Netrification:
Internet infiltration of a university library

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Has the Internet bubble burst? What are the consequences of those heady days between 1994–1996 when the World Wide Web was a new phenomena — exciting, challenging, dangerous, unknown, but ultimately enticing, with the promise of amazing things to come.

Whilst the froth and bubbles may have subsided, the hangover definitely remains; and yes, the Internet is here to stay, with development and diversification continuing apace. But precisely what form is this infiltration taking, as individual libraries and archives come under the sway of the Net? The University of Wollongong Library is perhaps a typical example of the changes being wrought as a result of the recent — and on-going — information technology revolution. The Wollongong experience may provide some pointers to the future direction of 'netrification', as the web increasingly becomes a part of everyday library processes.

During May 1997 a web version of the library's Innopac catalogue was launched, along with an updated version of the ubiquitous home page (http://www-library.uow.edu.au). Both sites operate from the library's internal, Netscape powered, web server. Also in May the old CD-ROM lab was transformed into the InfoLab, with a new Internet (Netscape) front-end providing access to both internal and external electronic databases.

These innovations came about as the result of an intense period of planning and implementation, requiring the installation of new computer hardware and software, and the design and preparation of web pages. And what are the repercussions of these changes?

Apart from the necessity for on-going systems support, the actual implementation of this new technology calls for the reskilling of library staff and patrons. Familiarity with the use of web browsers is a new element within the information literacy equation. The payoffs are, however, substantial, and primarily relate to the provision of greater desktop access (both on and off campus) to library information resources, whether via the catalogue, listings of web pages, or direct connection to electronic databases.

The use of the Internet as a promotional and teaching tool for librarians is also an integral part of this process. Apart from the adoption of e-mail for communication and transfer of files, individual web pages can serve both as information resources for clients, and attractive presentation material for staff, thus negating the need for specific presentation software packages. With HTML able to accommodate colourful text and graphics, all that is required is PC projection facilities and appropriate browser packages.

Whilst the these examples specifically apply to the University of Wollongong library, they do indicate the type of uses to which the Internet is being put in Australian academic libraries. The 'netrification' of libraries across the board is obviously occurring to varying degrees, whether it be within the biggest government departmental library or the smallest school facility. However, as the current decade moves to a close, and Internet excitement waxes and wanes, the web is almost certain to continue this process of infiltration. The jury is still out as to whether it is a case of librarians leading the way, or the profession being led by the technological changes. It is probably a bit of both. ∎

In the know

Heather Linnett, organising committee, second technicians weekend workshop, Goolwa

The first South Australian library technician's weekend workshop 'Marketing for change' was held at Mannum in June 1996. It was very successful and feedback from delegates indicated that they appreciated the type of program and the relaxed atmosphere these informal forums generate.

The second weekend workshop, held earlier this year, was designed by library technicians for the library professional generally. There were delegates from all categories of the profession and the industry generally. The workshop was a demonstration of intent. It demonstrated that so-called para-professionals have the capacity to think, and to make decisions as autonomous persons, to organise without the need for constant direction, and to have an attitude which demonstrates commitment and knowledge. But above all the intent to demonstrate that 'professionalism is an attitude, not a status symbol'.

The theme for the weekend was 'In the know: the role, the changing environment, the profession'. We examined the library profession generally and analysed roles and expectations. Two discussion forums were provided, where the participation, involvement and interaction of delegates was vital to the success and outcomes. Other sessions included mentoring, local history collections, curriculum vitae writing and interviewing practices, 'Techs in the tropics', occupational health and safety, libraries as service centres, plus many more.

The social program included dinner at the River Port Restaurant where local identity, Frank Tuckwell, was the special guest. Frank told of stories and events long past.

Trevor McCann was with us once again to support the section. His kind donation of the dinner wines, yet again, and his interaction was appreciated. Our thanks to Trevor and to RAECO International for their involvement.

Our thanks to all the presenters, in particular, to Jeannine Hooper, Stephen Barnett, and John Matthews, for their session on web page construction, and for agreeing to help with the construction of the South Australian library technician home page. Thank you to all the delegates for their participation and insight during the workshop. Also, thank you to the other committee members, Sue Kimberley, Jennifer Bodey and Michelle Scholz for their help with organising the event. ∎