetings. We will provide ALIA policy statements on subjects such as *Freedom to read*, *Libraries and multiculturalism*, *Policy on library services for people with disabilities*, and *Professional ethics*. And, of course, we will be establishing electronic discussion groups on a wide range of subjects.

All the staff at ALIA House will have their own email addresses. This will mean that members can direct inquiries quickly to the person who can most appropriately respond.

We will also be providing email addresses for our members. At first this service will only be available to members in the ACT. Later it will be extended to members in other parts of the country. To take advantage of this service members will need a personal computer and a modem which will be used to dial into the host computer.

It's exciting here at the frontier. A wheel may occasionally fall off the wagon or we may be ambushed by alien tribes from cyberspace but jump aboard as we roll along. At least we won't be cutting down any trees to create our superhighway!

Virginia Walsh



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