The internet is dead. Long live the internet.

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I did not expect to see it in the obituary notices so soon. ALIA's internet service, ALIAnet, for example, celebrated more than five years of continuous operation only last week. However, Marydee Ojala, editor of DATABASE, in her keynote delivery at the ALIA Information Science Section's *9th Australasian Information Online and On Disc 99 Conference* in Sydney recently, made such an announcement.

It did not come as a shock, but it was interesting to follow the threads of her argument that we are at the end of the internet as we know it. Of course, the internet is constantly changing and evolving, and new models of the dynamics of internet use are being created as quickly as the all-pervasive personal home page. And, after all, it is fashionable to talk apocalyptically these days, especially when discussing technology. The bold statement may have come as a bigger shock to the countless streams of people who at the same conference made full use of the multitude of multi-coloured iMacs assembled in the internet café.

I make a bolder prognostication. I predict that in ten years time — that is two ALIAnet lifetimes, or a mere drop in the lifetime of the internet — the internet will still be alive, and kicking — and pretty much in the same state as it is now.

Bandwidth will grow, speeds will increase, computers will be cheaper and faster — and the internet will fragment into a multitude of intranets, all attracting different fees for data flow. Those of us fortunate enough to live in a non-third-world country will not really know if we are online or offline for most of the time. Ubiquity of access will blur the distinction between being connected or not. The social and economic ramifications will be enormous. Those outside the system may appear to cease to exist. Those without the resources to be connected will undoubtedly be marginalised (this is already happening in Africa — read the latest opinion in hotwired.com to find out more). A cultural imbalance will need to be averted if the knowledge economy does indeed become the focus of our attention into the next century.

Knowledge management?

One of my New Year resolutions was to avoid writing the term 'knowledge management'. I have failed. From the 1980s to the mid-1990s the library sector was told that the term 'information management' was the key to eternal wealth and happiness. This may well have been true, but we have all moved on apace. No longer do we have 'chief information officers' in large and medium-sized corporations. Suddenly, they have all been elevated to the title of 'chief knowledge officers'. I even heard someone at the conference referring to himself as a 'CKO'. We now manage knowledge, not information.

Forgive me for sounding cynical, but I foresee that in the next few years we will have a new title bestowed upon these people: 'chief wisdom officers'...

That is not to deny the importance of information/knowledge acquisition, storage, management and retrieval — and the significant role that the library sector plays in all of these tasks. Far from it — the opportunities and challenges that are faced by those who work in the sector right now are immense. The economic value of that 'information/knowledge capital' in any organisation is a commodity that is beginning to have a greater marketable share of the overall wealth of a given company or organisational unit. If this is so, then surely those who are employed in the information sector are poised to become even more valuable themselves.

Neil McLean, in his locknote address at the *Online 99* conference, hinted that, to achieve a level of sustainability in the management of information, new service paradigms must be employed, and need to be developed further. We are beginning to move away from the notion that technology is the solution to all of our information/knowledge problems (and bucketloads of technology are being applied to almost all of these problems right now).

We are also beginning to refocus on the need to embrace a model of sustainability and provision of services that include real people in the equation, as well as all of the technology that goes with it. We still have a long way to go in the longer-term, but the future looks more human-centric than ever before. Technology may rule for now, but The Next Wave will have the humans in front. And as Dolly the sheep and bionic chips in dogs presage a blurring of biology and technology, perhaps we will see the day in the near future when the internet becomes an intrinsic and 'hardcoded' part of each of us. Only then will I feel confident in announcing, 'The internet is dead. Long live the internet.'

Meanwhile, back in the real world...

By now, those who browse the Association's new-look website will have seen the amount of new material made available recently. With more than 4000 pages residing on ALIA's web server, we are in the process of implementing plans to significantly increase the usefulness of the web-based component of ALIAnet's internet services. An internal re-organisation at ALIA National Office has allowed us to divert more staff into the process of marking-up web pages, and soon we shall begin to incorporate much more material that is currently only available in print.

On that note, I take this opportunity to introduce our newest recruit, Adam Steer, who joins Sharon Brodrick and the rest of the publishing team in the production of ALIAnet material. Both Adam and Sharon have joint responsibility for the maintenance and posting of updates to ALIAnet webpages, and in the near future Adam will have added responsibility for a number of other operational aspects of ALIAnet. ∎

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