The Librarian as Publisher:
A World Wide Web Publishing Project

by
Mark Stover

Phillips Graduate Institute is an independent graduate school offering degrees in marriage and family therapy. Its faculty chooses the best masters theses each year and an editorial board made up of students and a faculty advisor edits them into an annual publication, Progress: Family Systems Research and Therapy. The first issue was published in Spring 1992; volume five came out in May 1996.

A subscription to Progress sells for $10 annually. Yet, despite this modest cost, the journal has few paid subscribers. Web publishing of Progress was identified as a means to disseminate our research to a larger audience without spending a fortune in marketing costs. There was little debate from either the faculty or the editorial board on the merits of this idea; it just made sense.

Publication Structure Decisions

The Web version of Progress (http://www.phillips.org/progress.htm) is what I like to call a “mirrored” publication; that is, the Web site “mirrors” the print text in that it provides access to the same information in an entirely different format and with added value. The issue of refereed versus nonrefereed journals is a sensitive one for a publication like Progress. Publishing on the Web does not yet have the prestige or authority that print journals carry. Scholarly tradition holds that for a journal to be accepted as legitimate and authoritative, it must be refereed, preferably in a double-blind manner. Anything less is open to accusations of vanity publishing. However, there are some disciplines (most notably, the law) where nonrefereed journals carry equal weight with refereed journals. The best example of this is the Law Review, which is edited by students and generally does not submit its articles to the double-blind referee process. Whether this model will be followed (or even accepted) in the social science world remains to be seen.

The issue of free access versus fee-based access to scholarly Web information is likely to be an area of some debate. Obviously, commercial publishers must protect their financial interests and they are already devising ways to charge for Web-based journals. Indeed, the OCLC-based electronic journals serve as a good example of a fee-based system of scholarly Web information. But nonprofit academic institutions, which sponsor a great deal of today’s research, may decide (if they choose to get into the Web publishing arena) that the goal of disseminating information takes precedence over the goal of making money. In the case of Progress, lack of revenue from print subscriptions made profit considerations a moot point. But most Web publishers will have to deal with this potential problem, especially in the case of mirrored journals.

Copyright Ramifications

The inside cover of the latest issue of Progress contains this statement: “No part of this issue may be reproduced in
any form—except for brief quotations (not to exceed 500 words) in any review of professional work—without the permission in writing from the publishers.”

As holders of the copyright, Phillips Graduate Institute can choose to reproduce Progress on the Web without conflict. But can we prevent others from ignoring the copyright restrictions and illegally reproducing the information in a different forum?

While there may be intellectual reasons (such as the concept of “fair play,” protection of the author’s creation, etc.) for Progress to be concerned about copyright violations, no economic reasons compel us to get involved in preventing copyright misuse. On the other hand, if we were a commercial publisher or if our authors had a financial stake in the distribution of their work we would have reason for great concern. Perhaps technologies that can prevent unethical copyright infringement will be developed in the near future.

Copyright law in its present form seems inappropriate when applied to the Internet. Some believe that the Web’s system of copying files back and forth across the Internet from server to client is a technical violation of the copyright law. Others, such as Bert Boyce (1996), feel that, even apart from Internet issues, the system of copyright as it applies to scholarly journal publishing is outmoded and unfair to authors. Solutions to these two copyright law problems are needed in order to improve the system of rewarding and protecting authors of scholarly information in the coming century.

**Design Issues**

Several theories exist today in regard to the design and organization of a Web journal. The theory that should be dismissed immediately is the one that states that a Web journal should only give away very basic information, such as tables of contents, abstracts, book reviews, or sample articles. This type of Web publication is often listed under the rubric of “Web Journal,” but can only be construed as a journal in the broadest sense of the word. More accurately, it is a promotional strategy designed to attract paid subscribers to the print version of the journal. It is a misnomer to label this type of information as part of the journal genre.

Another (more reputable) theory is that the Web journal should replicate the print environment. That is, the Web journal should retain the “look and feel” of the print version as much as possible and should not add (or subtract) any material from the print journal. This honors the integrity of the journal and of the authors by maintaining a consistent standard across the different media. The Web journal in this approach is viewed as simply one more platform upon which the content and format of the journal can stand. For example, print, microfiche, microfilm, online, and the Web are all viewed as separate but equal media through which the journal can be published.

Unfortunately, this viewpoint underestimates the power and flexibility of the Web as a publishing conduit. It does not take into consideration the hypertext and multimedia aspects of the Web that allow the publisher or editor to add tremendous value to the Web journal through hyperlinks and multimedia.

A third theory is more far-sighted and less conservative than the first two. This theory sees opportunities and possibilities in the new Web medium instead of constraints and limitations. It seeks to add value to the Web journal by indexing each article and by adding other links (both internal and external) to the document. The Web environment can be utilized for maximum effect by employing such mechanisms as Java-based interactivity, forms-based letters to the editor, and even virtual reality. It is this approach that holds tremendous promise for Web publishing as a radical departure from the old order.

