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

The “Map”: in early 1995 an internation reference librarian with the help of a few graduate students created the Library’s first web page. The focus of the page was general introduction to the library and finding resources. Technology: HTML, Perl.

Next Step: a new staff member 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 consultation with the 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 very basic and not very polished. Some users also noted that they never viewed the scripted words across the top were actually visible.

Next Step: A new staff member was hired for about six months and a half years. Technology: HTML, Perl, JavaScript. Web/Eclipse used for site search capabilities.

“The Team Approach”: A Web Team worked for about nine months looking at 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 amount of information. Technology: ColdFusion, Java, 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.

Web Technology Timeline

February 1993: Mosaic, first graphical web browser, released.


1995: Java introduced by Sun

1996: Delphi 1.0 released.

1996: JavaScript language introduced.


January 2000: XML, 1.0 Recommendation published.


January 2001: ColdFusion 5.0 released.

Summer 2003: ColdFusion MX 6.1 released.

Research Question

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

What 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

- Page views and unique visitors
- Average daily visitors
- Average daily page views
- Bounces

Changing Roles: Anecdotes from Medical Librarians

“...In 1993 the manager of our research library wanted to know what this “internet thing” was 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’. I remember a librarian said ‘It’s a fad – no way will it last a year here.’ Having the interest, I decided not to refuse the assignment. Within a year I had created the Library’s Gateway. As soon as it was up and running, I started developing the library’s first Web page, which went live in 1995.’

“I’d love to work in the Library, too. So I created my own website, which was actually the last website my students used. This was in 1997 and I don’t think that I had expertise in web development. However, I had taken an online course and I had a website with the Library’s website. I provided some resources that others found to be helpful. It grew as time went on.”

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