

# Internet resources for ready reference

By Jeff Rosen and Carl E. Snow

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## *A guide to the electronic stacks*

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**A** few years ago the Internet was a much different place. There were few sites reliable enough to be counted upon by librarians for reference purposes. But as the World Wide Web has exploded and become more stable, it is time to reassess the usefulness of the Internet for reference work. Many academic libraries now have a terminal equipped with a Web browser such as Netscape Navigator at the reference desk, so electronic ready reference sources may be a real alternative for small academic libraries and for all libraries that have a goal of user self-sufficiency. Certainly librarians should use the same criteria for evaluating Internet reference resources as they do for print resources: Who is the authority behind the source? How often is the information updated? Is the complete reference source available or is it a "teaser site" that gives only partial information?

Librarians who decide to use the Web to answer ready reference questions may want to create a ready reference Web page with links to new or familiar reference sources so that reference librarians and patrons will become used to using these resources. This means that librarians working at the reference desk need to become more familiar with the "electronic stacks" in order to make wise selections of links to reference materials.

What follows is a list of Meta-sites, Web sites that are well organized with links to many different ready reference sources, and a listing of

individual reference sources that is by no means all inclusive, but that we felt were especially good.

### **Meta sites**

- **The Internet Public Library (IPL) Ready Reference Collection.** This site at the University of Michigan is an excellent collection of many different types of reference resources with an easy-to-use layout and organization. The creators state that "sources are selected according to ease of use, quality and quantity of information, frequency of updating, and authoritativeness." Broad categories of information such as arts and humanities are used as major subject headings with links to more specific categories underneath. For example, choosing the topic "Biographies" under the broad category of "Reference" leads the user to a page with links to many specific resources including A&E's *Biography* television series site which includes the searchable text of 15,000 entries from *The Cambridge Biographical Encyclopedia* or a link to *The Complete List of Popes* or the *Notable Citizens of Planet Earth Biographical Dictionary*. Each site is given a short description and the Web address and author of the page are listed. Access: <http://www.ipl.org/ref/>.

- **Accurate Eye's Reference Desk.** Accurate Eye's Reference Desk is a great collection of many resources and, despite the Web address in Australia, it appears to be a relatively fast connection. The use of frames to lay out the page may be confusing to some users at first but is really quite easy once you get used to it. Visitors choose a category in the small index frame on the left of their screen, such as

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“Slang Dictionaries,” and are presented with a list of Web links in the larger frame in the center of the screen. For example, choosing “Biographies” brings up a frame that includes links to such resources as *Britannica’s Lives*, the *Encyclopedia of Women’s History*, and *Notable Citizens of Planet Earth*. Access: [http://www.ozemail.com.au/~acceye/html/html\\_frame.html](http://www.ozemail.com.au/~acceye/html/html_frame.html).

- **Galaxy’s EINET Reference.** At EINET’s reference page, categories of reference materials are arranged top to bottom on the page in alphabetical order so that it is easy to find links to categories such as “Acronyms,” “Flags,” or “Quotations.” Each of these categories leads, in turn, to a much larger collection of links. For example, clicking on “Quotations” will lead the user to a page with links to more than 75 different sources for quotations including familiar tools like *Bartlett’s Quotations*, but the page also includes such gems as “Dan Quayle Quotes,” and useful sources such as “Labor Quotes” or “Abraham Lincoln Quotes.” In addition, there are links to many very important sources for business information. Access: <http://www.einet.net/galaxy/Reference.html>.

- **The English Server at Carnegie Mellon University.** Carnegie Mellon University offers a reference collection that is organized alphabetically by the name of the source but no categories are provided. This is not a huge all-inclusive site but a very good smaller collection nonetheless. The sources seem to be somewhat focused toward reference librarians with links to many library-related sites such as ALA, Library Aids, and the archives of various library-related listservs such as GOVDOCS-L and PACS-L. Access: <http://english-www.hss.cmu.edu/reference/>.

- **Quick Reference—The University of Texas at Austin.** The University of Texas at Austin has a great collection called Quick Reference, which is organized very well under major categories such as “Business Reference” or “Major Reference Works.” Selecting one of these larger categories leads to a page with major subheadings listed at the top above a long alphabetical listing of links to individual resources. Access: <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/Libs/PCL/Reference.html>.

- **Ready Reference Using the Internet.** Ellen Berne’s page from the Winsor School in Boston is a very comprehensive list of links to many reference sources. The author states that “only full-text resources/data suitable for ready-

reference are included here.” This very long page is arranged in one long alphabetical list and each link has a short description. Items are listed under their common names; for example, under the word “budget,” we find links to the 1996 and 1997 federal budgets and related materials. This Web page is somewhat slow to display because everything has been put on one page instead of offering subject topics or categories linking to multiple pages. Berne has provided *See* and *See Also* references to other sites for some headings. Access: <http://k12.oit.umass.edu/rref.html>.

