

Selection criteria for Internet resources

By Rachel Cassel

Trial usage can enhance selection policies and procedures

Faced with the ever-growing richness of resources on the Internet, Binghamton University (BU) librarians realized that we needed to provide public access to the Internet and develop guidelines for selecting/deselecting appropriate resources. In the spring of 1993 the libraries began providing public access through Internet One, a locally designed system which uses x-windows, a multiple session system running on a UNIX platform. The system integrates several locally designed applications with free Internet software to provide "point and click" access to resources including CARL UncoverII, the BU Gopher Server (BUGS), OCLC FirstSearch, Eureka/RLIN, other libraries' OPACs, the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, and WAIS. Multiple windows which can be open concurrently provide ease in searching and downloading from several resources. Internet One is only available through selected sites on campus; it cannot be reached remotely because of its dependence on x-terminal hardware.

Librarians work in conjunction with University Computer Center staff to suggest sources to mount on the library-related menu items on BUGS; those items are Resources by Academic Discipline, General Reference Works, and Other Library Related Sources. While gopher is available on Internet One, it can also be accessed through personal computer accounts on several campuswide platforms.

Guidelines were needed for selecting and deselecting resources from both Internet One and the campus gopher. A search of the litera-

ture revealed that although articles on the Internet were growing exponentially, their focus is primarily on the mechanics of navigation, bibliographies of subject-specific sources, and some articles relating to reference concerns. As of this writing, collection development issues relating to Internet resources have yet to be addressed in the literature, although some discussion has occurred on COLLDEV-l@vm.usc.edu (Feb. 21, 1994). The consensus on this discussion group seems to be that sources are selected, not collected, and colleagues differ on whether a separate Internet resource selection policy is needed. Our institution has chosen to develop a distinct policy, incorporating criteria used to collect traditional materials, while recognizing the unique criteria needed due to the scope of the two Internet systems we maintain.

Because of the different nature of these two systems of public access to the Internet, selection guidelines differ for each. A working committee known as ACID (Advisory Committee on Internet [One] Development) was established to develop the guidelines for selection/deselection and to monitor the Internet for new resources to consider. In addition, this committee developed procedures for trial periods of fee-based sources. This article summarizes key points from both of these policy statements.

Selection criteria

ACID decided that the selection of electronic resources for placement on either Internet One or BUGS should adhere to the general criteria used to select print materials: the item supports the curriculum; it supports faculty research interests or grants; it is useful and pertinent for reference service.

The following criteria are used to determine whether an electronic resource should be added to Internet One. For inclusion, the item should meet the general criteria above and at least some of the following: the source is of general interest and utility; it is comprehensive in coverage, including breadth and depth; it is projected to be heavily used by the university community; it is developed and maintained by an established authority.

For inclusion on BUGS, the item should meet the general criteria established for all materials, but may not necessarily meet the broader characteristics used to select Internet One sources: the source is of interest to smaller numbers of users; it is less comprehensive in coverage but still of utility; it has been developed and maintained systematically but not necessarily by an established authority.

An item will be considered for deselection from either system when any of the following criteria are met: it is out of date; no longer of utility; no longer meets the appropriate criteria; is superseded by more current information.

As long as the sources are available without charge, duplication will not be considered problematic. For example, the same resource may be on the gopher and on Internet One, or may be accessible through gopher or WAIS. It is often desirable to increase visibility of a source by mounting an item on Internet One in addition to "burying" it in a gopher hole. Similarly, source records that provide WAIS keyword searching of documents on the gopher are also loaded into WAIS on Internet One to allow more sophisticated searching of multiple sources.

Trial periods of fee-based sources

Fee-based sources that become available on a free trial basis are considered for selection on Internet One or the gopher, based on the connectivity specifications of the source provider. Suggestions for items to include on either system will come from library faculty and staff, teaching faculty, or ACID members who monitor the Internet for new developments. Subject specialists are encouraged to suggest any appropriate items to ACID for consideration. Specifications for mounting the source as a trial (i.e., length of trial, number of simultaneous users allowed, amount of lead time needed to establish the trial period) and for mounting the fee-based source (i.e., what the fee would be and how it would be determined, whether it would be based on a specified number of users, length

of time connected, unlimited time/number of users, or password/IP address based) are gathered by ACID and the assistant director for systems. Certain sources may be unacceptable for selection at this time because of their connectivity specifications and the public nature of Internet One and BUGS.

The committee determines which system is more appropriate for the trial item and recommends the menu name and explanatory phrases that will appear. As an example, to the novice the term CARL UncoverII is unclear and some type of explanatory information may be required; on the gopher menu we have chosen to use "CARL UncoverII Index to 15000 periodicals." The committee also determines the wording of information to be provided on first- and second-level menus to make it clear to the users that the source is available only on a trial basis. Discussions are held with appropriate departmental faculty regarding the eventual cost of the item, if selected for retention after the trial period, and what possible methods are available to cover the cost. Evaluation forms for monitoring user satisfaction are tailored for the source and mounted either as a lower-level window on Internet One, or as a separate document on the gopher.

After the trial period has ended, ACID gathers the following information: departmental faculty and librarians' opinions on the performance, scope, and usefulness of the source; comments from completed evaluation forms; and usage statistics. If the trial is deemed successful and the subject librarian would like to consider mounting the source, she follows the standard procedure for requesting an electronic or expensive item.

Conclusion

Free sources available on the Internet are increasing and, with them, popularity and ease of access, due mainly to free gopher software and public access systems such as Internet One. Also, more advanced tools are being developed, including Mosaic and other WWW clients. It's very tempting to indiscriminately select sources for these systems, simply because they are available. But we must be careful to maintain quality of service to our patrons by subjecting these sources to similar collection development criteria as we employ for nonelectronic sources. We must also ensure systematic evaluations of trial sources to determine those most appropriate to provide to our patrons. ■

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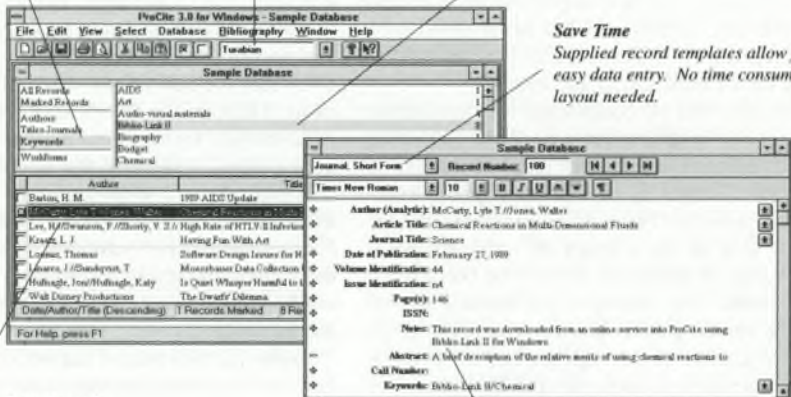
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