

Back to the beginning



Kerry Webb

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Anyone who follows a newsgroup, especially those dealing with controversial matters, soon realises that there are new people coming to the Internet community all the time. Many newcomers to the 'net don't receive any basic training, and have to learn as they go along. The first part of this column is dedicated to them, as I discuss some of the basic tools that you can use to find your way around.

To illustrate the process, I'll use a real-life problem that a friend of mine presented recently. She wanted to find information urgently about a library system called (we'll say) Bingo which was marketed by a company named Ultra Hyperion (not their real name either).

First I tried a number of Web search engines, starting with AltaVista and HotBot. You can find these with a Netscape browser by clicking on the 'Net Search' button which takes you to <http://home.netscape.com/home/internet-search.html> where there are links to about twenty search engines. Users of Microsoft Internet Explorer can either use that URL or follow the 'search' link at the bottom of the MSN Home Page at <http://www.msn.com>. Most of the search engines are built by 'robots' cruising the Net, collecting pages and indexing the significant words on those pages. None can cover the complete World Wide Web, but they do index a massive amount of information.

Another type of service listed on that page is Yahoo! which employs people to compile a hierarchical index of information. It doesn't have the coverage of the other services, but it is well organised. Of course, when you find search facilities that you like (either search engines or sites) you can put links to them in your Bookmarks or Favourite Places files.

So, I searched using the words 'bingo' 'ultra' and 'hyperion'. It's amazing what you discover. It turns out that Ultra Hyperion is the name of a popular toy, so there were a lot of very false drops, and nothing about a library system. I would have searched on 'bingo' and 'library' but most search engines put commonly-occurring words such as 'library' 'Internet' and 'file' on their stopword list so you can't use them.

I also thought that there might have been some discussion of the system on newsgroups so I tried DejaNews at <http://www.dejanews.com>. This service indexes thousands of groups by keywords in the postings and name of the posters. AltaVista has a similar facility but I find DejaNews better. Alas, no luck there either, but if I'd wanted to discuss the Ultra Hyperion toy, I knew where to go. On a hunch I tried the Telstra White Pages to get a phone number, but you need to know the state where the company is lo-

cated. There's a similar problem in trying American telephone directories.

In some cases, you can take a punt on naming conventions. XYZ Corp may have a web site at www.xyz.com but in general you're better off trying a more formal search.

At this point, I gave up and suggested that my friend get on the phone and ask around some more to see if anyone else knew anything. If she had time, she could have posted a message to PACS-L or some similar list asking for information. Library-Oriented Lists and Electronic Serials at <http://info.lib.uh.edu/liblists/home.htm> provides global information on library resources on the Internet, and there's a very good collection of information about Australian lists at http://www.gu.edu.au/gint/ozlists/ozlists_home.html.

This gives you an idea of some of the search strategies that you may be able to use in a general search for information. It's quite likely that I've missed some obvious choices, and I'd be very happy to hear from anyone with any more ideas.

ATSIC site

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission recently launched its web site at <http://www.atsic.gov.au>. It has a well-designed and readable appearance, with plenty of information about ATSIC and links to Australian and international indigenous peoples' sites. I was particularly impressed with the layout, as the designers have worked well with the ATSIC staff to produce a distinctive look that doesn't get in the way of the information that they're presenting.

Free PowerPoint Internet presentations

B Tudin Information Technologies, a Canadian Internet Consulting and Training company, has provided a series of PowerPoint presentations that you can download from <http://www.inasec.ca/com/btudin/tudmain.htm>. The topics that they cover are 'Introduction to the Internet and WWW', 'Internet connections', 'A trainer's compendium of Internet terms', and 'Establishing a quality presence on the Internet'. They look good, and the information is comprehensive and up to date.

Technicians e-journal

NetNexus is a new e-journal for Australian library technicians, compiled by the team of Helen Halfpenny, Susan Blake and Barbara Rocchi. It will be published every two months and features articles, a column of 'net happenings', and links to useful sites. You'll find it at <http://www.ntu.edu.au/library/netnexus>.

The first edition has articles on the experiences of technicians in reference and information desks in two university libraries. It looks good.

