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BY CAROL TENOPIR

Moving to the Information Village

WHAT DO LIBRARIANS do best? Select and organize materials, find answers, and help clients locate the best resource for their information needs. In today's information environment, it means selecting, organizing, and accessing the best resources and locating the best experts in whatever format they are available.

Bringing order out of information chaos is a natural role for librarians and is especially important in a world where each year hundreds of online databases are added, thousands of new CD-ROM titles are produced, and tens of thousands of new World Wide Web (WWW) sites are created. Integrating access to all of these types of information resources is the challenge many libraries are tackling now.

Notable integrated information systems have been developed by the librarians at Ohio State, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, and others to help bring order to the information confusion many students face. The library staffs at these institutions have combined their technical expertise with a deep knowledge of their clients' needs and the content of the most useful information resources. These integrated information systems replicate the reference interview in part, suggest useful information resources regardless of medium or format, and either electronically logon or give directions to get to the identified resource.

Engineering Information Village

In the commercial world, Engineering Information Inc.'s (Ei) Engineering Information Village is an ambitious attempt to bring order to an otherwise chaotic information environment.



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Ei Village integrates a traditional online abstracting and indexing service, value-added access to more than 8400 WWW sites, contacts to engineering consultants, connection to an engineering librarian, and access to other sources or services of interest to engineers. Even if you are not interested in engineering topics, Ei Village can be used as a model for developing integrated information products.

The Ei Village, a digital outpost resembling the WWW, is a place where engineers, engineering students, or researchers can pursue their quests to find information of almost every type. Nearly everything in this realm is related to the field of engineering—a focus that helps provide direction and make the task of selecting relevant information resources easier.

Using the now familiar WWW technology to bring a variety of types of information together makes users feel as though they are using cutting edge technology. Combining that with a graphical user interface (GUI) that employs a clearly understood village metaphor makes it manageable even for novices. The metaphor of a village is carried throughout the Ei Village visit. Customers are called residents, and there is even a mayor to whom you can send E-mail.

Village areas

A visit to the Village begins with either a guided tour or at the Village Guide, an interactive table of contents. Most users will go to the virtual main street, presented as a screen of building icons. Currently there are 11 buildings, or areas, on the main street. Clicking on "Chamber of Commerce" provides a sample of Internet sites just to give the user an idea of what to expect. "Research & Industrial Park" is arranged by engineering discipline (e.g., mechanical, civil, chemical, electrical, etc.) or by industry (construction, telecommunications, transportation, drugs and medical products, etc.) and provides access to technical information in these areas from a variety of sources.

"Travel Services" combines tour information for virtual travel through the Village and on the web with real travel services, such as city and country guides and the ability to order plane tickets and book hotels. The "Library" provides access to the OPACs of many engineering libraries, virtual library collections, and Ei's new online service, Ei Connexion. Ei Compendex Plus and other bibliographic databases also are accessible.

"Business & Financial District" includes access to web sites and other sources of economic, financial, and stock market data. "International Center" brings together engineering and business information from local, state, and national governments worldwide. "News & Weather Bureaus" provides stories from daily AP and Reuters news services and worldwide weather reports. "Career & Education Campus" provides links to more than 1000 colleges and universities with engineering programs. "Ei Offices" is just that—a link to the company's offices in Hoboken, NJ.

The final two sites can be left off the Village homepage for some or all users if specified at setup. "Entertainment Arcade" provides links to games on the web, while "Shopping Mart" links to shops and mall services.

Paying for editor's choices

Most users can readily access the web, but the value of this product is the evaluation and selection of 8400 sites from hundreds of thousands of sites now living in cyberspace. The Ei staff selects stable or content-rich web sites they believe will be of interest to their customers. Links are kept up-to-date to minimize dead ends, and new sites are made accessible in all the appropriate places throughout the Village.

Ei editors pick the most valuable sites for each engineering discipline or industry category and identify them as editor's choices. "Editor's Choice" is prominently placed near the top of each new screen and these selections are reviewed regularly. Daily updates provide access to new web sites, links to

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changed sites, while eliminating links to discontinued ones.

Many of Ei's selected sites will be familiar to librarians, including those from U.S. government agencies, such as the Census Bureau, the Library of Congress, the Department of Commerce, the Patent & Trademark Office, the Department of Defense, the IRS, the SEC, and the CIA. Approximately 150 university and technical libraries with substantial engineering collections are linked. Links to government agencies from around the world allow users to access authoritative international regulations and technical information. Only the most authoritative sources are identified, effectively separating the web wheat from the chaff.

