

**Proceedings of the 5th Annual  
Federal Depository Library Conference  
April 15 - 18, 1996**

---

## The World Wide Web at a Small State University

Larry Schankman, Mansfield University  
Mansfield, PA

---

Good morning. During my 15 minutes this morning I'll talk about the use of the Web in a small, poorly funded State university. My primary motivation in library use of the Web, and the one thing that has made the big difference for me professionally, is information content (what I often call the "good stuff").

First and foremost, I consider myself a reference librarian. Unfortunately, my library does not enjoy the same ability (i.e. budget) to acquire value-added print and electronic resources as wealthier institutions. Now, until a few years ago I could only sympathize with our patrons who needed materials that we did not own, and hope they would either wait up to two weeks for inter-library loan or accept my excuses. This saddened me horribly, especially since library school taught me to avoid the dreaded "N" word (No!) like the plague.

But now, with the near instantaneous, worldwide resources of the Internet, I can insert the "Y" word (Yes!) more often into my reference desk vocabulary. "Yes, I can get that for you. Any preference for format?" And this pleases me immensely. Indeed, I appreciate the Internet as a great equalizing force for information access. As a documents librarian I take even further delight in the fact that most U.S. Government information is non-copyrighted. Thus, our school enjoys much the same access to information, at least in the public domain, as do the richer, larger universities.

But as more and more Web sites pop up every day, it seems harder and harder to find rich content, especially those texts and data which we librarians would refer to as ready reference. For these reasons, and given that our book budget will not increase, I set a goal for myself shortly upon my arrival at Mansfield University to improve the information resources for our students, faculty and staff. Since we needed money, I wrote a grant application. And after several changes and an initial rejection, we finally received about \$90,000 in LSCA Title III funds to enhance public access to government (and even non-government) information.

In addition to many neat toys, some of which I have just now ordered (such as a CD-ROM recorder and multimedia authoring software), we were able to substantially upgrade our Internet services and install a CD-ROM network. With the addition of two 14-disc towers, we are now able to serve government CD's to our own students, as well as to our grant partner, the J.V. Brown District Library in Williamsport, PA. Through the Brown Library we provide electronic government information to about 20 participating rural public libraries.

The first stage of the grant involved creation of several Web pages. Beginning with the government and statistical data pages, this project has asserted a life of its own. I certainly never expected Web page maintenance to become such an all-consuming experience. Nevertheless, I have now created dozens of pages, on a variety of topics. In fact, I have even had to remove several pages as a result of insufficient time with which to adequately maintain them (the expression "get a life" often comes to mind).

In many ways, this project seems to me a harbinger of things to come. After the implementation of GPO's Transition Plan I can imagine an even greater need for depository librarians to help train and support smaller and less sophisticated libraries in their congressional districts. Besides, if we choose to expand our traditional role as educators we could perform an even more rewarding community service: more documents to more people, 24 hours a day, from any connected location, clothing optional.

In this spirit, the second component of our grant consisted of several workshops conducted for public librarians. These workshops focused on government information and the services now available to them through our network via telnet, the Web, or toll free dial-in access. For our first workshop, conducted as a traveling "road show," we produced a show-and-tell of our favorite government documents. We later offered one workshop each on Internet government resources and the depository compact discs provided through our CD network.

I will now demonstrate the three basic uses of the Web in my library.

#### **a. Local, Secure Menuing System**

Recently I have set up an experimental Web page which can launch any program we decide to offer our patrons. The Web page itself is rather typical, except that we use a Web browser (Netscape in our case) to access local applications, CD's, and local files, in addition to Web resources. Since we do not have time to discuss the techniques and software necessary to make this work, I have set up a Web page which describes and illustrates everything you need to set up a secure menu yourself, using your favorite Web browser.<sup>1</sup> The advantage to this system is that we can utilize Windows at the reference desk without the confusion and inherent problems associated with Program manager (minimizing or moving around icons, security, etc.).

#### **b. Remote Access to Information and Data**

In many cases students and faculty request materials which are either unavailable at our library, or too inconvenient to find in print. Especially in the case of data and more obscure text, our subject librarians and support staff (including student reference assistants) have as much difficulty identifying and locating materials as the requester. To forestall such

embarrassing moments I have put links on our library home page<sup>2</sup> to many useful government and full-text resources. Even when we own the needed material, Web access proves far more convenient than hunting down individual documents. As an example, we have set up a demographics page just for local and county data.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps an even better example, since so many people are unaware of where to find it, is the map of our state's Federal legislative districts.<sup>4</sup>

### **c. Online Pathfinders and Library Guides**

Now that many, if not most, of our students have become accustomed to browsing the Web, we can offer online library guides formatted in HTML. Not only does this save on the cost of paper, but it helps the environment as well. Besides, I am not so naive as to discount the likelihood that students, when provided handouts and other print resources, will immediately throw them away. Moreover, Web pathfinders just look better, and in the case of guides to online resources, link directly to the highlighted site. Pathfinders used at Mansfield University include guides on Federal legislative histories,<sup>5</sup> Federal regulations,<sup>6</sup> and statistical data available in and out of the library.<sup>7</sup>

The final phase of our grant will come to pass this summer, when I hope to learn some programming techniques. In addition to a CD Recorder, I have acquired a color scanner, graphics software, and the latest versions of Visual Basic and Macromedia Director. My hope is to create several interactive, multimedia CDs, which we can then network. One particular project that I plan to sink my teeth into is the creation of a regional census CD, utilizing an intuitive menu with data extracted from several depository CDs. The possibilities are indeed endless.

### **References**

1. <http://www.clark.net/pub/lschank/web/launch.html>
2. <http://www.mnsfld.edu/depts/lib/index.html>
3. <http://www.mnsfld.edu/depts/lib/stats.html>
4. <http://www.mnsfld.edu/depts/lib/pa-districts.html>
5. <http://www.mnsfld.edu/depts/lib/mythomas.html>
6. <http://www.mnsfld.edu/depts/lib/fedregs.html>
7. <http://www.mnsfld.edu/depts/lib/govstats.html>

You might also see the Govdocs pages, at:

<http://www.clark.net/pub/lschank/web/gov.html>

<http://www.clark.net/pub/lschank/web/govdoc.html>