I see Progress as a third-order Web journal. That is, I want to add value to the text by indexing and hyperlinking it. While each article has been fully indexed, time constraints have limited the number of hyperlinks added to each article. Also, some of the concerns expressed below (related to hyperlinking) have contributed to the lack of value-added markup.

**Indexing the Web Publication**

One solution for converting documents into a searchable database is to laboriously mark up each article into HTML. This is obviously a time-consuming and tedious task, and is neither the most cost-effective nor the most efficient method. Another solution is to create a database of documents with an underlying search engine familiar to the community (for example, the university’s online catalog search software might be modified to allow full-text documents to be retrieved). Then, a telnet gateway or CGI scripting can be utilized to allow full access through the Web. This method can be expensive for the publisher, and it also can be confusing to users who often do not expect to see a different (i.e., non-Web-based) search engine while surfing the Web.

An inexpensive and relatively elegant solution is to use one of the newer “Web builder” software applications that use MARC, dBase, or ASCII records to create a searchable Web database. We used BestWeb (http://www.bestseller.com) in our project primarily because of the price tag, but the results were more than satisfactory. BestWeb allowed us to build a database of bibliographic records that was searchable through three different access points (we chose author, title, and subject). In turn, we linked these records to the full-text documents (which had been converted to HTML), thus creating (in effect) a one-step lookup for users.

**Hyperlinking the Web Publication**

Hyperlinks between and among the different articles in our journal would maximize the Web’s hypertext capabilities. For example, if a Progress author writing in 1995 quotes a Progress author writing in 1993, the ideal would be to create links to connect these articles in a two-way relationship. Readers viewing the 1995 article could automatically see the article that was being quoted; readers viewing the earlier article could anticipate what would be writ-
ten about this article two years later by connecting to the 1995 article.

Another kind of linkage (that is actually relatively common on the Web) is to connect each reference cited in the text of the article with the full bibliographic citation at the end of the article. Readers can then toggle back and forth between the body of the article and the bibliography.

One of the major problems in adding hotlinks to any kind of Web document is the time-consuming nature of the task. There is intellectual effort (Which words or phrases should be marked up? How many? How often? Where should the hotlinks point to?) as well as physical effort (the act of marking up the text). Publishers of Web documents must ask themselves if the added value of hyperlinking the text is worth the extra work that is required.

Should hyperlinks be internal (self-referential) or external? Self-referential links are easier to control, but external links are more interesting. For example, a self-referential link would connect one piece of an author's article to another piece of the same article. Perhaps all references to a particular citation within the article would be linked together.

External links are more risky, but certainly they are more rewarding. An external link might connect a mention of the American Psychological Association to the APA home page. It might anchor a reference to a particular author listed in the bibliography to that author's home page or e-mail address. The risk comes when these links become orphaned by changed or defunct URLs.

Limitations of Hyperlinking

At a certain point one could argue that the Webmaster becomes a coauthor of the article.
or editor working alongside the original author. But can we change the nature of the article without permission? This would seem to be both arrogant and unethical. Another question to be asked is, do hotlinks detract from the clarity and original purpose of the article? The answer depends on the nature of the article as well as the links, but undoubtedly there is a point of diminishing returns where too many links create noise and confusion for the reader.

Crawford and Gorman (1995), in their sane but perhaps overly cautious book, criticize attempts to convert essentially linear text into hypertext documents. This criticism is especially trenchant when “overhyperlinking” takes place. Overhyperlinking an article from a Web journal, especially when done from the editorial (unilateral) perspective, is unfair to both author and reader. This has already become a problem for more ephemeral Web documents, such as home pages, and could end up detracting from the value of the original article in more scholarly Web publishing.

The Librarian’s Role in Web Publishing

Librarians can help to bring scholarly information to the Web in a number of different ways. First, we can (and should) be more assertive in promoting Web publishing. This can take the form of something as simple as encouraging others to publish their material on the Web, or it can be as complex as pushing the issue of Web publishing to the forefront of the campus administrative agenda.

Second, we should be actually publishing full-text articles (research and/or opinion pieces) on the Web ourselves. These articles can be placed on our own home pages, or (better yet) they can be given a place of prominence on the campus or library Web server. The research can be written by and for librarians, or it can be more broadly based and venture outside our field into other disciplines. As an advertising message has informed us on a different matter, “Just do it!”

Third, librarians should be indexing these Web publications. While full-text indexing has often proved to be less than helpful in terms of precision and recall issues, these published articles deserve at least the basic intellectual access points of author, title, and subject.

Fourth, we should be adding value to Web publications through internal and external hyperlinks, being careful to stay within the legal, ethical, and aesthetic boundaries of copyright, authorial integrity, and Web page design. These links make the Web more than just another platform on which we can mount written research. The value-added aspects of the Web, especially its almost universal accessibility, its immediacy, and its hypertext nature, make a powerful and compelling argument for the concept of scholarly Web publishing.

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References