

5-1999

Instant Gratification Takes Too Long

Terry Ballard

Gill Library, College of New Rochelle, tballard@cnr.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.cnr.edu/gill-publications>

 Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Ballard, T. (1999). Instant Gratification Takes Too Long. *Information Today*, 16, 63-65.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Gill Library at Digital Commons @ CNR. It has been accepted for inclusion in Gill Library Publications by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ CNR. For more information, please contact lfazzino@cnr.edu.

The Systems Librarian

by Terry Ballard

'Instant Gratification Takes Too Long'

WebTrends helped one library get up-to-date reports on its system's usage

In those long-ago covered-wagon days in my career—say, 5 years ago—I pretty much just ran an online catalog. Being the curious sort, I enjoyed keeping tabs of how patrons were using the OPAC, so I took full advantage of the system's ability to track searches. The justification was that we had spent a lot of money on the system and we should track its usage, making sure it was being used in the best way possible. The reality was that I just wanted to find out everything I could.

Now, in the world of 1999, most of my work involves getting Web pages out for people to look at. The most important databases (i.e., the ones we are paying a lot of money for) will send us regular reports on how their Web products are being used by our patrons. I remember getting a report when we started providing Web databases on a regular basis—one vendor showed that our students had downloaded 15,000 full-text articles in a single month. And this is a college with only 4,000 students. However, these reports were not fully satisfying. They were frequently received months later, and some vendors would only send reports in response to specific requests. These piecemeal reports from vendors did not satisfy my curiosity; I wanted instant gratification. And as Meryl Streep's character said in *Postcards from the Edge*, "Instant gratification takes too long."

“
Reports were
frequently received
months later,
and some vendors
would only send
them in response to
specific requests.
”

I was interested in finding the overall usage of our Web pages, on both the on-campus intranet and the World Wide Web. Then last spring at the National Online Meeting in New York, I ran across a vendor of online catalogs who was showing some really interesting Web usage reports. I wasn't in the market for an online catalog, but I was certainly in the market for a program that could analyze Web usage. I wrote down the name of the program: WebTrends. Not surprisingly, they were on the Web at <http://www.webtrends.com>, and I wasted no time in downloading a 30-day free trial.

The Setup

WebTrend's software runs from report logs that are automatically kept by any Web server. There are three servers that I work on at the college, and I located the access log files on each. Then I created three log locations on my hard drive to store the data. Using a Windows-based ftp program, I set up protocols to automatically go to each of

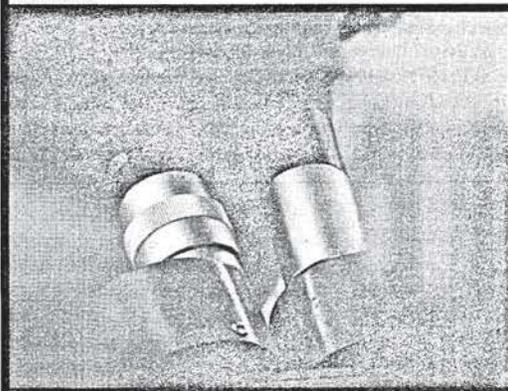
the three locations on the remote servers that were matched with the locations on the hard drive. Once that was set up, I could simply activate one of the three ftp settings and, with one click, download the log file into the appropriate directory of my hard drive. With the three current log files loaded on my PC, I simply set up the WebTrends software to make reports on those three servers.

The WebTrends setup was easy enough. For each server, it needed a label, and it wanted to know where to look for the log data on the hard drive. Then you could choose the time period—it could be any time covered by the data in the log file. At first I went with the defaults, which reported the last week's worth of activity, bandwidth by hour of day, the 10 most popular Web sites, and the four least popular sites. Since our main concern was to see which pages were being used, I increased the most-popular-Web-site report to include the 300 most popular sites. As soon as I saved a setting, that became the default for future reports.

(continued on page 64)

Bring Your World Into FOCUS

...with bibliographic databases from Elsevier Science



EMBASE

Elsevier
BIOBASE

Geobase

FLUIDEX

World Textiles

New!

