

The Net Result

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This is hopefully the first of many similar articles, intended to keep the membership up-to-date with what's happening out on the so-called *Information Superhighway*. I hope it will be one of the last times I use that insidious term, for although the potential for such a glamorous, streamlined communications facility exists, it is far from "super" in its present state. Of course one could argue that a simple examination of our metropolitan highway systems, with their complex, convoluted and sometimes bottlenecked design, provides a good simile for the Internet, but one assumes this is not what was in mind when the term was originally muted.

Probably one of the most interesting Internet developments within the last few months is the takeover of AARNet by Telstra. This means the old AARNet is now known as Telstra Internet Services. This has a number of significant implications for communications in this country, not the least of which is, the commercialisation of the once "free" Australian Internet. Whereas AARNet was run and financed by the Universities through the AVCC and sought only to recover costs, Telstra is obviously in the business of making profits, and thus, pricing structures have already changed significantly. Many other concerns have arisen from this venture including the network partnership between Telstra and Microsoft to provide an Internet competitor, and the administration of the networking naming, routing and numbering systems. With enough pressure being applied by the Value Added Resellers, the change to the consumer should not be too great.

And on the question of consumers, although many thousands are taking up the call to link into the great Internet, still few really recognise what is available via this system. Hopefully this column will provide a few answers in that direction, at least for those interested in the religious content.

One of the best avenues to identify the coverage of a particular subject on the Net is through a search of one of the many indexing systems. Some of the best known are: Yahoo, Einet Galaxy, Lycos, and WebCrawler. A quick look under Religion in Yahoo provides subheadings covering the following denominations:

Atheism, Bahai, Buddhism, Christianity, Creation/Evolution, Cults, Dvaita, Eastern, Evangelists, Free Dajism, Freethought, Gnosis, Hare Krishna, Hinduism, Humanism, Islam, Jainism, Jehovah's Witnesses, Judaism, Monasticism, Osho, Paganism, Quan Yin, Satanism, Scientology,

Shamanism, Sikhism, Taoism, Universalism, Witchcraft, Zoroastrianism, and much more . . .

Religion is one of those subjects that is flourishing on the Net.

Just looking under Christianity produces another plethora of sub-subjects:

Anglican/Episcopal, Baptist, Boston Church of Christ, Catholicism, Christadelphians, Mormons, Church of the Nazarene, Lutheran, Mennonite, Orthodox, Presbyterian, Quakers, Seventh Day Adventist, United Methodists, and United Pentecostals.

And these are just a small collection of the 456 world wide web sites which are classified under the Christian banner. Of course the actual usefulness of the sites is varied, and many range from a simple statement of fact, to a comprehensive web site with many facets, covering an entire subject area in-depth.

A good example of Internet usage is seen under the heading Bibles. Here are listed a number of sites which make it easy for biblical scholars to follow their subject. It is a simple matter of retrieving information from a number of different translations, including the KJV, RSV, Vulgate, Elberfelder (German), Louis Segond (French), Ible-Bay (pig Latin) as well as in Italian, Finnish, Danish, Swahili, Swedish and Spanish.

Further investigation will provide the World Wide Study Bible which is the Internet equivalent of the commentary/concurrent edition idea. For each book there is an entry for Easton's Bible Dictionary, and then it will provide for any given chapter of any book the following information: KJV, RSV, Young's Literal, and Darby translations, as well as the Concise Matthew Henry Commentary and Aaron's Bible Commentary.

There are many types of systems like this on the net, including the NIV in some cases and full text searching. And, although it is possible to buy CD-ROM products to do the same thing (at a faster speed), the cost factor is important. These online versions are constantly being upgraded and amended, where as a CD version is a static item, which will require another purchase if upgrading is desired.

This is a mere skimming of the surface of what is out there and what is happening, and over the next few issues we will examine some of these in-depth. From newsgroup to e-mail to ftp and more.