Camille's Comments

The Technology Committee has recently added three new members: Susan Biery (Collection Development and Management), Aimee Quinn (Government Publications) and Chris Wiatrowski (Nonbook). The Committee is now up to its full complement and has members that represent all sections of the library. Committee member names appear in each issue of Library TechNotes. Please feel free to discuss your concerns with any member of the Committee. You can be sure that they will let your concerns be known!

NEON Update
By the time this issue goes to press, John Fox will be finishing up the translation of the NEON menu and authorization files for the move to a new hardware platform. With that migration complete, it is expected that SCS will begin work on the development of a graphical user interface for NEON. Dubbed NEON II, the academic libraries of Nevada will have what we have always hoped for: an HTML version of NEON. Patrons can click on Britannica Online, for example, and be able to search that resource as they would with a Web browser. (Currently through NEON the patron must use LYNX, a character-based browser.) We intend to purchase Innovative Interface’s new Web-Pac product which provides a Web-interface to the online catalog. And as our library’s Web pages continue to grow and develop, a patron will be able to “click and move” seamlessly between NEON, the library’s Web pages, to the online catalog, back to NEON and so forth. We will still have the character-based version of NEON for those patrons dialing in from home and whose microcomputers can’t display the graphics seen on the World Wide Web.

NEON II is tentatively set to be ready in June. This means that the library will have to purchase and install modern workstations for the public areas that can support a graphical user interface. This will be a big project and is dependent upon the upgrade of network hubs around the library and the installation of new hubs (e.g. in the Nonbook area) to support NEON II workstations on that floor. The equipment for the new hubs has already arrived. (It was purchased as part of a planned upgrade to the library network. We have already run out of ports on some of the hubs and these must be expanded.) We hope to have a new Computer Systems Technician hired in the next month or so to work on this with John. Lamont will also assist with new workstation set-ups as he did with the classroom.

(Continues on Page 4)

TechQuote

"Persons grouped around a fire or candle for warmth or light are less able to pursue independent thoughts, or even tasks, than people supplied with electric light. In the same way, the social and educational patterns latent in automation are those of self-employment and artistic autonomy."

Marshall McLuhan (1911-80)
Canadian communications theorist.
Understanding Media, ch. 33 (1964)
How fast is your redraw?

PC Mechanic

My PC is Killing Me!

Well, not quite, but yes, your PC could be hazardous to your health. However, if you’re conjuring up images of being irradiated by your monitor, you’ll be disappointed to find that the true dangers are much less dramatic (but no less real).

What is the most dangerous part of your computer? Would you believe your chair? Huh?

By far the most common computer-related disability being reported these days is what is known as a Repetitive Stress Injury (RSI), a result of the fact that the human body was not engineered by nature to be a machine. Repeat the same hand/wrist motion over and over again, hour after hour and day after day, and there’s a not-so-bad chance that the affected joints and tendons will become inflamed and swollen. Worse yet, those tendons have to travel back and forth in a narrow bony channel in your wrist, and when they get too swollen to fit, the problem becomes much worse. (This subset of RSI is called Carpal Tunnel Syndrome, and it hurts. Lots.)

If you think this ailment sprang into being with the invention of computers, think for a moment about scales on the piano? Well, many music students have done just that for at least two centuries or so, and they were developing RSIs long before the computer arrived. Ironically, typists have been mostly spared, because they had to periodically stop to hit the carriage return (which long, long ago in a galaxy far away was *not* a key on a keyboard but an actual lever you had to reach up and push).

So what does your chair have to do with this? Just this: one of the significant contributors to the development of RSI is the angle at which you hold your hands while typing. Ideally (according to experts), your arms and wrists should both be parallel to the floor (not angled upward away from you), and you’ll find this requires that either your keyboard be set fairly low or your chair high or both. Since most of us don’t have the luxury of recessed keyboard wells, setting your chair high is your only alternative.

Incidentally, many keyboards have little pop-up feet on the back that let you tilt the keyboard with the back higher than the front. Don’t! Once again, this will leave you angling your wrists backwards, and that is potentially a Bad Thing.

What about your eyes? Well, most monitors sold these days have low radiation output levels, and so far no one to my knowledge has definitively pinned any serious complications on the older ones, so how worried you want to get about that issue is up to you. However, one thing has been shown to seriously cause fatigue, and that is flicker.

Your monitor, like your TV set, redraws the same picture on the screen many times per second (a TV does this 60 times per second, in step with your alternating house current). Computer monitors vary, redrawing from 50 to as often as 80 times per second (this is called the “vertical refresh rate” in technobabble). The faster the redraw, the less flicker you can perceive.

Even if you can’t see it, though, flicker has been shown to cause significant fatigue among computer workers. Today the recommendation is that your PC should redraw the screen 70 times per second or more.

How do you adjust this? Well, like so many things in your PC you need to look at your documentation. Many older video boards and monitors won’t support a refresh rate faster than 50 or 60 times per second. In fact, trying to make a monitor run at faster than its rated speed can easily burn it out, requiring expensive repairs. So don’t try this yourself unless you know exactly what you’re doing. But if you do think that your monitor is noticeably flickering, you might want to ask a qualified technician to look at it and see if it can be reset at a faster rate.

Finally, don’t underrate the value of a pair of “computer” eyeglasses. Most glasses, especially bifocals, are made on the assumption that everything you do is either up close (reading) or far away (driving). Looking at a computer screen 2 feet away falls into the crack in between, with the result that many pairs of glasses just aren’t in focus when you’re using a computer. The $100 or so for a pair of glasses adjusted for that 2 feet can be well worthwhile in reduced headaches and fatigue.