BIOTECHNOBASE

Enviroline Extra



Focus on the world around you using the power of the bibliographic databases produced by Elsevier Science, Secondary Publishing Division. Because of our extremely rapid coverage of current articles and robust retrospective files, you can pinpoint precisely the information you need published in thousands of international journals and other sources. These databases span a wide range of subjects, including the life sciences, drugs, clinical medicine, geology, geography, textiles and fluid engineering. Our newest databases provide comprehensive coverage of two critical areas—biotechnology and the environment.

Available online, on CD-ROM, in print
and via customised services. Full text
available via the EMDocs Document
Delivery Service.



ELSEVIER SCIENCE
Secondary Publishing Division

650 Avenue of the Americas
New York, NY 10011 USA
Tel: 1-800-457-3633
+1-212-633-3980
Fax: +1-212-633-3975
E-mail: usembase-f@elsevier.com

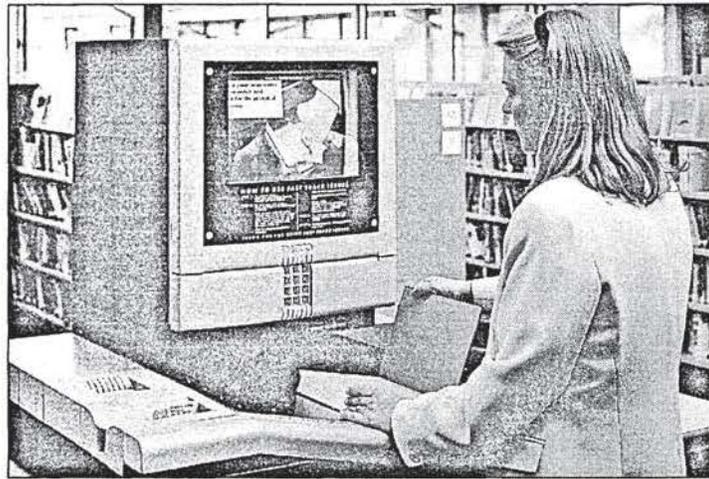
Molenwerf 1
1014 AG Amsterdam
The Netherlands
Tel: +31-20-485-3507
Fax: +31-20-485-3222
E-mail: embase-europe@elsevier.nl



NewCirc Technologies Unveils Fast Track Patron Self-Checkout System

NewCirc Technologies, a joint venture of Vernon Library Supplies, Inc. and Kingsley Library Equipment Co., has announced the release of the Fast Track Patron Self-Checkout System. According to the announcement, this follows successful evaluation installations over the past year in California, Colorado, Kansas, Michigan, and Maryland libraries.

Fast Track integrates with both electromagnetic and radio frequency security systems and automated circulation systems such as DRA, Dynix, and Innovative Interfaces utilizing third-party SIPs. NewCirc, Fast Track's North American distributor, states that the system, developed in Australia and used by libraries worldwide throughout the '90s, provides a nonintimidating, fast, easy, and secure method for the self-checkout of books and media by library patrons,



The Fast Track system features an omnidirectional barcode reader.

freeing library staff for other duties. The Fast Track system has exclusive features not available on the 3M SelfCheck System, according to the announcement. These include an omnidirectional barcode reader that allows books and media to be placed in almost any position for scanning, a field-strength-controlled security strip desensitizer so that a single process can be used for the checking out of books and videos, and the ability to accept not only barcoded or magnetic stripe patron cards, but also barcoded patron tags. Library control of text, graphics, and art, plus video and sound, allow fully customized messaging on screen as well as custom text printed on receipts.

Source: Vernon Library Supplies, Inc., Norcross, GA, 800/878-0253, 770/446-1128; Fax: 770/447-0165; <http://www.vern.lib.com>.

NISO Appoints Committee to Draft Library Standards

The National Information Standards Organization (NISO) has announced the appointment of a committee that will draft a national standard to define a set of transactions to support circulation activities among independent library systems.

"Our goal in drafting this protocol is to help libraries share their resources more easily and widely," said Patricia Stevens, the chair of the new NISO committee. "This new protocol will enable libraries running different integrated library systems to interoperate and share their circulation information. The library users will benefit by having access to a wider array of materials and by being able to borrow across li-

brary systems and enjoy seamless interlibrary loan."