## Individual reference sites

### *Business and commerce*

- **EDGAR, the Electronic Data Gathering, Analysis, and Retrieval System.** EDGAR consists of electronic filings by corporations to the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC). EDGAR’s primary purpose is to increase the fairness of the securities market by accelerating the dissemination of time-sensitive corporate information filed with the agency for the benefit of investors. Access: <http://www.sec.gov/edgarhp.htm>.

- **Hoover’s OnLine.** As a major supplier of business information for investing purposes, Hoover’s Online includes company capsules, stock quotes, links to company Web sites, and



An image from the Internet Public Library Ready Reference Collection’s Web site.

job sites to the general public. It also includes, for paying subscribers only, specific company profiles, personal portfolio information, and other interesting investing news. Access: <http://www.hoovers.com/>.

- **Security APL Stock Ticker Symbol Search.** Looking for a company’s stock symbol? Security APL searches its database by corporation name for stock, bond, money market

fund, and mutual fund ticker symbols. Also available is the company's 52-week, high and low, current trade information as well as other market information. *Access:* <http://www.secapl.com/secapl/quoteserver/search.html>.

### **Dictionaries and literary sites**

- **The LOGOS Pronouncing Dictionary.**

The LOGOS dictionary from Italy is a dictionary site consisting of around 30 languages and more than 3.5 million words. LOGOS is unique because it is updated and added to by entries submitted by Internet users. Adding to the unique nature of this dictionary are the audible sound files demonstrating pronunciation of certain words. *Access:* <http://www.logos.it/query.html>.

- **Webster's Dictionary (Searchable).**

Despite the lack of graphical adornment, Webster's is a very comprehensive dictionary. It not only provides definitions, but also a pronunciation key, spelling correction suggestions, and a direct link to a thesaurus entry for the selected word. *Access:* <http://c.gp.cs.cmu.edu:5103/prog/webster/>.

- **Bartlett's Book of Familiar Quotations.** Columbia uses the 1901 edition of Bartlett's to provide a Web site of familiar quotations from passages, phrases, and proverbs with a straightforward search interface. Also included is a list of author's names whose quotes are used. While you are in the area stop by and browse the Bartleby Library collection. *Access:* <http://www.columbia.edu/acis/bartleby/bartlett/>.

- **ECHO: EuroDicautom.** The EuroDicautom is a translating dictionary. Type in a word in one language and have it translated into another language. A product of the European Union, this dictionary translates between European languages. *Access:* <http://www.uni-frankfurt.de/~felix/eurodictautom.html>.

### **Calendars**

- **Calendar Converter.** Calendar Converter is a unique Internet service that allows users to convert a date from standard format to Julian day number, day of the week, Gregorian calendar, Julian calendar, Jewish calendar, or French republican calendar. This is most definitely a one-of-a-kind site. *Access:* <http://www.genealogy.org/~scottle/calconvert.cgi/>.

- **Local Times Around the World.** Local Times provides a listing of the standard local times for the countries and islands of the world. Daylight savings time, however, is not consid-

ered. A useful site for individuals with friends in foreign countries and travelers. *Access:* <http://www.aus.net/times/>.

- **Calendar Creator.** Calendar Creator is a Web page that prepares a year-long calendar for a selected country and year. This program is very easy to use and, although it is located in Norway, the creators have used Java (TM) technology to provide quick and easy access to this site. *Access:* <http://www.pvv.ntnu.no/~steffent/applets/calendar/>.

### **Directories**

- **Zip+4 Codes Queries (U.S. Post Office).** Ever need to find a ZIP code? Here is a handy online way to find them. The U.S. Postal Service maintains this site that is always up to date and even displays the nine-digit ZIP code. Best of all, there are no lines to stand in! *Access:* <http://www.usps.gov/ncsc/>.

- **Bigfoot Global E-Mail Directory.** Bigfoot provides a central search interface for locating e-mail addresses. With more than 100 million white page listings, and 8 million e-mail addresses, this an excellent resource to begin searching for people. *Access:* <http://www.bigfoot.com/>.

- **Telephone Directories on the Web.** This useful site contains links to online telephone, fax, and business directories from around the world. Included are directories for 800 numbers, the yellow pages, and the white pages. It is a simple responsive interface that brings all of the resources together in one central location. *Access:* <http://www.contractjobs.com/tel/>.

