Navigating the Internet and the World Wide Web: Workshop Report

Tom Ferguson, Editor
Journal of Thoracic Surgery

The half-day workshop on "Navigating the Internet and the World Wide Web" was a valuable prelude to the Airlie House Retreat theme, "The Fate of the Scientific Paper in a Paperless Age". It meant coming early, but with a worthwhile program and beautiful Airlie for another day, who could complain? The 11 attendees gathered in the Learning Center, which is one of the best-designed facilities I have ever seen. Individual computer stations arranged in a circular pattern made it possible to follow the course material in a very interactive fashion.

The 3-hour workshop was conducted by Kerry Brandt, assistant professor of Biomedical Information Sciences and Program Director for Curriculum Support at the William H. Welch Medical Library, Johns Hopkins University. Fortunately for us, Brandt is not at all as portentious as his title. He was sensitive to the diversity of professional backgrounds and to the levels of Web expertise, ranging from novice to the sophisticated user, represented in our small class. He was careful to bring us along in such a way that none of us felt either overwhelmed or bored.

His outline for the afternoon was divided into 4 sections: 1) Internet and World Wide Web overview, 2) browsing and searching the Web, 3) electronic journals and scholarly communication, and 4) biological databases. The handout materials augmented well each of these subject areas.

The 1st section covered the basics of what the Internet is, how it functions, and how it can be accessed. The discussion of the coming shift away from modems to coaxial cable and trunk lines was particularly interesting.

The 2nd section was the most valuable to me. He explained how search engines work, why some are better than others, and how to use the existing engines for different search functions. Of particular help was the material on metasearch engines (which until this course I did not know existed).

The 3rd section was devoted to looking at some online journals, such as the Journal of Biological Chemistry. There was too little time to delve into the philosophical pros and cons of Net publishing, but he gave us a good introduction to issues later dealt with during the retreat.

Digitizing Figures: Workshop Report

Grace Darling, Managing Editor
Selected Readings in Plastic Surgery

The Digitizing Figures workshop, held immediately before the CBE Airlie House Retreat, was both timely and informative. The material was presented by a publisher, an author, and a printer, who gave us their professional perspectives on author-supplied digital figures.

Leading the discussion was Michael Held, a publisher at a university press. Held recounted how some authors now insist on submitting computer-generated files of text copy and graphics. While textual characters pose no problem, in large part because of the ASCII standard, digital illustrations bring with them an array of difficulties in their journey from the author's desk to the printed page. For a publisher, it means that the editorial staff must deal with technical issues such as file types, storage media, and output resolution. The publisher frequently acts as go-between for the author and printer, and effective communication is hampered by a lack of common terminology. If the printer cannot use the digital files as submitted, the publisher must rely on hard copy that may be of poor quality. Naturally, authors complain when their work is not reproduced faithfully, even if their original files were unusable. The result for publishers is interrupted workflow; delays in turnaround time because of errors, reshoots, and multiple proofs; a challenge to their reputation; and, inevitably, increased costs of publication.

From the point of view of the author, digitized figures are a godsend, says Todd McGee, a postdoctoral student at Stanford University. Computers simplify enormously the task of illustrating a scientific paper. Whether the image is scanned from a photograph or x-ray film, captured by a confocal microscope or digital camera, or generated directly as a graph or line drawing, anyone who has a personal computer can create, crop, label, and revise figures. For the new generation of scientists with computer skills, the digital environment means greater flexibility, faster and easier production, and considerable money savings.
What about the printing of digital files? As Paul Bozuwa of Capital City Press told us, a properly prepared computer-generated image is rare indeed. Often the camera-ready figure suffers from inadequate resolution, deficiencies of the output device, colors outside the spectrum of the offset press, and tags (letters or arrows) in fonts not available to the printer. Moreover, digitization effectively shifts costs from the laboratory to the print shop. Digital files demand highly trained operators, a large array of peripherals for different media, sophisticated equipment and software for graphics manipulation, increased interaction with publisher and author, and longer production times.

