

REFERENCE NOTES

A program of the Minnesota Higher Education Services Office (HESO) at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities

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INFORMATION BITS

Soaring to Excellence 2002

The College of DuPage's teleconference series continues March 22 with "Whatever Happened to Carbon Paper?: A Look Toward the Future for Librarians, Library Assistants and the Printed Word." Information on the series is available at <http://www.cod.edu/teleconf/soaring/>. Contact your multitype or regional library system to find a downlink site in your area.

Collection Development Symposium

The University of Minnesota Libraries and MINITEX invite you to attend "Digital Rights: Authorship, Ownership, and Partnership," the Ninth Annual Collection Development Symposium, May 20, 2002, Earle Brown Continuing Education Center, St. Paul. Program description and registration information is available at <http://sdt.lib.umn.edu/cdm/>. Registration (due May 1) is limited to 200 people.



Searching OCLC FirstSearch Databases via MnLINK

Did you know that most of the ELM databases can be searched via MnLINK? This MnLINK access includes The OCLC Collection of FirstSearch, ProQuest National Newspapers 5, and six of the fourteen Gale databases. Gale databases **not** available through MnLINK are InfoTrac Student, Junior, and Kids Editions, Junior Reference Collection, Discovering Collection, Contemporary Authors, Health & Wellness Resource Center, and Business & Company Resource Center. These databases are not Z39.50 compatible, which is the protocol that the MnLINK Gateway uses to talk to the databases.

For the most part, searching The OCLC Collection databases via MnLINK is similar to searching them via the OCLC FirstSearch interface, with a few differences. The MnLINK interface is, in a word, simple, compared to all the bells and whistles available on the vendor interface. MnLINK offers two search modes, basic and advanced, rather than the three offered in the FS interface. MnLINK omits the expert search mode. If you're used to searching the OCLC FS interface it may take some time to get used to the nuances of the MnLINK interface. For example, in WorldCat, performing a "title" search in MnLINK is equal to performing a "title phrase" search in the FS interface. Performing a "title keyword" search in MnLINK is equal to performing a "title" search in the OCLC FS interface.

In WorldCat, both interfaces allow you to browse an index or wordlist for correct spellings and the number of times a term appears in the database. Both interfaces also allow you to find related terms. The OCLC FS interface labels this feature "find preferred subjects," while MnLINK calls it "term finder." The OCLC FS interface allows for searching in thirty different indexes or fields, including "update date" and "standard number," while the number of searchable indexes in MnLINK is twenty-one. The limits available in each interface are similar. You can limit by language, date, and publication type. MnLINK does not have the option of limiting by Internet resources or limiting your search to items owned by your library.

In October 2001, OCLC combined ContentsFirst with ArticleFirst so you can now search for article citations as well as browse through table of contents pages of 12,500 journals. In MnLINK, however, they are still two separate databases. The tables of contents are in ContentsFirst and the article citations are available in ArticleFirst. MnLINK is currently working to reflect the changes made by OCLC FS.

When searching NetFirst through the MnLINK interface, your index options are very limited compared to those available in the OCLC FS interface. The MnLINK interface also lacks two of the three limits that OCLC makes available. You cannot limit by domain or by Dewey class number. This is unfortunate, since limiting a search to government, education, company, or military Web sites is such a great feature of the OCLC FS interface. As expected, information included in the bibliographic citation of each record is much briefer via MnLINK. Each record contains a title, URL, abstract, and subject information, while OCLC FS includes Dewey subjects, geographic information, domain information, and descriptors (MnLINK subject info).

As with most databases and interfaces, there are advantages and disadvantages. For many, aside from functionality, it depends on personal preference, which oftentimes depends on a searcher's experience. Vendor interfaces tend to offer more choices and search options. Residents of Minnesota might prefer the MnLINK Gateway. After all, it offers one-stop shopping to twelve different databases that all use the same interface.

Web Lingo: Portals and Vortals

From time to time in *Reference Notes* we do a column where we try to clarify terms that are less than self-explanatory AND appear ubiquitously in discussions or writings about the Internet. I usually think that it's time for such a piece when I'm reading about a subject I know something about—like reference—and I fail to understand anything mentioned after the first paragraph. “Am I supposed to know what this means?” I think. At *Reference Notes*, we figure if we don't quite “get it,” there may be a few of you who don't quite get it either.

The terms “portal” and “vortal” seemed worthy of a column. They surface often in library and information technology publications without much context or definition. I searched Gale's *Expanded Academic ASAP* and *Google* for these terms and “definition.” These searches turned up several helpful and relatively brief articles that outlined similarities and differences between the concepts, a bit of history, and future prognostications.

