So much (net) junk

Victoria Richardson, Netimpact Online Publishing

Moving upstream in the information chain from a librarian to a publisher has offered me an opportunity to explore the responsibilities publishers have in the dissemination of information — particularly electronic information intended to be used on a computer screen.

To me, as a librarian, the hub-bub surrounding the birth of the internet was misplaced. Librarians have been using electronic information retrieval resources for a decade before the internet, and so doing it via the internet should just have made our task that little bit easier.

But how many people, librarians included, find information retrieval from internet sources frustrating? So much information. So much junk.

Librarians are uniquely client-focussed in everything that they do. Electronic publishing, on the other hand, has not yet evolved end-user standards. It seemed to me that documents being produced for the web and on CD-ROM lack the traditional signposts that I was used to seeing as a librarian.

For example, with traditional print publishing, a reader can ascertain a number of things about a publication without actually reading the content. They can:

- make a judgement about the volume of material in a publication because of the size and number of pages;

- determine the arrangement of information by looking at a table of contents or index;

- know the age of the information by the publishing date;

- know where the information is catalogued and indexed by looking at standard verso information; and

- know that the author's details may appear somewhere in the document for authentication.

None of these traditional signposts exist for large electronic text documents. It seemed to me that a lot of information being published for use on-screen was being produced by individuals from an information technology background who seemed to have no understanding of the process of communicating information at all.

The influence of librarianship in my publishing career leads me to believe that the development of excellence in digital document design can turn information overload into information on demand.

My employer, Netimpact Online Publishing, won the 1998 Canberra Region Graphic Arts Study Award to examine this very issue. I believe librarians are, and should continue to be, the leaders in the development of document design for digital publishing. I believe that products produced by librarians to disseminate information are among the best to be found. We are the true knowledge workers in the information industry, and we should take every opportunity to share our information management skills with others.

We need to participate in the production standards of information wherever we can. If we commit to doing this as a profession, our role in collecting, harvesting and sifting of information for our clients will continue to be recognised for its true value and professionalism in the evolving knowledge society.

Success story

Netimpact Online Publishing recently won two awards presented at the Canberra Region Graphic Arts Awards night. They were the 1998 Industry Award for Excellence and the Study Award.

The 1998 Industry Award for Excellence was for the information design of the *1998 Australian information industries capability directory* published on CD-ROM for the Department of Industry, Science and Tourism (DIST).

The attributes which contributed to this product's success were:

- offering the best possible access to information, with information retrieval tailored to user's needs;

- clearly and simply communicating Australian IT information in a universal (multi-platform) format;

- using an innovative 'publishing solution' to solve an information retrieval problem efficiently and effectively; and

- providing an information resource that required little or no existing IT knowledge to use.

The Study Award was presented to assist further study in a related field of achievement. In accepting the Study Award, Netimpact seeks to understand the developing trends and standards in international publishing for the electronic media, and bring the benefits of this award back to our local industry.

The awards are sponsored by the Canberra Institute of TAFE, the Australian Graphic Design Association and the Printing Industries Association of Australia. ∎