The presenters suggested the following authors' guidelines for preparing digital files of artwork:
• Line drawing: Scan at 1000–1200 dpi and save the file in EPS format with fonts saved as an outline or path or as a TIFF file.
• Halftones: Scan at 300 dpi; set the tonal range at 2% to 96%; and save as a TIFF file.
• Combination: Import the halftone image (at 600 dpi) into Photoshop; crop and set the tonal range at 2% to 96%; export to a drawing program to create the labels; then remove the TIFF image layer; save the fonts as paths or outlines in EPS (600 dpi); open both the image and label files in Photoshop and combine; save as a TIFF file.
• Color: Produce a TIFF file at 300 dpi and save in CMYK format.
• All files should be able to be opened in Photoshop.
• Submit a hard copy suitable for reproduction which has been generated from the same version of the digital file. Store large files in Zip, Jaz, or Syquest media. Check with the compositor/printer to determine which media are acceptable.
• To compress large files, use a lossless utility like PKZIP or LHARC for PC systems or StuffIt or DiskDoubler for Macintosh systems.

Committee Report

Education Committee

Cheryl Iverson, Chair

Although long out of school, I have never lost the feeling of the student that fall is the time for fresh notebooks, sharp pencils, and setting out on an exciting course. The Education Committee will meet in early November, following the Airlie House Retreat, to take stock of what we have accomplished and plan what lies ahead.

During the last year, Christy Wright, one of our valuable members who contributed so much to the Airlie House retreats, rotated off the committee and 2 new members, Barbara Drew and Elisabeth Heseltine, joined us. (Other members are Paul Bozuwa, Lew Gidez, Michael Held, and Faith McLellan.) We are fortunate to have the committee's former chair, Susan Eastwood, remain on the committee as liaison to the board and inspiring presence.

In 1996 to date, our activities have included the following:

Under the direction of Bob Utiger and Lorna Conway, the 7th Short Course for Journal Editors was given before the annual meeting in Portland.

Working with Judy Dickson and Pat Stephens of the Author's Editors Committee, we added a 2nd Short Course—Short Course for Manuscript Editors—to the popular premeeting series. (See CBE Views 1996;19(4):98-9.)

The 3rd Airlie House Retreat, "The Fate of the Scientific Paper in a Paperless Age", coordinated by Faith McLellan, will be held 1 to 3 November 1996.

Two half-day workshops will precede the Airlie House Retreat: "Navigating the Internet and the World Wide Web", led by Keryn Brandt, and "Digitalizing Figures", led by Michael Held, Paul Bozuwa, and Todd McGee (Stanford University).

For 1997 we plan to continue with the 2 short courses and perhaps for 1998 develop a 3rd short course for this series: Short Course for Managing Editors. If you would be interested in taking a 1- or 2-day course on this topic, I would be most interested in hearing from you about the topics you'd like included.

Two new courses have also been added before the 1997 meeting: a workshop on how to write a scientific paper, taught by Elisabeth Heseltine, and a course on the principles of meta-analysis for journal editors taught by Ingram Olkin of Stanford University and Joseph Lau of Harvard University.

Paul Bozuwa is making plans for 2 Windows sessions immediately following the 1997 Annual Meeting.

Barbara Drew and Lew Gidez have been working on the development of an independent-contractor model, which will allow us to work, in a contractual arrangement, with members who have developed successful courses so that these courses can be given throughout the year at diverse locations with benefit to both the member-leader and to CBE. Several of the premeeting courses planned for 1997 will allow us to better develop the specifics of this model.

Finally, at our committee meeting, we will discuss how best to use CBE's new Website to publicize our educational activities (and perhaps allow people to register for them online) and to serve the educational needs of our members. Again, I welcome your ideas and suggestions. cheryl_iverson@ama-assn.org