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Library Web Development: A Decade in Review

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

1994   **1996**   **1998**   **2000**   **2002**   **2004**

Lamar Soutter Library Web Site Images

Pre-Web Technologies

Hey! Remember me?!

Gopher: Files displayed in a hierarchical menu structure
Veronica: Search engine for Gopher sites
Archie: Search engine for FTP files

"The Map": In early 1995 an interested reference librarian with the help of a few graduate students created the Library's first web page. The focus of the page was a graphical representation of the 1st floor of the Library.
Technology: HTML
Next Step: In 1997 the Library hired a recent college graduate to work part-time assisting with web development.

"The List": This interim 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 conjunction with Biomedical Media department.

"The Morphing GIF": This page focused on gathering web resources and sorting them into useful categories (biomedical, general, etc.) for Library users. This site is remembered as being graphics-heavy and slow to load. Some users also said that they never knew the scripted words across the top were actually navigational buttons. This page was hosted for about two and a half years.
Technology: HTML, Perl, JavaScript. WebGlimpse used for site search capabilities.
Next Step: Form 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 e-resource collection.
Technology: HTML, ColdFusion 4.5/5/MX, JavaScript. Verity and ColdFusion queries used for site search capabilities.
Presently: The same design scheme is used today but has been adjusted to conform more to current web standards.

This collage depicts some of the grant-funded web sites hosted by the Library, including EBM, Evidence-Based Public Health, HealthNet, etc.
Other Features: A staff intranet was developed in early 2002 primarily for the hosting of team and departmental minutes.

Web Technology Timeline

February 1993:
Mosaic, first graphical web browser, released

October 1994:
Mosaic NetScape 0.9 released;
Perl 5.000 unveiled
May 1995:
Java announced by Sun
Summer 1995:
ColdFusion 1.0 released
December 1995:
JavaScript language announced

January 1998:
ColdFusion 3.1 released
February 1998:
XML 1.0 Recommendation published

December 1999:
HTML 4.01 Recommendation published
January 2000:
XHTML 1.0 Recommendation published
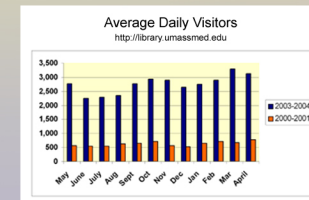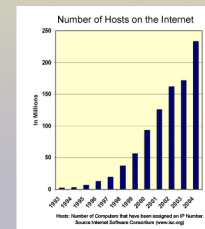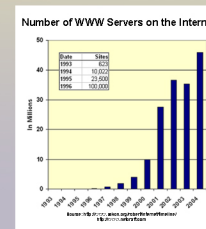
Spring 2001:
ColdFusion 5 released

Summer 2003:
ColdFusion MX 6.1 released

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 web site?
- What other developments contributed to the evolution of medical library web sites?
- How has the librarian's role in web development changed in the last ten years?

Web Statistics

Number of WWW Servers on the Internet

Number of Hosts on the Internet

Average Daily Visitors
http://library.umassmed.edu

Changing Roles: Anecdotes from Medical Librarians

- "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 be of real use here." Having the least seniority, I dared 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."

- "In fall of 1994 we had just implemented a new ILS. At the annual user group meeting we asked the vendor representatives if they had plans to make the OPAC 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!"

- "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. I didn't ask permission, I just went ahead and developed a website containing links to many resources I felt were most useful. It grew as time went on."