As you would imagine, portals and vortals are conceptually linked. A portal is fairly consistently defined (see below for article citations) as a “gateway” Web site that attempts to attract a broad or “horizontal” range of users. The term portal draws upon its marine root, “port,” a place where ships dock for loading and unloading cargo. Many of the popular search engines and directories of the first wave of Web development have morphed into portals. Yahoo!, AOL, HotBot, and AltaVista, to name just a few, are portals, though they didn't start out as such. Portal developers want to attract users. Increased user traffic translates into increased advertising revenue. Portals offer users a single place for a large audience to launch a number of different and desired applications and connect with product information. Applications available include the capacity to customize the portal (e.g., My Yahoo!

or My Lycos), sign up for free email, enter a chat room, shop and/or add links to the page, and, of course, search for information extracted from the Internet. So how does a Web site differ from a portal? If you can log into it, if it remembers previous transactions or can look at your transaction log and push something “intelligent” at you, or if it can be customized to reflect your preferences, then it's a portal. Portals don't have to be household words, but they do have to recognize you.

Vortals are like portals, except for the intended audience. Rather than seeking to attract as many diverse people as possible, vortals try to capitalize on people's specialized interests. Although they often offer the same features—a search engine, directories, chat/email/bulletin boards, instant messaging, file swapping, shopping, and/or surveys/polls—vortals are designed to create and extend a “vertical portal.” The vertical portal appeals to individuals, organizations, and businesses (or a combination thereof) interested in broadly or narrowly defined specific content. For example, if you are a kayaker, <http://www.epaddler.com> will give you a schedule of whitewater kayak races for the year 2002 and online entry forms for selected races, let you talk via chat software to other kayakers who have plunged down the same waterfall you want to plunge down, sell your old flat water kayak for an ocean kayak, look at the latest manufacturers' catalogs, and read articles from the latest specialty kayak magazines. If you're pregnant and want health or planning tips “pushed” at you on certain dates during your pregnancy (along with coupons for baby- and birth-related merchandise), you can sign up at <http://www.ivillage.com>, an expansive vortal aimed at women of all ages. Vortals are the “next wave” of the “one-stop” concept that was initially touted by portal developers. Now that portals have become all things to all people, vortals step in to address the special interest niches that are often at the heart of Internet communication.

So how do you find a vortal that represents a library user's particular interests? Here are a couple easy ways I tried to locate a vortal on a specific topic:

- I ran a search in Google using “+vortal +directory” and came up with a fairly coherent list of Web sites that organize vortals by broad categories. The most promising of the results was <http://www.searchengines.com/vortals>. The site defines what a vortal is, outlines the categories and subcategories in the directory, and provides links to the vortals listed under “Topical Search Engines.” Vortal categories in the directory include Sports, Arts & Entertainment, Science & Health, and Law & Politics, to name just a few. There are several hundred vortals listed at Searchengines.com. You might also want to try <http://www.searchability.com> for their list of specialized search engines. *Online* has an excellent article entitled “Getting Vertical to Cut Research Time” by Thomas Pack.

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Reference Notes

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Reference Email.....ref@othello.lib.umn.edu

Office Hours.....Mon-Fri., 8:00am-4:30pm

Reference Intake Form.....

.....<http://kinglear.lib.umn.edu/reference/refdb>

- Run a search for the topic you are interested in plus the words “portal OR vortal.” Why portal? You’ll find that there are plenty of specialized Web sites calling themselves a portal. Many developers aren’t fussy about the language they use to describe a site, just so long as it gets across the idea that the site will provide customers with a window to the subject or commodity for which they are looking. My “portal OR vortal +dolls” search retrieved many sites identifying dolls, selling dolls, linking doll collectors via chat rooms, and offering travel packages to doll expos.

Let us know if there are portals or vortals out in cyberspace that you find particularly useful for reference work. We’ll be happy to publish URLs in upcoming issues of *Reference Notes*. In the meantime, we’ll be looking at terms that qualify as “Web lingo” for the next time we do this column. Proxy server, anyone?

In addition to the sites mentioned above, the following articles and Web sites were used to compile this column:

- Barrett, Steve. “Portals are Re-Introducing Problems that Originally Triggered their Conception.” <<http://www.campusportals.org/columns/index.htm>>. 12 February 2002.
- Evans, Daniel S. “Web Portals.” *PC Magazine* (November 21, 2000): 159+. Expanded Academic ASAP, 12 February 2002.
- Jafari, Ali. “Should a Campus Portal be Intelligent?” <<http://www.campusportals.org/columns/c200110615.htm>>. 12 February 2002.
- La Morte, Chris. “Web Portals: operations, features and services.” *Poptronics* (April 2001): 20+. Expanded Academic ASAP, 12 February 2002.
- Pack, Thomas. “Getting Vertical to Cut Research Time.” *Online* (September 2001): 44+. InfoTrac OneFile, 12 February 2002.
- Peek, Robin. “When is a Web Site a Vortal?” <<http://www.infotoday.com/it/sep99/peek.htm>>. 12 February 2002.

