

Thoughts on VALA

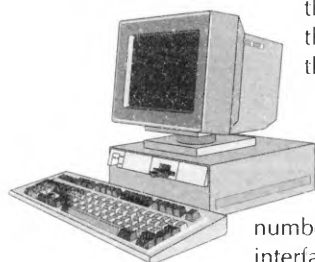


Kerry Webb

The VALA conference was held from earlier this year in Melbourne. It has changed a lot in the fourteen years since the first one was held in the Medical School at the University of Melbourne. There are more people, a substantial exhibition, notable overseas speakers, and the Internet. The Net was everywhere — as it should be — but I did wonder if we gave enough consideration to what was happening *outside* the Internet.

This line of thought was prompted by Walt Crawford, the keynote speaker from RLG who opened the conference. He spoke about the matters explored in the book he wrote with Michael Gorman, *Future libraries: Dreams, madness and reality*. The book analyses many of the myths around the electronic library (or virtual library or digital library). In it, they expose the shaky foundations of prophets such as Nicholas Negroponte (*Being digital*) and opponents of library automation like Clifford Stoll (*Silicon snake oil*). Walt has a seductive low-key presentation, but more importantly he talks good common sense. There was plenty to think about in what he had to say.

There was again an Internet room at the conference. There were twelve PCs running Netscape (thanks to the State Library of Victoria and VICNET) and most of the machines were in constant use. Most users were checking e-mail, and very few were seeing the Net for the first time — meaning that the Net has become (at least for those who go to VALA) a part of the landscape — useful, but not as exciting as it used to be.



I thought that the most significant feature of the exhibition was the number of library systems featuring Z39.50 interfaces. It is heartening to see a standard actually being deployed widely and becoming a 'standard' feature of these systems.

Election information

The Australian Electoral Commission has its home page at <http://www.aec.gov.au/> with details of electorates, candidates, and general information. This is a permanent site. The Parliamentary Library also has information at <http://library.aph.gov.au/library/>, including tables of electorates and margins.

Sydney airports information

On the home page of the Federal Department of Transport at <http://www.dot.gov.au> there is an information package on the airports in the Sydney Region, including plans for the controversial Sydney West Airport (in the Badgery's Creek area) together with official statements about the issue of noise at

Sydney (Kingsford Smith) Airport.

Iowa's state-wide system

The State of Iowa will have a Web-based book locator and ILL system, with cgi-based forms, around April 1996. The project page is at <http://silo.lib.iastate.edu/>.

Ftp from ABN

The National Library has announced that it has commended a pilot project in distributing bibliographical records by file transfer protocol (ftp). This is aimed at libraries which receive regular tapes or diskettes of their holdings and/or changes. If you want to know more about the project, call the ABN Help Desk on 1 800 026155 or send a message to networks@nla.gov.au.

The Universe according to UniServe

Wendy Pryor from RMIT reports that UniServe Australia has been established to provide networked access to teaching resources for academics in Australian tertiary institutions. The project consists of five discipline-specific clearing houses and a coordinating centre, initiated by the Committee for the Advancement of University Teaching (CAUT).

The sites are: <http://uniserve.edu.au/uniserve> (Coordinating Centre) <http://uniserve.edu.au/law/> (UniServe Law) <http://engch.uow.edu.au/clearinghouse/> (UniServe Engineering) <http://health.uniserve.edu.au/> (UniServe Health) <http://ultibase.rmit.edu.au/> (UniServe Humanities and Social Science) <http://www.usyd.edu.au/su/SCH/> (UniServe Science).

WebCat list

Jeff Huestis from Washington University in St. Louis has set up a list to discuss issues the use of Web interfaces to library systems. To subscribe, send a message to ListServ@wuvmd.wustl.edu with [subscribe webcat-l <your name>](#) as the first line of the message.

Digital Libraries Sun SITE

Sun Microsystems and the University of California at Berkeley have announced the Berkeley Sun SITE to feature developments in digital libraries. Its features will include access to text and image-based digital library collections from around the world, expert reports on issues like copyright and intellectual property laws involved in creating and maintaining a digital library, and guides to imaging, searching, cataloguing and browsing tools, techniques, software and hardware products being deployed within digital library projects around the world.

It's at <http://sunsite.berkeley.edu>.

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An Internet radio program

The ABC has announced a new radio program about the Internet which started on Radio National on Sunday 4 February just after the 5 pm news. It is called CLICK ON! and the presenter is Stephen Rapley, the person behind Radio National's Web site. It offers a critical review of the Internet, and will identify the destinations worth seeking out as well as interviewing the people using the net — for work and play.

CLICK ON!'s e-mail address is ClickOn@rn.abc.net.au and details from the program will be available at: <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/clickon/click.htm>.

Survey of e-journals

The Multimedia Research Group at the University of Southampton has published *A survey of STM online journals 1990-95: the calm before the storm* at <http://journals.ecs.soton.ac.uk/survey/survey.html>. It examines in detail the publishing features of over 80 online journals. Every journal covered in the survey is linked, including links to referenced works. The authors are keen on getting feedback on the survey and say that they will publish constructive comments in a sort of open peer community.

Bibliography on e-publishing

The *Network-based electronic publishing of scholarly works: A selective bibliography* has been recently updated by the University of Houston Libraries at <http://info.lib.uh.edu/pr/whats.htm>. It covers directories, economic issues, electronic books, electronic serials, future scenarios, general works, legal issues, library issues, new publishing models, publisher issues, and related electronic resources. There is a subsection on digital libraries in the library issues section.

Health services research journal

The Web site for the *Health services re-*

search journal is currently being built. This multidisciplinary journal provides those engaged in research, public policy formulation, and health care administration with advance information on new trends and the latest techniques of research and evaluation. This enables subscribers to take advantage of current and significant research.

The address is <http://www.xnet.com/~hret/hsr.htm>. So far, the site contains a ten year index of articles by author and subject. Abstracts of recent articles have also been added.

Citations in the electronic world

Jan Tent of the University of the South Pacific has compiled a useful guide to citing e-texts, with references and examples. See it at <http://lamp.cs.utas.edu.au/citation.txt>.

Looking for tips on Web-building?

The Webmaster reference library at <http://webreference.com/> is a very good place to start. Start at the table of contents (from books to VRML) and follow the links to explanatory material, samples, tips and companies providing specialist services.

Online Australian publications

The National Library has established a Selection Committee on Online Australian Publications (SCOAP), to develop guidelines for selection and management of these publications for access and preservation. For information on SCOAP, contact Margaret Phillips at mphillip@nla.gov.au. ■

A small note from the author

I would like to acknowledge the support given by the National Library in providing me with Internet access, allowing me to research and compose this column (in my own time!).



The ALIA home pages and the ALIA web service, ALIANet, can be found at the following URL: <http://www.alia.org.au/alia/>.

This column (with associated hyperlinks) has the URL of <http://www.alia.org.au/alia/incite/articles/webb's-web.html>.

Please note that full-stops appearing at the end of any URL or e-mail addresses listed within *inCite* should NOT be used as part of the address unless indicated.

Contributions and suggestions for this column are always welcome. Please contact Kerry Webb at k.webb@nla.gov.au, or via the ALIA National Office, incite@alia.org.au.

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