1998

Moving a CD-ROM Network to the Web

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

The Systems Librarian *by Terry Ballard*

Moving a CD-ROM Network to the Web

One library's success story proves that it may be easier than you think

"I'm not sure where we're going, but we're making good time."—Yogi Berra

Sometimes trouble can be the gateway to opportunity. Last spring, we had trouble with a CD-ROM network that was a complete shambles. Since this was the main device for distributing electronic data in our library, we had to do something. We could either fix it at a cost of several thousand dollars, or we could move on to the Web. That was easy to do in the short run, because all of the vendors who were providing us with CD-ROMs were also distributing the same databases on the Web. They were happy to switch us over to the Web versions while we sorted things out.

Because we were not using the exclusive in-building network that our CD-ROMs ran on, we mounted the databases on the campus intranet. Then we let our faculty members know that they could now get indexes and full-text articles right at their offices, and the students could use these in their dorms at any time of the day or night. One psychology professor was so thrilled that she came to the library and gave me a hug. She was unusual, because most of the professors said something like, "That's nice, but when can we get this at home?" A few of them rubbed salt in the wound by telling us the names of the other colleges that already did this for their faculty members. We would just smile and say, "We're working on it."

Levels of Difficulty

We started off by giving the project to our overworked college Webmaster, who investigated the possibilities of getting proxy server software, entering a database full of qualified users, and then setting up passwords for them. Finally, he would have to cut a separate deal with each online vendor and make each database work. This was further complicated by our campus firewall—all of the on-campus machines are inside the firewall, but the library server was outside. In other words, this was a very hard thing to do. As spring turned into summer, students graduated, professors went to Italy and the South Seas, and at-home access to databases still was not a reality.

> *"When the motivation is there, users will put up with a lot."*

Fortunately, I remembered a presentation that Dirk Klingner from Pace University made at a past American Library Association (ALA) Conference. He reported on using Innovative Interfaces' Web Access Management software. The simplicity of this was appealing—it would run off our existing online catalog, so there was already a list of authorized users to work from. There is one table to maintain with the addresses of all the online vendors. Since they all sold us our software on the basis of IP recognition, it was mainly a matter of phoning them and asking them to recognize the IP address of our online catalog as a valid campus user. Klingner said that he had the whole thing going within a day or two.

The only downside that I could see was the cost. However, one thing that helped in that regard was the campus law school. They were willing to cover half the cost because it would give their users research capability from home. With an extra donation for fast service, Innovative had the service up for us within a week of the purchase order.

"Everything works if you let it."—Meat Loaf

It actually took me a few days to input the database vendors' URLs into a table in the OPAC software. Next, I had to phone the vendors and arrange for them to recognize the new IP address as a valid campus user. Most databases fell right into place. Some required days of experimentation to work. But once they worked, they stayed working.

The first two trial users were me and my library director. Within a week, all of the librarians were using the services from home. Nobody reported any problems setting the proxy in their browsers, but the real test would be faculty and students. A memo went out to faculty, and the usage counts went from a handful to several dozen. I had been concerned that the requirement of typing in a 14-digit barcode would be a big barrier. Actually, when the motivation is there, users will put up with a lot.

The way people get to the service is by going to the library's public Web page at http://www.quinnipiac.edu/librmain.html and choosing the first button on the screen, which goes to a page of instructions relating to specific browsers. Once they have seen that, they click to a link that takes them to icons and buttons linking to the databases (this is still on the public screens at http://www.quinnipiac.edu/library/qconn.html). If they are valid users, and if they have set their proxy correctly, the system will ask for their name and barcode. Once validated, they can use all of the services for the rest of the session with no further identification.

I had also been warned that this extra usage might slow down the online catalog's other functions. However, this problem did not materialize when students started using the service, and we showed up to 100 connects a night. The main reason seemed to be that students were most likely to use the service late at night when the technical services staff at the library were not at their posts.

The most thorny problem seemed to be America Online. We were told that release 4.0 of their software had an option for setting an automatic proxy. After considerable frustration on the part of our AOL users, we finally got to the right answer thanks to the persistence of our library director, Charles Getchell. It turns out that AOL 4.0 browsers can be set to work with this system, but the settings are not easy to find.

Any problems we have had are swamped by the success of this program. As of this writing, our users have had access for 1 month, and we have had nearly 900 successful connections. We can't wait to see what happens on the week that term papers are due.

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.

CARL's Kid's Catalog Moves to the Web

CARL Corporation has announced the development of a Web version of Kid's Catalog. According to the company, Kid's Catalog Web will follow the guiding principles of the original Kid's Catalog development: to provide an environment that not only opens the information world to children, but helps them learn as well.

Like the original version, Kid's Catalog Web will provide easy access to library materials, but the catalog will be a stronger educational and curricular aid, with content and research agents built in to help children achieve success in their schoolwork. There will also be features dedicated to parents and teachers, including curriculum and learning resources.

Nathan Frick, product manager, said, "The World Wide Web allows libraries to go beyond the possibilities of a graphical interface, in terms of the broad range of media types and content available, and in terms of the array of information that is being developed for kids on the Web." In addition, the Web version of Kid's Catalog will allow children to use the same intelligent interface from the classroom, the school library, the public library, and home.

Paula Busey, one of the original developers of Kid's Catalog, is on the team creating the Web version. "We are building on the original research done for Kid's Catalog, and we're working to ensure that this new version engages children's creative and critical thinking skills more effectively," Busey said.

Busey added, "Kid's Catalog Web will differ substantially from the original in that it will be much more interactive, letting children take notes as they work, compile research bibliographies, use collaborative learning tools, and—optionally—publish their projects and papers." According to the company, full text, multimedia, readers' advisory resources, online encyclopedias, youth-oriented Web sites, and reference tools will be woven in, creating a fully realized program for research and knowledge synthesis.

CARL is developing Web toolkits that will allow the library to easily customize Explore paths and include links to all types of data.

The Web version of Kid's Catalog will be easier for librarians and systems administrators to update and customize. Since the Web pages can be maintained on a single server in the library, updates will be immediately available to every user without modifying the software at the desktop.

With the capabilities inherent in the Web and HTML style guides, the Web version of Kid's Catalog will be compatible with text-to-speech synthesizers. This capability will make information resources available to children just learning to read as well as those with visual disabilities. The product will also support Unicode characters in MARC records, making it translatable into any language.

Kid's Catalog Web is currently in development. The first phase is planned for release in summer 1999.

Source: CARL Corporation, Denver, 888/439-CARL, 303/758-3030; http://www.carl.org.

OCLC's Metadata Project

(continued from page 51)

by more than 1,000 libraries. OCLC maintains InterCat as a proof-of-concept database and a ready resource to assist catalogers who are approaching the cataloging of Internet resources for the first time. Both NetFirst and InterCat records will be used initially to seed the CORC database.

According to the company, OCLC's pioneering work with metadata will also come into play in the project. Both full USMARC cataloging and an enhanced Dublin Core metadata mode will be used. (The Dublin Core is a 15-element metadata set intended to facilitate discovery of electronic resources http://purl.org/metadata/dublin_core.)

The underlying engine of CORC, originally developed for OCLC SiteSearch 4.0, will automatically catalog resources on the Web. It includes harvesting and automated description capabilities developed in OCLC's Scorpion research project.

Source: OCLC, Dublin, OH, 614/764-6000; Fax: 614/764-6096; http://www.oclc.org.