Virtual Reference Service: What, Why, and How?

The College of DuPage presented Part I of a lively and informative teleconference on digital reference services on February 8. About sixty librarians and media specialists from across Minnesota attended the MINITEX-sponsored program at the University of Minnesota’s Wilson Library. The session was packed with information, including an on-air demonstration of how LSSI’s Internet-based reference chat transactions work and overviews of administrative, economic, and cultural issues and challenges associated with moving to virtual reference services. Teleconference panelists included Steve Coffman, manager of product development at LSSI; Paul Constantine, head of reference services at Cornell University; Ann Lipow, a well known library consultant; and Richard Dougherty, a former university librarian and current head of a library consulting firm.

The session began with a justification for developing digital reference. Declining user numbers at the reference desk, an increase in quality sources available on the Internet, the perception that user interfaces at Internet information services like

Ask Jeeves lack precision, the general trend towards digital transactions (e.g., shopping, making reservations), and a desire to be where users are were identified as reasons for pursuing remote reference services. Several definitions of digital/virtual reference were offered by the teleconference panelists, with a consensus that digital and virtual reference could be used interchangeably to describe reference transactions conducted via email, chat software, or video conferencing software. Chat reference, while currently the popular way to deliver digital reference, was seen by all participants as a less-than-desirable model for development. Instead, video-based reference was touted as the model for the future. Use of video added to chat re-admits the “face-to-face” dimension so important to the reference interview.

After a demonstration by Bernie Sloan (Ready for Reference service in Illinois) of how chat software works, each panel member took a turn discussing some aspect of virtual reference start-up. Administrative issues related to starting up digital reference services include staffing, the physical location of the services, establishing service hours, training providers, phasing in a service, and evaluating service impact.

The economics of setting up and maintaining services were outlined next. Several different formulas were introduced for calculating costs. The panel’s consensus was that assembling a digital reference service would not cut down the cost of reference transactions in the near future. At the same time, there was agreement that the use of expensive online resources would be enhanced by increased use of a digital reference service, although this also raised copyright and licensing issues.

Finally, the changing culture of libraries served as a backdrop for a discussion of how librarians are adapting to virtual services. Lipow challenged the audience to shift our perspective—“It’s not the users who are ‘remote.’ The library is not in touch with many of our users at their point of need.” Instead, Lipow suggested that reference librarians need to place themselves—literally and digitally—where the public cannot miss them. That means, among other things, aggressive marketing and promotion of virtual services to users and working collaboratively within the library community to stretch resources, co-staff, and manage digital services.

If you are interested in learning more about digital reference, check out the teleconference videotape. It will enhance your understanding of current digital reference practices and related issues. Contact Mary Parker at MINITEX (612-624-1024 or email m-park1@umn.edu). Other teleconference materials, including an online reading list, can be found at <http://www.cod.edu/teleconf/Virtual/sloanlink.htm>. Part II of “Virtual Reference Service” will be presented on Friday, April 19. While the MINITEX site is full, we can direct you to other sites in Minnesota or put you on a waiting list.

REQUEST FOR ASSISTANCE

Occasionally, MINITEX Reference Services receives a request for a poem, quotation, picture, story, or something that cannot be found by checking standard sources. The Reference staff would like to appeal to the collective memory of MINITEX participants for assistance. Please forward any leads on the following questions to Reference Services at **612-624-4150 or 800-462-5348**:

Looking for information on a western-style painting entitled "Badland Curly" by a Coha or Colia Puffy or Duffy. (476)

Looking for information on a French artist, Auguste LaBrun, from the 1800s. (519)

Looking for the text of a poem that begins, "Michael McGee climbed up a tall tree and said 'Golly Gee what things can I see from this tree in my yard.'" (504)

Looking for information on artist Nan Lindahl. Patron has etchings by this artist entitled "The Cove," "Mariner's Haven," "Summer Day," and "Suburban Home." (495)

Looking for information on Pasquale, a Canadian trapper/explorer from the 18th or 19th century. (433)



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We would like to know what you would like to see in upcoming *Reference Notes*. Please either call us at 800-462-5348, send us an e-mail (see page 2 for addresses), or fill in your comments below and mail this form to MINITEX Reference.

Terrific web sites, reference books, and other sources you use:

Comments / Suggestions:

Name: (optional) _____

Library: (optional) _____ Phone: (optional) _____

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1999 EVENTS CALENDAR

- June 5-10 **Special Library Association** will be holding their annual conference at the Minneapolis Convention Center. Please see their web site for more information: www.sla.org/conf/99conf/index.shtml
- June 16 **Academic Library Advocacy Day** at St. John's University in Collegeville, MN
- July 2, 1999 **National Literacy Day** Contact: Focus on Literacy, Inc., P.O. Box 504, Laurel Springs, NJ 08021