Lamont Downs
Tech Book Review

Civilizing Cyberspace by Steven E. Miller

Miller weaves together business trends, political economy, American history, technological savvy, and an awareness of our everyday needs, to focus on the issues that really matter and to make the choices clear. Readable, comprehensive, and insightful, Civilizing Cyberspace is for nontechnical people as well as computer professionals, concerned citizens as well as official policymakers. At the end of each chapter are question and answer sessions with key business and academic individuals who respond to questions based from the chapter's content.

Summarized from a book review at a site called the Local Government Network.

Paulette Nelson

Tuma's Wondrous Web Sites

John December's Computer-Mediated Communication Magazine
This electronic journal is must reading for all cybrarians and others interested in technology articulate writing, and the Internet.
http://www.rpi.edu/~decemj/cmc/mag/index.html

Happy Chinese Lunar New Year!
Will The Year of the Rat be an auspicious one for you? Visit this site and see.
http://harmony.wit.com/chinascape/ChineseNewYear/

Point's Top 5% of All Web Sites
Any Web connoisseurs out there? Check out the Point's Top 5% sites to see if you agree with their ratings. Sites are evaluated on content, presentation and experience. I've found that sites that rate in the 40's in one or two categories are pretty special.
http://www.pointcom.com/

Comet Hyakutake
Look to the stars. Comet Hyakutake promises to be the brightest since 1976, and should be discernable in March. Get all the details at this JPL/NASA site, including new photos that show the comet's tail splitting into two showy plumes.
We could be in for quite a display.
http://newproducts.jpl.nasa.gov/comet/hyakutake

The Daily INC
A refreshing change from the daily newspaper, The Daily Internet News Collage features news from all sorts of sources, comics, headlines, sports, stock market reports, and news from around the world. No more newsprint ink on your fingers now that the Daily INC is here. Several areas (Wall Street Journal, Nando) require a one time registration, but everything is free. The local aspect focuses on Los Angeles.
http://www.rhythm.com/inc/

"Any Web Connoisseurs out there?"

Kay Tuma
Glossary

hardware platform - Specific computer hardware, as in the phrase "platform-independent." It may also refer to a specific combination of hardware and operating system and/or complex, as in "this program has been ported to several platforms." 

graphical user interface (GUI) - The use of pictures rather than just words to represent the input and output of a program. A program with a GUI runs under some windowing system (e.g. The X Window System, Microsoft Windows, Acorn RISC OS, NEXTSTEP). The program displays certain icons, buttons, dialogue boxes, etc., in its windows on the screen and the user controls it mainly by moving a pointer on the screen (typically controlled by a mouse) and selecting certain objects by pressing buttons on the mouse while the pointer is pointing at them. (Though Apple Computers would like to claim they invented the GUI with their Macintosh operating system, the concept originated in the early 1970s at Xerox's PARC laboratory).

html - (Hypertext markup language) Hypertext document format used by the World-Wide Web. Built on top of SGML. "Tags" are embedded in the text. A tag consists of a "<", a "directive," zero or more parameters and a "">

web browser - A program which allows a person to read hypertext. The browser gives some means of viewing the contents of nodes and of navigating from one node to another. Mosaic, Lynx and W3 are browsers for the World-Wide Web. They act as clients to remote servers.

interface - Hardware, software and/or procedures for the transfer of information between interconnected equipment or processes.

hubs - (By analogy with the hub of a wheel) A device connected to several other devices. A hub is used to connect several computers together. In a message handling service, a number of local computers might exchange messages solely with a hub computer. The hub would be responsible for exchanging messages with other hubs and non-local computers.

(Continues on Page 5)
Technology Booklist


Glossary

Report - A logical channel in a communications system. The Transmission Control Protocol and User Datagram Protocol transport layer protocols used on Ethernet use port numbers to demultiplex messages.

Database - One or more large structured sets of persistent data, usually associated with software to update and query the data. A simple database might be a single file containing many records, each of which contains the same set of fields where each field is a certain fixed width.

Technobabble - The use of incomprehensible words, acronyms and phrases to describe technological processes. This glossary is an excellent example of technobabble.

[Most definitions in this glossary are from The Free Online Dictionary of Computing. http://wombat.doc.ic.ac.uk/]

Comments...

(Continued from Page 1)

Innovative New Products Task Force

A number of new "products" are available from Innovative Interfaces since Release 9.0/9.1. The most exciting product (Innovative calls them products when they are really software modules or enhancements that have to be purchased) is one called Web-Pac which provides an HTML interface to the online catalog. I had mentioned this product in last month's Comments (see http://www.iii.com). Both the UNR and UNLV libraries plan to purchase this product to take advantage of NEON II's capabilities and to provide powerful links from bibliographic records to Internet resources. Some money will be available for additional Innovative products. The following Technology Committee members will be coordinating the review and prioritizing of new products under the categories defined by Innovative:

Database Maintenance & Report Writer
Laralee Nelson

Online Public Access Catalog (OPAC)
Susan Biery
Circulation Control
Holly Huckeba
Acquisitions Control
Kathy Rothermel
Serials Control
Pam Sitton

These people will be leading the discussion on new products in various section/unit meetings and with interested individuals one-on-one. Please contact one of these Committee members to provide your input. The Task Force will then meet as a group to discuss the products that impact more than just one section of the library (e.g. re-indexing the database). The Task Force's prioritized list of products will be forwarded to the Associate Dean for a final decision.

Like they say, the only thing that is constant around here is change!

Camille Clark Wallin