

TRAINING USERS ON INTERNET PUBLICATIONS EVOLVED FROM (AND STILL IN) PRINT

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“Neither Fish Nor Fowl Nor Good Red Meat”: The Early Stages of Evolution

Electronic publications are evolving out of print resources. What they’ll evolve into isn’t clear, though their paper origins are plain. In the meantime, users deal with interim products of questionable utility and stability: this is the Web-world, after all, where functions *can* change without warning, whether or not they actually do so. Individuals familiar with the print version often prefer it. Web surfers find searching the online version as drawn from the legacy of the print text frustrating.

Training researchers to make the best use of electronic publications requires addressing the electronic versions’ dual natures and allowing for individual trainee backgrounds. The print user and the Internet-savvy user face the Web version from different angles. The former needs a reason to favor the Web; the latter needs help recognizing the print-based nature of the resource and using the publishers’ navigation tools. The Internet-savvy book user combines both of these conflicting needs. What’s a trainer to do now? Start with the fact that, print or Web, a book is still a book and a journal a journal.

Organization

A glance at the first few electronic screens is enough to gauge how far into the electronic world a print publication has gone. In most cases, it is not far. The print format usually rules. If the original table of contents had several layers, so does the electronic version. If indexing is lacking or

poor in the printed version, the electronic one reflects the same fault.

The operative idea seems to be that if the organization worked in print, it will work on the Web, and the converse is equally true. Individual articles or book sections are available by searching or browsing the book or journal issue to which they belong. Some publishers are beginning to offer users the ability to reorganize content, but such efforts are still labor-intensive for the user who selects every publication or part of a publication to be searched (or browsed or clustered) together *individually*. The time this takes ensures that only the most dedicated or desperate researchers use this function.

Separate print publications, no matter how closely related, are kept separate on the Web even when offered by the same publisher. The Bureau of National Affairs (BNA) publications don’t mix. *Banking Daily* and *Corporate Counsel Weekly* have distinct subscriptions, search engines, and archives. Both are independent of the *Daily Report for Executives* and the rest of the electronic publications. An individual interested in searching the archives of more than one publication must do so one at a time or go to a third-party provider.

CCH goes further. Its publications are divided several times before appearing on the Web. They are sorted by division: business, tax, labor and employment, etc., then arranged by category: securities, banking, trade, etc., and again by subcategory: securities law news, federal materials, state materials, etc. While it is possible to search across all publications in a given division, the effect is daunting. Users can narrow their search to only certain types of documents, from a list of document types in the double digits. Duplicate listings, such as forms, only add to the confusion. On the plus side, CCH offers “My CCH”: a page users can customize to include the publications or portions of publications of interest. Once again, it can be customized only within a division. Tax, Business, and Employment are distinct and separate subscriptions.

Peripheral vision is lost on the Web. Computer screens display limited information at a time. When reviewing an index, users see only the “relevant” portion. Only select publication(s) can

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be searched or browsed at any one time. The possibility of noticing something potentially relevant or of interest on a facing index page is gone. Patrons selecting books from an electronic shelf don't see relevant publications by different publishers. Third-party providers regularly keep publications separated by publisher. The opportunity to find the perfect source that the user wasn't looking for or didn't know to look for is lost.

Navigation: Browsing and Searching

The upside to electronic versions of books is browsing. Most publishers create as many internal hypertext links to referenced documents as possible. The ability to jump quickly from one relevant section to another in a different volume is valuable. Indexes are user-friendly. Users are not required to recognize the difference between paragraph and page numbers. Links lead to referenced text without side trips. There are limitations: the links lead only to other portions of the publication in question or to other items provided by the same publisher.

The drawback of browsing an electronic book is the number of steps and/or clicks required to drill down to a desired section. The layout is almost uniformly hierarchical. One click of the mouse opens the list of chapters in a volume. The next click opens the list of sections in the chapter. Another click is required to access the list of subsections, and on and on. Depending on the provider, once a text section is attained, the user has to back out to the list of sub(sub)sections to get to the next section. Increasingly, publishers are providing internal navigation tools that enable individuals to move directly between text sections.

If books have better-developed browser functions, serials have better search functions perhaps because they are competing with third-party providers that also offer their content. BNA is an excellent example: its search engine includes date restrictors, field searching, and different sorting mechanisms. The advanced search page is the *default* search page; users have to take an extra step to access the simple search page rather than the other way around. The search page features a clean design. Publishers offering fewer serial

publications usually have more simplified search functions, sometimes merely internal versions of popular Internet search engines.