Patricia Stevens (OCLC) is the chair of the new NISO Standards Committee AT. Other committee members include John Bodfish (Ameritech), Bob Daugherty (University of Illinois at Chicago), John Gignac (Geac), Mary Jackson (Association of Research Libraries), Jerry Karel (3M), Sally McCallum (Library of Congress), Mark Needleman (Data Research Associates), Julie Nye (North Carolina State Library), Pat Renfro (University of Pennsylvania), Jim Rush (PALINET), Bill Schickling (Gaylord), Barbara Shuh (National Library of Canada), John Wardell (CPS Systems),

Sandra Westall (Innovative Interfaces, Inc.), and Mark Wilson (The Library Corporation). Karen Anspach (EOS International) is the NISO Standards Development Committee liaison.

The committee held its first official meeting March 29-30 in San Diego. Information on the committee's progress, including meeting announcements and meeting reports, is posted on the NISO Web site at <http://www.niso.org> in the NISO Standards section.

The National Information Standards Organization, based in Bethesda, Maryland, is a nonprofit organization accredited by the American National Standards Institute

that develops and promotes consensus-approved standards used in libraries, publishing, and information services. NISO standards address the communication needs of those industries in areas such as information retrieval, storage and retrieval, library management, preservation and storage, and publishing formats and identification systems. NISO is actively engaged in international standards-development activities through ISO TC46 and is the Secretariat for TC46/SC 4 on computer applications in information and documentation.

Source: NISO, Bethesda, MD, 301/654-2512; Fax: 301/654-1721; <http://www.niso.org>.

The Systems Librarian

(continued from page 63)

First Results

The first time I ran a WebTrends report, it read the entire 6-month duration of the log file. Because of the size of the report, it took several hours to run. It was also very memory-intensive, eliminating any chance of running programs like Netscape or Excel while the processing was going on. When it finished, it automatically opened a session of Netscape to display the results. It showed me that the campus intranet was completely dominated by library services. Seven of the 10 most popular pages on campus were produced by the library. Naturally, I wasted no time in getting this report to my library director. That was all it took to get an order out for the permanent product.

Next, I ran a report on the public Web page. In that sphere, we were just one of the troops—our library Web page was only the 13th most popular site. The school's very popular athletics program was the big draw for the public. Still, it was interesting to see how the sites played, because that influenced the information that I added to the library's public pages.

The report did not count the usage of the library's proprietary databases. Once the user clicks to go off-site to visit ProQuest or LEXIS Universe, the transaction falls off the report generator's radar. We were tempted to

put in a local screen with information about each database. That would enable it to be counted and would give us a fair comparison of the relative popularity of the databases. Contrary to our library-services philosophy, it would have added one more barrier between our users and the information they

was hard to describe the problems the next day, but I found that I could generate WebTrends reports for the hour that the problems started, and even produce detailed bandwidth graphs for the exact 5-minute period when the trouble started. This turned out to be a very useful diagnostic tool.

“
I was interested in finding the overall usage of our Web pages, on both the on-campus intranet and the World Wide Web.
”

were after. This reminded me of one of the more peculiar aspects of quantum physics—the act of observing a phenomenon at the subatomic level actually alters the results.

Unanticipated Benefits

A few months after we got WebTrends, the college started experiencing some network down times and slowdowns. These usually occurred after 5:00 p.m. when the network people had gone home to their spouses, children, and dogs. Sometimes it

Also, our school's athletics department lost the counter software they had mounted on all of their Web pages, and they were wondering how they were doing. I was able to generate a report confirming that they were doing just fine. Some day soon they will surely send me a free basketball jersey in gratitude for these reports.

One More Program

I found out that WebTrends could not run detailed reports on our OPAC because

we can't get to the source code where the original log files might be kept. This bothered me because our OPAC had been getting 300 visitors a day from off campus, and the only data I could extract from the catalog told me the times of their visits and their IP numbers. One IP number pretty much looks like another to me, so this left me curious about who was visiting our OPAC. To that end, I was happy to run across a program called CyberKit. A free trial was found at <http://www.ping.be/ping2348/index.html>. This allowed me to feed in any IP number and find out the name of the server it came from. The results shouldn't have surprised me—most of the traffic was coming from Connecticut and the three states that border it.

All of these programs can help a systems librarian answer the question once posed by a mayor in our area: "How am I doing?" However, there is still no substitute for doing reference desk duty to see the results being tested by the real world of users.

Terry Ballard is the automation librarian at Quinnipiac College in Hamden, Connecticut. He can be reached at ballard@quinnipiac.edu, or through his Web page at <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Delphi/3632>.