Not just the web

Although the heart of the Village is the web, it goes far beyond that. Ei Compendex Plus, Ei's longstanding bibliographic database of engineering research literature, is the cornerstone of the village library. Originally accessible only through a telnet session, Ei Compendex has been redesigned as a web site due to early visitors' suggestions. Web access to Compendex can be added to a Village subscription, or it can be accessed on a pay-as-you-go basis through a telnet session.

A telnet session is used to access other bibliographic, directory, and full-text commercial databases through Ei's online gateway service, "Ei Connexion." Ei Connexion gateways to DIA-LOG for Boolean logic searching of 150 databases identified as being of interest to engineers.

There is an additional charge to search the Connexion files. Included in the Village subscription, however, are a couple of current awareness features for access to some textual databases. "Ei Tech Alert" allows residents to search the most recent two months of Ei Compendex Plus and Ei Page One and the last three days of the AP and Reuters newswires. Tech Alert uses a natural-language interface and a relevance-ranking search engine. "Ei Spotlights" are preformatted, weekly updated bibliographic searches on more than 150 engineering topics.

Ei's own document delivery service allows users to order full documents identified in a bibliographic search. Documents can be delivered via E-mail, U.S. mail, FAX, or courier ser-

vice. Charges are not cheap but are comparable to other document delivery services: approximately \$13.50 for most articles (\$9.50 from Ei, plus the publisher's copyright fee.)

Village as a community

Scientists have used the Internet for years to communicate with their peers. Originally, Ei Village was not conceived as a replacement for the E-mail function. But early users wanted it all—access to printed and graphical

Links to government agencies from around the world allow users to access authoritative international regulations

information sources and access to human information sources. The village now advertises a true virtual "community," offering users access to colleagues as well as documents.

"Ask Your Peers" provides users with access to discussion groups and forums organized by engineering disciplines or industries. Like its offering of web sites, the Ei editorial staff has identified potentially relevant listservs that already exist on the Internet. A description of each and subscription links are placed where they fit in the organizational structure of the Village. Engineers don't need the Village to subscribe to these lists but having them within the Village is convenient, offering them a "one-stop" shopping experience.

An even more valuable service is the ability to access engineering and information experts through the Village. "Ask a Village Engineer" provides users with access to experienced engineers whom Ei has retained to answer questions posed by Village residents. For each engineering discipline, a senior engineer will use his or her experience and contacts to answer E-mail questions.

The "Village Librarian" answers E-mail reference questions, usually within 12 hours. Yes, there is a real librarian behind that icon. Ann Hutcheson is available 8:30-4:30 EST to answer questions for Village residents.

Prices

Engineering Information Village customers are almost evenly split between academic institutions and corporations. Personal accounts are also available. Prices are difficult to summarize because they vary according to the potential user population of the institution or the number of concurrent users allowed, the number of I.D.s requested, and whether or not you purchase unlimited access to Ei Compendex Plus through the Village. Customers who subscribe to Ei Compendex Plus on CD-ROM or tape get discounts. Academic prices range from \$4000 per year (for under 500 users, eight I.D.s, and "pay-per-event" access to Ei Compendex Plus) to \$27,000 per year (up to 4000 potential users, with 27 I.D.s and unlimited access to Compendex). Prices are quoted separately for universities with more than 4000 engineering users. Number of I.D.s is not the same as number of concurrent users. Each I.D. can support multiple logons and can be configured to allow or disallow access to certain Village features, such as the Entertainment Arcade. Concurrent user plans are also available at a slightly lower cost.

Corporate prices are higher, ranging from \$4500 per year (fewer than 100 users, nine I.D.s, and pay-per-event access to Ei Compendex) to \$30,000 per year (up to 1000 users, 30 I.D.s, and unlimited use of Ei Compendex). A corporation may have single workstation access in the library for \$3000 a year (or \$6000 with unlimited Compendex.) For more information, contact Engineering Information, Inc., Castle Point on the Hudson, Hoboken, NJ, 07030; 800-221-1044.

Complex mix

Ei Village is one of the first commercial integrated information products. It will not be the last. Bibliographic, full text, directory, and graphical databases and even informal chats provide users with various ways to access information. Boolean logic, relevance ranking, hypertext links, and browsing are all needed as search techniques.

Librarians must play a fundamental role in developing and vetting the best of systems that select the best resources, offer a choice of search techniques, keep things current, and point to a variety of information sites that help overwhelmed users find an easy path to an information destination.