



Information Overload

Issue 34, June 2005

Welcome:

Welcome to this month's edition of Information Overload. This month we discuss networking, but we are not just talking about going to the next industry event, branch meeting or conference, but how we really stay connected to what is happening in our professional and even personal lives, and the impact that technology is having on our ability to do so. We hope you enjoy reading.

As always, if you have any suggestions or would like to see us cover any other topics, we would love to hear from you. Just send an e-mail to training@iea.com.au:

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In this Issue we will be looking at:

- Networking - We can't do it on our own!
- Deep webs, blogs and wiki's
- A Thought to ponder.

Networking - We can't do it on our own!

I think it is safe to say, that everything you say, and every decision that you make will be based upon ideas and information that you have gained from someone or something. The books that you read, the television programmes that you watch, the conversations that you have, the people that you work with, the events that you attend all have a bearing on your day-to-day activities. In its simplest form - Networking is an opportunity to learn from as many people as you can in the time that is available to you, or the time that you feel you want to devote to the exchange of ideas and opportunities, with friends, colleagues, mentors, peers and anyone else you come into contact with. Of course you may not take at face value all that you see, read or hear, but consciously or unconsciously you will sift the data, analyse the public opinion and personal bias then you make your comments and decisions based on the information that you have at your disposal at that particular point in time, as well as your own personal opinion, bias and beliefs. Whether you come to change your mind or not, will depend on whether you receive new information, and whether or not you are willing to challenge your own thinking.

Networking is, in my opinion, more than just going to the next industry event, but something that can be done on a daily basis. The people that you speak to on a daily basis, be it on the telephone, face-to-face or via any of the list servs that connect countries, organisations and people together all have an impact on you, the information that you collect and the service that you provide.

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My first professional job title was that of an information scientist, a rather pompous sounding description (in my opinion), until I realised that my job was not to simply find information and pass it on to my clients, but to analyse the information that I received, and make a value judgement based on my own personal algorithm of whether or not this was what the client wanted to see, or was there another answer?

When I started studying for my degree in information studies, the Internet was purely the realm of the computer geeks and the nerds. The library that I worked in still had a card catalogue, although they did have a microfiche version for the really serious researchers, and I learned how to search chemical abstracts the hard way – using indexes in the hundreds of volumes lining the shelves on the third floor, the keywords and metadata were chosen by subject specialist cataloguers, and to find them we cross-referenced everything by hand. And if I couldn't find the answer to the question, I went and asked Mona. She was the reference librarian on the second floor, who seemed to know every single book the library had ever purchased, and more importantly to me at least, she seemed to have read and/or memorised most of them. And if we didn't hold the book, then we asked one of the deposit libraries across the world, if we could borrow one of theirs. My network consisted of those people that I knew, and if I didn't know the answer, then I could ask one of my colleagues, and if they didn't know the answer, they usually knew someone who did.

Today our networks are global. You and I can sit at home in front of our computers and search virtually every library catalogue in the world, from the deposit collections of the British Library, to the universities and colleges, public libraries and most major organisations to find the information that we want, and to make it even easier, there are search engines to do some of the work for us. Recent news stories from around the world have announced the intention by the major search engines to index the collections of thousands of libraries - http://www.businessweek.com/ap/financialnews/D8AOVOG00.htm?campaign_id=apn_tech_down "Library materials given to search engines" accessed June 2005, although it appears that the 5,000 Thomson Gale collections mentioned in the article will only be available to those people who have membership to one of the participating libraries (at this stage), this is an interesting trend, and will be watched by publishers, copyright lobbyists and librarians with interest.

Technology has opened up more than just library collections to the world, now everyone can be a publisher. It used to be the case that if the mainstream publishing houses didn't accept you, the options were very limited to get your word "out there." You either published the item yourself (a laborious process, with limited reach), or you paid an organisation to do it for you (known as vanity publishing), which may not have been quite so laborious, but you still had limited reach. However, with the massive worldwide reach of the Internet, vanity publishing is available to almost everyone. Now everyone who wants to, can share their thoughts, opinions, bias, research and anything and everything else they want to, quickly and cheaply, and be able to reach a mass market, within minutes, which is all very well, but how do people know how to find it – once it is there.