... and the other 'net-happenings

The Net-Happenings list run by Gleason Sackman in North Dakota has long been a notable resource for Net users. It now has a new home at <http://www.gi.net/NET/> with facilities to subscribe to the list, to submit information about a resource, and to search the archives.

Online dictionaries

The OneLook site allows you to search forty-nine dictionaries in such areas as computers, science, medical, business and sports. It allows some form of simultaneous searches, but the results aren't what you'd expect. A search on 'arm' across medical and sport dictionaries returned a few entries for pharmaceuticals but none for arm, and a similar search on 'foot' returned entries for foot but none for football. Still, it's a useful service. See it at <http://www.onelook.com/>.

Discussion paper on privacy

In September the Commonwealth Attorney General released a discussion paper on *Privacy in the private sector*. Comments are invited before the end of November. The paper (with appropriate hotlinks) is at <http://www.agps.gov.au/customer/agd/clrc/privacy.htm>.

Further information on the general issues of Privacy is on Roger Clarke's pages <http://www.anu.edu.au/people/Roger.Clarke/DV/#caa> and <http://www.anu.edu.au/people/Roger.Clarke/DV/FedLeg.html>.

eLib developments

The UK eLib programme arose from the Follett Report in 1993. A sum of £15m was allocated to the 'Electronic Libraries Programme', which funded around sixty projects. A good example is the EEVL site at <http://www.eevl.ac.uk/> which maintains a database of engineering resources on the Net. The entries for each resource describe where it is, what it contains and how it can be accessed. Details of all eLib projects can be found at <http://ukoln.bath.ac.uk/elib/projects.html>.

Copyright and historical records

There's an interesting battle going on in the United States about some historical records. The Official Records of the War of the Rebellion (which is just one of the names that those people use for the US Civil War) were compiled late last century and have long been a valuable research resource. Copies of the multi-volume set sell for more than \$1500, and several publishers have recently been scanning the complete set of documents through OCR equipment to publish them on CD-ROM at around \$500.

Civil War buffs were surprised last month to see that the United States Army Center for Military History was offering a Web version of parts of the Official Records free at their site at <http://www.army.mil/cmh-pg/>. We were not surprised

to see that it precipitated an argument with one of the CD-ROM publishers when it was claimed that the CMH version had been copied from the publisher's CD-ROM. The CMH has had legal advice that the original documents were in the public domain (which they were) and that a scanned version of them does not constitute intellectual property. The last report is that the CMH and the publisher are having discussions to resolve their conflict.

Institute on Digital Library Development online

The Institute on Digital Library Development (IDLDD) consisted of two five-day workshops to give librarians, archivists, and museum professionals with the skills they need to use existing tools and proven techniques to place library content on the Internet. One of the goals of the Institute was to make the materials used in the Institute available to those who could not attend, so the Institute Web site now offers many of the handouts, lecture notes and presentations used by the Institute faculty and guest lecturers. Presentations are available in both native Microsoft PowerPoint and Adobe Acrobat versions.

There are materials available relating to digital library issues and concepts, HTML markup, imaging, optical character recognition, Adobe Photoshop use, image and multimedia databases, and access and indexing issues. You will also find links to a few examples of the kind of work accomplished by the Institute participants. The site is at <http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/IDLDD/>.

WA report on the Internet and the public sector

The Auditor-General for Western Australia produced a report in June 1996 on The Internet and Public Sector Agencies. The report identifies the issues facing agencies in their use and management of the Internet, and suggests good practice that would improve efficiency and effectiveness in the public sector use of the Internet.

It found that most agencies perceived benefits from the Internet but are not yet able to quantify them. Most risk assessments have been aimed at security issues whereas potential legal exposures from published information have received little attention. Policies and procedures on Internet usage and associated information management are lagging behind agencies' moves to join the Internet. Some agencies are already having difficulty resourcing the maintenance of accurate and up-to-date information published on the Internet.

Not too many surprises there, but it's good to see an official report drawing attention to these issues. The report is at <http://www.iinet.net.au/~oagwa/internet.html> and you can download it in PDF format for easier reading. ■

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<http://www.alia.org.au/>

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