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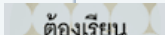
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WEB AFFAIRS: Access to culture should remain free

Published on Aug 18, 2003

If you have been on the Internet for a while and have done a certain amount of research with search engines you probably remember finding results whose URL (ie Web address) started with "SunSITE.unc.edu".

This was a huge website, with many mirrors, funded by grants from Sun Microsystems. Over the years, the project evolved into a collection of information technology experiments funded by a variety of sources: some academic, some corporate, and some small information technology start-ups. The name changed twice and the site is now known as ibiblio.

Explain the people in charge of the project's maintenance: "ibiblio is a diverse and expansive collection of information on the Internet, created and maintained by the public, for the public. It is the ultimate collection of freely available information, the future of Internet librarianship, and a collaboration between the former SunSITE.unc.edu (University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill) and the Centre for Public Domain."

Whereas an average municipal public library receives a few hundred visitors a week ibiblio.org averages three million information requests per day. The contributor-maintained collections are expanding daily.

The contents of this "collections of collections" can be browsed in a Yahoo!-like fashion, ie, by clicking on a topic from a list of 93 entries whose main headings are: Arts and Recreation; Geography, Biography, and History; Language; Literature; Natural Science and Mathematics; Philosophy and Psychology; Reference; Religion and Theology; Social Sciences; Technology and Applied Sciences.

But this is not – by far – the only aspect of the project which also has among many other features an online Internet-encyclopaedia and an "Expo" section with exhibits about the Vatican, Soviet Archives, 1492, the Dead Sea Scrolls and Paleontology.

And of course – as one would expect from a site about public domain and open source – a large section is devoted to Linux, the free open-source operating system that is the biggest threat to Microsoft's hegemony in this field.

But not just the domain is public, the site is too. You can contribute to this "conservancy" of freely available information, including software, music, literature, art, history, science, politics, and cultural studies.

"If you've got something culturally cool and need a place to go, if you've got software that you think would go great with our already humongous collection of free software", just contact the webmaster.

And help make the Internet a bit less money-minded.

Xavier Galland

The Nation

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Address: <http://www.ibiblio.org>

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