Network navigating and navigators

By Noreen S. Alldredge and Thomas G. Kirk

The spring meeting of the Coalition for Networked Information

The theme of the spring meeting of the Coalition for Networked Information (CNI)—the first CNI meeting after the passage and signing into law of the High Performance and Computing Act of 1991 with its NREN provisions—was Network Navigating and Navigators. Plenary session speakers were cited by Paul Evan Peters, director of CNI, as "true pathfinders and pioneers whose work is breaking new ground in this area of vital importance to realizing the full promise of networks to advance scholarship and intellectual productivity."

Vinton Cerf, vice-president of the Corporation for National Research Initiatives highlighted the role of knowledge robots, called "knowbots," in carrying out searches as they move around in networks. A prototype knowbot is under development to query multiple NLM databases in the ABIDE project. Brewster Kahle project leader, Thinking Machines Corporation discussed the use of a Wide Area Information System (WAIS) which now has 25,000 users via Internet. The goals of the system are to make personal information accessible; to have published information find the users; to be usable anywhere; and to let others use what anyone else has learned. Key elements of the WAIS are that the protocol is based on Z39.50, and it utilizes native language queries and feedback (to date this includes English, French, Italian, and Latin). At the time of the meeting, 160 servers existed in several countries.

Joyce Reynolds, Information Services, University of Southern California discussed directory services since the ability to interact is only

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useful if one can locate the people with whom you need to work. Thus "effective use of the network will be determined by the quality and coverage of available directory services." George Strawn, program officer, National Science Foundation reviewed the project solicitation by the National Science Foundation (NSF) for Network Information Services Manager(s) for NSFNET and NREN, and noted that NSF is particularly interested in creative responses and an open and fair selection process.

Pat Molholt, currently at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, provided a vision statement that called for investment in the human capital of our organizations so that the challenge of

Share your networking stories

The authors are looking for examples of various aspects of networking. They would appreciate hearing from those of you who:

● are involved in a distance learning project that involves the use of networked information;

● are providing instruction programs that teach faculty and/or students how to use networked information resources;

● have developed planning documents for provision of networked information;

● are involved in cooperative projects to share resources through the use of networks;

● have reallocated budgets to provide support for networked information access and use.

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"changing the cultural fabric, the norms, the expectations, the definition of our profession" can be met. She noted that while we have invested in system and network R&D, we have not made a matching commitment to human resources R&D.

During the second plenary session panelists commented on the opportunities and challenges of the current national networking scene. Michael Roberts, vice-president of EDUCOM, described the global environment and cautioned

CNI projects

• *Wide Area Information Servers (WAIS)*: a supercomputer on every desk is a project which gives users simple interfaces for finding servers and accessing the information on them (reported by Brewster Kahle, Thinking Machines Corporation)

• *Knowbots*: focused on architectural considerations including the use of knowledge robot programs and distributed techniques (Vinton Cerf, Corporation for National Research Initiatives)

• *X.500 Protocol and User Services Planning in the Internet*: this protocol is designed to build a globally distributed directory for people, objects, and services (Chris Weider, Advanced Network and Services, Inc., and Joyce Reynolds, University of Southern California)

• *Gopher*: a client/server system that gives clients seamless access to databases and documents, and gateways to services such as FTP, Archie, and WAIS (Mark McCahill, University of Minnesota)

• *Resource Discovery on the Internet—the Archie approach*: provides an information indexing and location service to Internet users by currently tracking over 1,000 archives which contain over 1,500,000 files (Peter Deutsch of McGill University)

• *Bibliographic Description and Control for the Internet*: (Martin Dillon, OCLC, and Sally McCallum, Library of Congress)

• *Two-Phase Discovery—Netfind*: locates millions of people at thousands of sites worldwide (Michael Schwartz, University of Colorado)

• *Mann Gateway*: expansion of such a Gateway system to coordinate user access to locally developed systems and FTP resources and the implications of such enhancements (Howard Curtis, Cornell University)

the audience to remember that only a small percentage of the operating funds for NSFNET are federal, and that most of the fiscal resources are state and local funds.

John Clement, director of K-12 Networking at EDUCOM, noted that the needs of this constituency are access, appropriate content, and the opportunity for the user community to be actively involved in the policy process. Representing the Association of Research Libraries (ARL), Susan Brynteson, director of libraries at the University of Delaware, stressed there is a need to articulate codes and practices in order to deal with anticipated tensions related to privacy and security of information and also to protect freedom of speech. Laura Isenstein, coordinator of information services, Baltimore County Public Library, reviewed the service roles of public libraries in guaranteeing all citizens access to networked information and indicated that NREN will affect those roles. She cautioned that equitable access, costs, and ease of connectivity are key concerns for public libraries.

Representing ACRL, Noreen Alldredge, dean of libraries at Montana State University, stated that the goal of NREN should be an information infrastructure which enhances the intellectual, cultural, and geographic diversities of the world. She emphasized the need for strong state and regional approaches to network access, as well as education and training for college and research libraries to avoid dividing into a nation of "have and have nots." Howard McGinn, state librarian of North Carolina, represented the Chief Officers of State Library Agencies. He noted that the information needs of private citizens and local governments can be complex; any public information assets must be made accessible; state government data is now available; and that politics and policy can be influenced from the local level.

Wayne Kelley, assistant public printer and superintendent of documents, presented the Government Printing Office's vision for access to government information in the electronic era. The agency is "trying to move from a printer to a multi-media disseminator of information products."

What is needed most at this state of development of networked information services are working examples from which institutions developing networked information resources and services can learn. Readers of this column are encouraged to share these examples. See the sidebar on page 399 for details. ∎

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