Library Web Development: A Decade in Review
The Lamar Soutter Library, University of Massachusetts Medical School

Lamar Soutter Library Web Site Images

Pre-Web Technologies

The Map: In early 1995 an internal reference librarian with the help of a few graduate students created the Library’s first web page. The focus of the page was a group of technologies. HTML, Perl
Next Step: Assign a reference librarian to oversee web development. In 1997, Perl was added to the department.

The List: This intern page was hosted for approximately 4 months and was considered an improvement over “The Map.”

Technology: HTML, Perl
Next Step: Assign a reference librarian to oversee web development, in 1997, Perl was added to the department.

“The Morphing GIF”: This page focused on gathering web resources and sorting them into useful categories (bibliographic, general, etc.) for Library users. This site is remembered as being graphic-heavy and slow to load. Some users also said that they never quite knew the scripted words across the top were actually links. This page was hosted for about six months.

Technology: HTML, Perl, JavaScript

Next Step: From a team from the Library staff to develop a new site incorporating the latest technologies.

“The Team Approach”: A Web Team worked for about nine months looking at the different options for web design and also chose to utilize the ColdFusion development system. This database-driven structure also provided the Library with a mechanism for managing the growing resource collection.

Web Technology Timeline

January 1998: ColdFusion 3.0 released
February 1999: HTML, 4.01 Recommendation published
December 1999: JavaScript language standardized

Changing Roles: Anecdotes from Medical Librarians

1. “In 1993 the manager of our research library wanted to know what this ‘internet thing’ was all about — perhaps we might make use of it in our library. She asked individuals on staff if they would be interested in investigating. They made statements like, ‘We don’t have time for that foolishness. The internet is just a gimmick — a fad — no way will it last as long as this.’ Having the library secretary, I did not refuse the assignment. Within a year I had created the library’s Gopher. As soon as it was up and running, I started development of the library’s first web page, which went live in 1995.”

2. “In fall of 1994 we had just implemented a new ELS. At the annual user group meeting we asked the vendor representatives if they had plans to make the ORCA available via the Web. The vendor reps admitted the company hadn’t even considered this and had no development plans. Many attendees were puzzled by our request and why we thought Web access was important. When we attended the same meeting a year later, the interest level was much higher!”

3. “In 1997 I developed the Library’s website; it pre-dated the hospital’s website by a few years. Nobody in IT had any expertise in web development. I had taken some online workshops, didn’t ask permission, just went ahead and developed a website containing links to many resources I felt were most useful. It grew as time went on.”

4. “To obtain our medical library and web site, we chose to develop our own instead of purchasing a ‘turnkey’ solution. This was a very difficult decision because we had to develop all the content and had only a minimal amount of money to invest.”

Research Question

What presence have academic medical libraries had on the web over the past decade?

- How have advances in web technologies influenced the “look and feel” of the website?
- What other developments contributed to the evolution of medical library websites?
- How has the librarian’s role in web development changed in the last ten years?

Web Statistics

Changing Roles: Anecdotes from Medical Librarians

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Medical Library Association - Annual Meeting 2004 - Washington, DC - Mary Piorun and Robert Vander Hart

Source for web site images: http://www.dave.org