BIBLIOGRAPHIES IN AN ONLINE ENVIRONMENT

Larry Auld*

Abstract

An electronic journal can support continually updated bibliographies. The concept of such bibliographies is discussed, and a number of procedural matters are considered. Possible criteria are suggested for the selection of topics and compilers.

An often present, some would say popular, feature of many professional publications is the short, annotated bibliography on a current topic. (For example, see "Quick Bibs" in American Libraries.) Indeed, such bibliographies are current while the compilers are selecting the items and writing the annotations. But, by the time they are printed and distributed, they will be only recently current, at least several weeks having passed by swiftly. Thereafter, they become historical artifacts of what were once, but are no longer, reflections of current thinking. Thus, the very purpose of these short, current bibliographies is quickly betrayed by the relatively slow processes of printing technology.

The adoption of electronics in communications and publishing has led to predictions of a paperless society in which journals will be entirely electronic and without print-on-paper editions. The foremost attributes of electronic publishing are currency, (with time lag between compilation and publication

---

* Larry Auld, Assistant Dean, Graduate School of Library and Information Science, University of Illinois, U.S.A.
significantly less than with print media), continual revision (so that currency may be maintained), and excision (whereby obsolescent items may be deleted). In such an environment we have an opportunity to create a dynamic new form of current bibliography, one more nearly serving the primary purpose of currency plus some new features. This new form of bibliography is described in the remainder of this paper with particular attention to criteria for their selection and content, their format, and editorial considerations.

Let us imagine an electronic journal to which new articles are added at intervals and older articles are retained and often updated. In this journal we want to feature a series of continually updated, selective, signed, annotated bibliographies on topics of current interest. We will call our series EJ Bibs (short for electronic journal bibliographies).

CRITERIA

Each EJ Bib should be selected with certain criteria in mind:

1. The topics should be timely and of broad professional interest.
2. The compilers should be recognized as knowledgeable and competent with respect to the topics.
3. The selection of items for each topic should represent a concise list of best readings for the intended audience.
4. The annotations should represent the contents of the items cited in the bibliography fairly and lead to an efficient and ordered reading of the items.
5. Thus, the final selection of topics and compilers should be based on such factors as timeliness of the topic, vitality of the annotations, available space, etc.
FORMAT

Each EJ Bib should cite between a half dozen and twenty best items (e.g., books, articles, and reports) on a given topic. An introductory paragraph should define the topic and indicate the intended audience. Each annotation should incorporate a brief abstract, indicate why the item is included, and show how the item is related to the rest of the bibliography.

Each EJ BIB should be preceded by an abstract field which should conclude with dates of (1) compilation, (2) revision, and/or (3) review (i.e., "validation"). The compiler's name and affiliation should be listed at the end of each EJ Bib.

No particular bibliographic style manual should be prescribed. Therefore, compilers are at liberty to use their favorite style sheets. They should, however, be consistent in their adherence to matters of style and let the editor know which style manual is being followed.

The arrangement and sequencing of items in a bibliography should be for the compiler to determine. In general, the arrangement should present the citations and annotations in a logical sequence which would be most helpful to the reader.

Compilers should be invited to assign numbers if they perceive a particular numbering system as being especially useful to readers; otherwise, an arbitrary numbering system should be applied by the editor of EJ Bibs. Compilers, when submitting instructions for revision, additions, and/or deletions, can reference an item by number as well as having the option of citing author/title.

EDITORIAL CONSIDERATIONS

It would be desirable to have an editor who will oversee the entire series of EJ Bibs, controlling the quality and content so that an editorial point of view will be maintained. The editor
would ensure that the criteria and formats described above are observed and that currency is maintained.

Among the topics that might be examined in EJ Bibs are such areas as "Online Catalogs," "Artificial Intelligence," "Business Perspectives on Information," and "Electronic Publishing." Topics such as these, for which new developments and products being announced every few days or weeks, are particularly appropriate for testing the concept of continual revision which underlies the EJ Bibs.

Once an EJ Bib on a particular topic has been prepared and deemed marketable, it will need to be maintained. The person accepting a commitment to prepare an EJ Bib should agree to review and update the work continually. It will be the responsibility of the editor to delete an EJ Bib from the files if it has not been either updated or validated as still current by the compiler within the preceding three months. The bibliographies for some topics might require even more frequent updating if they are to be useful in a rapidly changing environment.

An additional feature of the EJ Bibs could be the provision of online access to many of the items cited. A note at the end of the annotation would indicate when an item is available and how it might be accessed. Copyright clearance and payment of royalties when appropriate would need to be negotiated. Presentation of the graphic content of cited materials would be a problem given the limitations of current technology.

When referring to an EJ Bib, users should always include the revision date as a part of the citation. Otherwise, a citation might be to an item no longer in a bibliography or to a revised (and thus different) version of a bibliography. This parallels the need to include the edition in a citation to a monograph or the volume, date, and (sometimes) edition in a citation to a periodical.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The genesis for the idea of EJ Bibs lies in a bit of history which should be acknowledged. In March 1985, Information Publishing went online with six articles as an experimental electronic journal devoted to library and information science. Information Publishing, edited by Brian Aveney, was offered by Information Access Corporation (IAC) and was available via Dialog as part of the Information Access Magazine Index(tm), Trade & Industry Index(tm), Magazine ASAP(tm), and Trade & Industry ASAP(tm) index and fulltext databases. As part of the experiment, thought was given to a number of features that might be included in a second “issue”. One of these features, originally proposed by Brian Aveney and elaborated by Larry Auld, is the EJ Bibs discussed in this paper.