### **Genealogy**

- **Cyndi's List of Genealogy Sites on the Internet.** A collection of nearly 10,000 links that have been categorized and cross-referenced in more than 50 categories, Cyndi's site is by far one of the richest resources for genealogy studies. It responds rapidly and is easy to use. *Access:* <http://www.oz.net/~cyndihow/sites.htm>.

- **Rand Genealogy Club.** The Rand Genealogy Club is a treasure trove of information. Not only does it have a searchable index of surnames, but it points to many other genealogy resources on the Internet. The club has won several awards for its content and layout. This page uses an economy of graphics that makes it pleasant to view and makes it load quickly. *Access:* <http://www.rand.org/personal/Genea/>.

- **GENDEX—WWW Genealogical Index.** GENDEX is a jewel in the rough. It provides keyword access to thousands of genealogical records. It is graphically plain, but it is a powerhouse of information that should prove useful to anyone researching family genealogy. When the filter programs are completed it will be even better. *Access:* <http://www.gendex.com/gendex/>.

- **American Ancestry.** American Ancestry is a small but important resource that includes records of early Americans, as well as a collection of marriage records. *Access:* <http://www.ancestry.com/>.

### **Legal resources**

- **Villanova Center for Information Law and Policy.** Villanova brings together a central resource for law and government. The nicely organized center brings Web sites for federal agencies and courts, as well as many state government sites, together in one location. This searchable site provides information on court cases and some full text of state statutes as well as links to the federal Web locator. *Access:* <http://vmag.law.vill.edu>.

- **Decisions of the U. S. Supreme Court.** A service provided by Cornell University, this basic tool for legal researchers on the Internet is a collection of Supreme Court decisions which includes selected historical decisions and comprehensive coverage of cases from 1990 to the present. *Access:* <http://www.law.cornell.edu/supct/supct.table.html>.

- **LawCrawler.** LawCrawler is a great source devoted to cataloging legal resources on the Internet. This central legal site provides a search engine and many categories of information including *Law Review*, legal associations, and state government information. LawCrawler uses screen space very efficiently although, with advertising graphics, the downloading may be bit slow. *Access:* <http://www.lawcrawler.com/index.html>.

### **Maps and travel information**

- **CARTOGRAPHIC MATERIALS.** The University of Waterloo has developed one of the finest collections of networked information for cartographers. It is a highly structured resource that lends itself to browsing by categories but lacks a keyword search engine. Among the many resources found in the site are links to specific map collections and how-to information for cartographers. *Access:* <http://www.lib.uwaterloo.ca/discipline/Cartography/cart.html>.

- **Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection.** The Perry-Castañeda collection at the University of Texas at Austin is the classic map collection on the Web with more than 230,000 maps covering every area of the world. Its Web page organization is user friendly, putting links to the maps right on the top page. Certainly, this is a must see map site. *Access:* [http://www.lib.utexas.edu/Libs/PCL/Map\\_collection/Map\\_collection.html](http://www.lib.utexas.edu/Libs/PCL/Map_collection/Map_collection.html).

- **MapQuest.** Don't try to use this resource with the Lynx text browsing software, you just have to have a graphical browser to use this map site. MapQuest is a great resource for finding streets anywhere in the U.S. You can even figure out distances and plan motor trips with this resource. Don't cancel your AAA membership, but this can be a useful resource for travelers. *Access:* <http://www.mapquest.com/>.

- **Gazetteer of the U.S. (U.S. Census Bureau).** The Census Bureau has an excellent but overworked service that lets users call up maps and census data based on zip code, city, or state. It's a good resource, but users need to be patient, because the system is sluggish. *Access:* <http://www.census.gov/cgi-bin/gazetteer>.

- **Travelocity.** Travelocity is the Web interface to the American Airlines' SABR system for booking airline reservations. Become a do-it-yourself travel agent by actually booking your own reservations. *Access:* <http://www.travelocity.com/>.

### **Medical**

- **AMA Physician Select.** The American Medical Association (AMA) presents an online doctor referral system, including more than 650,000 doctors. Search by a physician's name or search for a specialist and limit by city, state, or zip code. Unfortunately, the AMA has used plug-ins that spice the page up graphically, but can slow downloading. Even so, this is a very useful site. Be prepared to agree with the AMA user policy in order to use the site. *Access:* <http://www.ama-assn.org/aps/amahg.htm>.

- **THE MERCK MANUAL OF DIAGNOSIS AND THERAPY.** The *Merck Manual* is a well-known diagnostic handbook. First-time users are asked to register before using the manual, but it is free of charge. The manual does not have a search engine but the index is clear and should be useful to anyone. *Access:* <http://www.merck.com/>. ■

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