Deep webs, blogs and Wiki's

Whilst there are some people who know what they are looking for, and where to go for it, most people use a search engine as a first point of reference, type in a few keywords and then wade through pages of results, sometimes finding what they think they want, other times making do with whatever they find in the first couple of pages. The problem I have found with even the most prolific search engines is that they only index a very small percentage of the pages that make up what we know as the Internet, World Wide Web or

what has been termed – the “surface web”. Google is said to index some 4 billion pages and appears to be the search engine of choice by most searchers. Unfortunately there are billions of other pages that Google does not currently index. <http://brightplanet.com/technology/deepweb.asp>. There are a number of reasons for this:

- Information contained in dynamically generated web sites cannot be indexed – For instance any site that requires you to ask a question before being given an answer usually means the information is contained inside databases which is not accessible to the automated web crawlers, eg., directory listings. According to the Bright Planet Corporation the 60 largest known Deep Web sites contain 750 terabytes of information, which is said to be 40 times the size of the surface web. http://brightplanet.com/infocenter/largest_deepweb_sites.asp, although the inclusion of some of the largest library catalogue holdings through search engines such as Google and Yahoo will change this percentage somewhat, it is still only the tip of the proverbial iceberg of what is available. My own personal favourites list, contains hundreds of points into the deep web, including information hubs, directory listings, publishers and the many individual organisations that hold information of interest and use, which means I can go directly to the source(s) of information without the need to trawl through pages of potentially worthless information churned out by the engines.
- Firewalls may prevent the automated web crawlers getting to the information.
- Whoever created the sites have failed to add any metadata to the web pages – no keywords, usually means little or no traffic. For automated web crawlers to stick around, “you” need to give it something to chew on. Whilst some plug and play web site builders, add some HTML coding to the pages, if you don’t know where and what to add to the code, you will fail to get the results that you want or thought you would have.
- You haven’t told anyone about it (this is usually a major problem for personal web sites). One of the fastest ways to get noticed is to tell your own network about your site. If they like what they see, they will pass it on to their network of contacts, and on it will flow. The more sites that link to yours, the more chances you will have of being found by the traditional search engines, and the higher up the ranking your site will be.

To add to the Internet mix, perhaps one of the biggest growth areas is that of “blogs”, everyone or so it seems has one. (NB a weblog, web log or blog is a web application which contains periodic time-stamped posts on a common webpage – <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Weblog>) with everyone from politicians trying to rally supporters for their campaigns, to on the ground reports from war zones using the medium to reach a global market. Blogs can range from an online journal or diary to complicated content management systems that has a “blog” as part of the package. These content management systems that used to belong to the realm of the computer geek and the IT professional have now become mainstream. The beauty of online blogs is you do not need to understand or even know the complicated HTML coding that creates the pages we see on the Internet, instead these tools are template driven, choose your colour, your writing style and see your work published instantly, and anyone can have a go – and has, if the million or two blogs out there is anything to go by. And when Google purchased Blogger, (www.blogger.com) one of the most popular weblogging systems on the Internet recently, it became apparent (to me at least) that we were going to be finding some very interesting results in our “hit lists”.

If you would like to create a "blog" of your own – blogger is free to use. However, a word of warning, it appears that the hackers have already jumped on this particular bandwagon, and are using blogs as a means to distribute malicious code and keylogging software – *IDM, Image and Data Manager May/June 2005, p2* – "Hackers exploit popularity of blogs to commit crime" which can be a problem if you use the internet to do your banking, so you might like to ensure your virus protection is up to date, before logging on.

As a freebie, blogger isn't bad – but if you want a more sophisticated content management system, that can also double up as a personal or even business web site, then you might like to check out www.squarespace.com which you can trial free for a month.

With more and more people using blogs to get their voices heard, will blogs eventually replace in-house newsletters and intranets? With the option to have more than one writer/editor, and the ability to post comments by anyone and everyone, considerable discussion and networking is possible, something that is not easily achieved using other methods. Whether or not online blogs will replace newspapers and journals will have to be a case of wait and see, but in an interesting twist, online blogs have become books.

Online collaborative projects are not limited to blogs of course. "Wiki's" (Wiki comes from the Hawaiian word for quick) are a way to share the creation of a web space that anyone can edit using groupware or collaborative software, creating a network of pages, links and editors. You may have come across the Wikipedia - <http://en.wikipedia.org>, wiktionaries - <http://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Wiktionary>, Wikibooks - http://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/Main_Page which also has sub-groups – wikijunior and wikiversity, a free, open learning environment and research community - <http://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/Wikiversity>.

As you can imagine, having more resources available to us doesn't make it easier to find information per se, in fact it can take a lot longer to find verifiable, substantiated information, that isn't opinionated, biased and full of hearsay. But that of course is only my opinion.

A T hought to Ponder:

"You can get almost everything accomplished if you don't mind who gets the credit"
Ned Hay

Your comments and suggestions on the subject of this newsletter are most welcome. Or if you would like to see other issues covered in future editions, please email me at training@iea.com.au

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