

Cerfing the net

Ivan Trundle, manager, systems and publishing

I have just attended a most-informative and illuminating Internet conference in Sydney — *Internet World 97*. Keynote addresses from Senator Richard Alston and from Vinton Cerf of the United States demonstrate that governments around the world are now taking a serious interest in the Internet, from copyright issues to content regulation, access rights to infrastructure.

Increasingly, governments are being forced to take a more active role in all Internet developments, and thus are being forced to consider and make decisions at an unprecedented rate. Many argue that technology advances are too fast for effective government legislation or intervention, but the case for governments to legislate are compelling. The rise of concerns about copyright, censorship, and privacy justify the need for governments to make wise and sensible decisions and to legislate preciently. In August, ALIA presented a submission to the Department of Communications and the Arts on government proposals to regulate online content — those who wish to find out more can browse the 'Submissions to government' web pages on ALIANet, at <http://www.alia.org.au/submissions.html>.

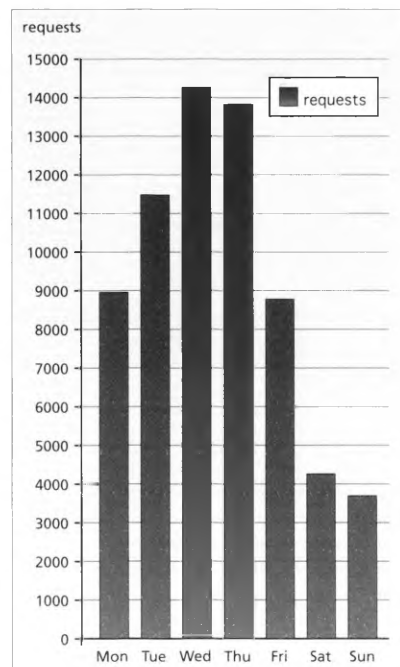
Also at the conference were many sessions on the diverse uses of the Internet, from commerce to communication, and from gaming to gambling. With over 325 000 web sites and over 10 000 000 host computers, the rise in popularity of the Internet is still climbing. One report stated that 300 000 new web pages appear every week, and that over half of all of the new jobs in the United States came from the Internet in the first half of 1997! And yet, paradoxically, (in the United States) few chief executive officers understand the true value of the Internet to the extent that they often commission con-

sultants to 'put the company on the web' (because everyone else is doing it) without developing a proper business plan that integrates the company's web presence with the company's core business. Consequently, many web sites require dramatic overhauls before they can be put to work. Planning, implementing and managing web services is now a full-time job, and one that is demonstrating a new executive role — that of a Web Internet Resource Executive (WIRE — Americans just love acronyms). These people bring business knowledge and acumen, strategic analysis, technical assessment and often creative direction to the board rooms of companies around the world. These people are not IT managers, or information officers, but are seen to be a new breed of executives who have the ability to make sound business decisions with a wider focus, albeit with considerable knowledge of the technology issues involved. The integration of Internet services within an organisation places additional demands on the overall infrastructure, and encourages organisations to focus more clearly on the information flow — both in and out.

This in itself bodes well for information workers. Until recently, information sector workers may have felt that information issues were being sidelined in the board room (and elsewhere). New thinking suggests that a refocusing of attention on the effective dissemination, collation, and use of information will require a plethora of skills developed by those who are trained in library and information sciences. Let us hope that the pundits are correct!

Looking at logs

Of interest to browsers of the ALIANet website, we have finally secured software to thoroughly analyse ALIANet's web ac-



cess log files. The level of reporting is extensive, and the figures presented below could easily be extrapolated to indicate the best days and times for browsing the whole of the Internet. Whilst the breadth of reporting that this software gives would fill more room than available here, the information published (hour-by-hour usage patterns), demonstrates the best times to browse our site (using local times, from 6.00pm to 7.00am the following day, with the least activity between 5.00am and 6.00am). So if you want to work fast, try browsing before sunrise each morning!

Incidentally, this data represents 'true' activity, or the kind of activity that is controlled by human intervention. Most web servers keep log files of every request, or 'hit', for a file (along with details of where that request is coming from, from what browser, what platform, time takes to process the request, and so on), resulting in log files that are unwieldy for normal analysis (a popular web site may have easily 25 000 000 hits per month). Many hits are made by automatic agents (or 'robots') working tirelessly for web indexing services, such as Lycos, AltaVista, and Yahoo. They are duly recorded in any log file, representing a false level of usage.

The software used in the analysis of ALIANet log files strips out all of this information first, resulting in a more balanced report of activity. The software also indicates errors that occur in the use of ALIANet, allowing our html team to correct any mistakes and tidy up loose ends. This in itself will make the browsing experience associated with ALIANet more pleasant and productive for all concerned. ■