Book publishers are working toward adding search functionality, but many of their search pages are complex and less intuitive. The search page for Books OnScreen, a site that sells books in electronic format, integrates some directions on the page. It offers fewer bells and whistles than BNA, but includes the ability to search just a portion of a book or all the books in the library. CCH, on the other hand, has a deceptively simple-looking search bar across the top of the screen.

The search options are less intuitive, and valuable information is hidden in the fine print. The help function is detailed and requires users to dig for answers. Unless the option is deselected, CCH automatically looks for synonyms of search terms, but the definition of *synonym* is too wide. A search for *Internet training* results in documents discussing e-mail.

The display of search results varies widely from publisher to publisher. Books OnScreen lists hits in relation to where, in a given book, they come from. Both BNA and CCH offer sorting by relevance as determined by the search mechanism. Taking a cue from third-party providers and the Internet, they also usually show the terms in context. The browse function also applies to search results for many book sites. Users are able to navigate not only between search results, but also between a given result and the text sections that, in the book, surround it.

Training from All Perspectives

Training users on electronic products is a Herculean task. One format does not fit all and probably never will. But certain techniques or approaches cut across the various publications' evolutionary lines. First and foremost, if time and staffing allow, is flexibility. The fewer people trained at a time, and/or the more similar they are, the easier it is to tailor the training to take them from the familiar to the unfamiliar.

Training for journals is a simpler matter, especially if the trainee knows how to navigate third-party databases. The focus is on searching. Techniques used to teach Westlaw® or LexisNexis

can be applied here, limited by the search functions included. Interest in browsing is usually restricted to the current version, easily at hand.

The case with books is a little more complex. The first thing is to ascertain who is being trained.

- Is the trainee familiar with the print version?
- Is the trainee Internet-savvy?

The individual accustomed to the print version can still recognize it on the Web. People still prefer print, but electronic versions serve a purpose. Users can access publications from out of the office, supplement missing or checked-out volumes, and search at levels an index cannot address. Showing the book user how the electronic version mimics the print allows for a level of comfort. They know how to browse from the print; whether or not they like the electronic layout, it is based on the print. Searching introduces a new level and a way to counter print limitations such as poor indexing. The electronic version provides added features; the convenience is key.

The Internet-savvy user, unfamiliar or less familiar with the print version, requires a different approach. Searching is the place to start. The search options are comparable to Internet search engines and databases (Westlaw, LexisNexis). Many offer Boolean or free-text searching and field restrictions. Emphasizing a resource's print nature grounds the user, especially when the results are displayed by volume. Moderated expectations result in a more positive experience. Internet versions of journals provided by the publisher often include graphics and tables from the print (more applicable to nonlegal publications), providing an incentive to favor the publisher's version over a third-party provider.

Both approaches combine for Internet-savvy users familiar with the print. Browsing is a first step, but the search functions offer enhanced use. Familiarity with the print facilitates choice of search terms and helps narrow the search to selected volumes. Just-in-time access is the primary incentive.

The Next Stage in the Evolution

Keeping up with an electronic Web site is a never-ending task. Updates and upgrades occur unpredictably and rarely offer advance warning. Sometimes the print version may be more current than the online, due to the method of updating. Currentness should improve for electronic variants, as information is increasingly digital in nature. Changes involving more factors are harder to pinpoint in the specific, but hard to miss in general, for instance, publisher consolidation.

Mergers in the physical world affect the electronic as do alliances between publishers and third-party providers. Exclusive contracts and actual ownership of subsidiary publishers increasingly differentiate third-party providers. Pricing for unique or exclusive (not necessarily unique) content is often separate from pricing for the remainder of a third-party's content and encourages direct access to the publisher's version, as available. Increasing numbers of mergers and alliances may exacerbate this trend. Per-document pricing, within or without negotiated fee contracts, may take longer to become a normal mode of purchase.

Consolidation and third-party providers have begun to reorganize content by subject. Reclustering information by subject and relation offers reduced search time and increased efficiency. The new arrangements are based on decisions made by the providers, but it's a start.

Search functions should improve. Browsing may involve fewer clicks. Innovations in Internet search engines will filter through to publishers' Web sites. Given the investment in and preferences for the print version, changes may occur in real time rather than Internet time.

Until the Internet versions are more evolved, the incentive to thrive in a research-dependent environment will divide those who master the electronic and those who resist using online resources. Focused, product-based training is ultimately the key to success.

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