Editorial

Introduction

In the October, 2002 issue, I announced the discussion list for *Information Research* and the 'knowledge management' issue provoked a good deal of debate. The list now has 135 members and I hope that some discussion will ensue for each issue of the journal. The list is "IR-DISCUSS@jiscmail.ac.uk" and you can join by following the instructions at the Web page:

http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/lists/IR-DISCUSS.html

It is clear, however, that, like all discussion lists, some stimulus is needed before there can be any discussion. The vast majority of lists in the information sector appear to carry little more than announcements, and prolonged discussion on any significant topic is rare. If IR-DISCUSS takes the same course, I'll discontinue it. The October 2002 issue generated a lot of discussion, because it was concerned with a provocative topic - 'knowledge management'. In the end, I 'killed' the debate because it wound up going round in circles. Perhaps one or more of the papers in this issue will generate some debate - Terry Brooks's paper on retrieval and the Web is certainly sufficiently provocative.

I've also taken the additional step of creating a Weblog for *Information Research*, in the hope, vain so far, that regular readers would join the Weblog and submit items of interest to the rest of us. With one exception, this hasn't happened: it might be interesting to explore why it doesn't happen in this field when such collaborative Weblogs are successful in the information technology field. Becoming a contributor is quite easy - just go to the Web site and join.

This issue

We have four papers in this issue, two of them, coincidentally concerned with aspects of the World Wide Web.

First, Mike Thelwall, discusses the reasons for having hyperlinks on the pages of academic institutions, comparing this phenomenon with citations in journals. He coins the terms 'ownership', 'social', 'general navigational', and 'gratuitous', and concludes:

> Compared to citer motivations they are relatively trivial and instead of being primarily socio-cognitive, none are cognitive and the gratuitous are not even social.

In "Web search: how the Web has changed information retrieval", Terry Brooks debates questions relating to the use of meta-tags on Web pages and the extent to which they are likely to be useful for information retrieval purposes. He points out that, on the 'open Web', the pages are volatile and unsuited, therefore, to the application of meta-tags and that, in any event, search engines are deliberately not using meta-tags in their searches. He concludes that:

> ...it is possible that the open Web is so novel a technological platform that we will be forced to recognize that our IR legacy of concepts and methods has been historicized to the modern database era of the late 20th century.

The question then is, Where are the *new* methods?

Coincidentally, Pia Borlund addresses the issue of the evaluation of interactive IR systems and I guess that the Web is the biggest interactive system on the planet. Of course, like most IR research, Pia is looking at experimental systems in the 'laboratory' mode, but the measures she brings forward may help us to determine what works most effectively when all systems are interactive.

With the paper by Jääskeläinen and Savolainen, we look at another problem: that of individual competency in using networked systems. The focus is on the ability to use public service sites on the Internet a topic of relevance to the 'digital divide', since these systems are often promoted as being totally open and 'democratic' whereas, as the authors find, 'network competency' is related to educational level and income. The poor and the poorly educated are less likely to have the competency to find the information they need.

Terry Brooks appears again with the second of his occasional columns - this time on the question of the wisdom of archiving digital documents.

We have the usual clutch of book reviews to round off the issue - and there are some interesting ones to take a look at.

The 'best-seller' list

In the previous issue I described how counters had been added to all of the papers in the journal and I said that I would report on the usage of the early papers in particular. So, in this issue, the usual list is abandoned and we take a look at early volumes. The counters were added in the last two weeks of December, so the scores reflect four months use. As usual, I report the paper with the highest number of hits in each issue, and it should be noted that, sometimes, only one or two hits separate a couple of papers in an issue.

Of course, it must be remembered that in the early volumes, *Information Research* was, in effect, the 'house organ' of the Department of Information Studies at the University of Sheffield - its aim was to produce working papers on research going on in the Department. Consquently, until Volume 3 No. 1, all the names are of Sheffield staff and students.

- Volume 1 No. 1 An action research approach to curriculum development, by P. Riding, S.P. Fowell, and P.C.M. Levy. **1781 hits**
- Volume 1 No. 2 A selective review of knowledge-based approaches to database design, by Shahrul Azman Noah and Michael Lloyd-Williams **533 hits**
- Volume 1 No. 3 Total quality management, British Standard accreditation, Investors in People and academic libraries, by V. Mistry and Bob Usherwood **1185 hits**
- Volume 2 No. 1 Hypermedia as an experiential learning tool: a theoretical model, by J.M.B. Nunes and S.P. Fowell **496 hits**
- Volume 2 No. 2 The management information needs of academic Heads of Department in universities in the United Kingdom, Brendan Loughridge. **252 hits**
- Volume 2 No. 3 Cataloguing in special libraries in the 1990s, by Elizabeth Makin, Nigel Ford and Alexander M. Robertson **255 hits**
- Volume 2 No. 4 Scanning the business environment for information: a grounded theory approach, Zita Correia and Tom Wilson **1475 hits**
- Volume 3 No. 1 Redefining roles: librarians as partners in information literacy education, by Helene Williams and Anne Zald **244 hits**
- Volume 3 No. 2 Towards adaptive information systems: individual differences and hypermedia, by Sherry Yu-Hua Chen and Nigel J. Ford, Department of Information Studies, University of Sheffield **447 hits**
- Volume 3 No. 3 Health information for the teenage years: what do they want to know? J. Rolinson. **347 hits**

As you can see, the 'high' hits cover a wide range, from 244 hits to 1781, and it is interesting to speculate how many hits these papers would have had if the counter had been running since publication. I'll let those who are interested work it out for themselves, since I lack the data on the pattern of use over time for any of the papers; however, the paper by Riding *et al.* has had 1781 hits in four months, a rate of 445 hits a month. It has been on the site since April 1995, that is, ninenty-six months - on a crude estimate of total use, therefore, we can suggest that the paper will probably have had 23,520 hits since publication. The paper by Williams and Zald, on the other hand, has had 244 hits in four months, or sixty-one hits a month and it has been on the site since July 1997 or sixty-nine months, giving a total estimated number of hits of 4,209

One way or another, these results seem to bear out Steve Lawrence's findings, reported in *Nature* in 2001, that papers that are openly available online are more likely to be used than those that are not. Should we say, Floriat Information Research?

Professor Tom Wilson, Publisher/Editor-in-Chief
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Contents   digit*.com
                    ERROR
                    Web Counter   **Home**