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The more things change, the more they stay the same...

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Despite advances in high speed telecommunications, lightning fast processors, incredibly compact storage devices, inter-network linkages, array processing systems, and the ever declining cost of computer processing, librarians and information seekers face the same problems they did 50 years ago when the electronic computer made its debut. The problem: determining how to find the data that someone thought worthy of offering up for public access.

Stories abound in such publications as USA Today and Wall Street Journal—as well as on local television news—that the Internet is easy enough for a child to use. Although anyone can type on a keyboard or click a mouse, effectively using any type of tools to locate useful information is something that has been elusive to mankind even before Alexander built his first library.

When our neighbors are told, "You can find that information on the Internet," they are being tossed a few crumbs without knowing whether it will lead to anything productive. If you want to watch a movie, and your neighbor tells you "I know that they are going to air that show tonight," would you know where to find that film? Do you have a television? Do you know what time it is scheduled to start? Maybe it is only being shown on a cable channel: Do you subscribe to cable television? Do you know which channel will carry it? If it is a premium channel, have you paid the extra fee to get that channel unscrambled? If on the other hand you have a satellite dish, do you know where to aim your dish's antenna? Do you know what satellite channel to tune to? And you still have to find out when the movie is scheduled for broadcast.

A similar series of questions must be asked before anyone can locate information on the Internet. Without knowing what is stored, where it is located, what encoding format was used to store it, and having the software on hand to process that data—without all of those things in place—you are not going to find anything relevant to your information needs. And just as cable systems restrict certain programs to premium channels or pay-per-view, there are growing numbers of resources available on the Internet that are only available to people who are pre-registered or are students of participating colleges. Some have price tags attached to each data file.

Although television viewers can turn to program schedules in local newspapers or a TV Guide, there is no consistent place that Internet browsers can readily, quickly, or cheaply turn to in order to locate similarly concise and accurate descriptions of electronic resources.

Unlike the typical American television set that is equipped to handle 82 channels of programming, there is no limit to the number of potential sources that a computer can connect to using the Internet. Digital Equipment Corporation claims that its AltaVista search engine can provide free access to over thirty million pages on the World Wide Web, but many experienced Internet users have difficulty in locating useable data files even when using the various Boolean search features of AltaVista or its dozens of competitors.

If an experienced Internet searcher like me (having degrees in both computer science and library science) has difficulty in locating census data, government agency expenditure, and notable quotations over the Internet, then how can we expect our neighbors to do so with less training and fewer tools at hand than we have inside our libraries?

Surveys indicate that the majority of Americans who own videocassette recorders cannot use their features without referring to an owner's manual. Because VCRs are more common in homes than desktop computers, how can anyone be expected to navigate his or her way through the World Wide Web, which has never had an owner's manual or handbook? And once people physically navigate to a computer site that possesses the information they seek, do they have the site-specific or data-specific instructions to download, view, print, or store that data locally? Do they have the necessary software on their home computers to perform those duties without garbling the data?

Librarians often face these same problems when they try to locate resources on the Internet. Some encryption routines require a password to access the "secret decoder ring." At times, the data is stored in a relatively common format, but you did not have the funding to purchase each and every branch of data manipulation software available in the marketplace. In mid-May, the business librarians' discussion list (BUSLIB-L) carried several calls for assistance by librarians who had difficulty working text files that were available only in Portable Document Format (PDF) format. How does someone who does not have a laser printer manage to print these PDF files?

As we increase the utilization of computers in our libraries and in our daily work stream, we also increase our reliance on a wide variety of operational standards that allow our machines to communicate with others from around the world. When you seek information on population shifts in your home county, most people would be more concerned about the accuracy of the statistics than the data coming from a nearby computer. Whether the information comes over the Internet from the Census Bureau in Washington, D.C., or from the state capitol in Salem should be irrelevant. But how do we locate that population data file, if each regional Census office puts the file into a separately created file folder? Take a look at the files that you maintain in your office: Does your colleague from down the hallway know where to find something that might be sitting in one of your file drawers? If you were out sick, and someone had to pick up the pieces for that important meeting tomorrow morn-

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D.C.; a city planner in Virginia; and students, faculty and librarians from around the country.

Although it began as a demonstration project, with an ending date of October 1996, the Government Information Sharing Project will continue to maintain the site. With new funding from PORTALS, OSU will add several more databases and will experiment with different types of CDs, including full-text. We plan to work on improving the presentation and features as well as adding to the content of the site, developing a quality reference source on the Internet for libraries to share.

Correction
In the last issue of OLA Quarterly, we reported erroneously that Multnomah County Central Library was originally funded by a Carnegie grant. Although seven branches of the Multnomah County Library were Carnegie libraries, Central was not. The Library Association of Portland purchased the land for the Central Library, and Multnomah County levied a tax for its construction. Thanks to June Mikkelsen of Multnomah County Library for pointing out this error.