

Papers presented at the Future Proof Indexer Conference, Katoomba, NSW, 27-28 Sep 1997, Australian Society of Indexers.

Future of Indexing: what do users expect?

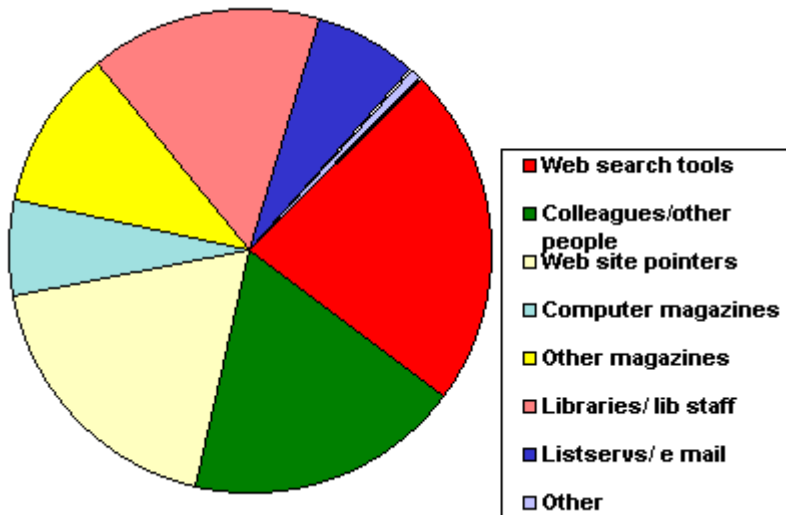
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Indexing covers a complex range of professionals and tasks. Some of the categories within which indexing is a major task are:

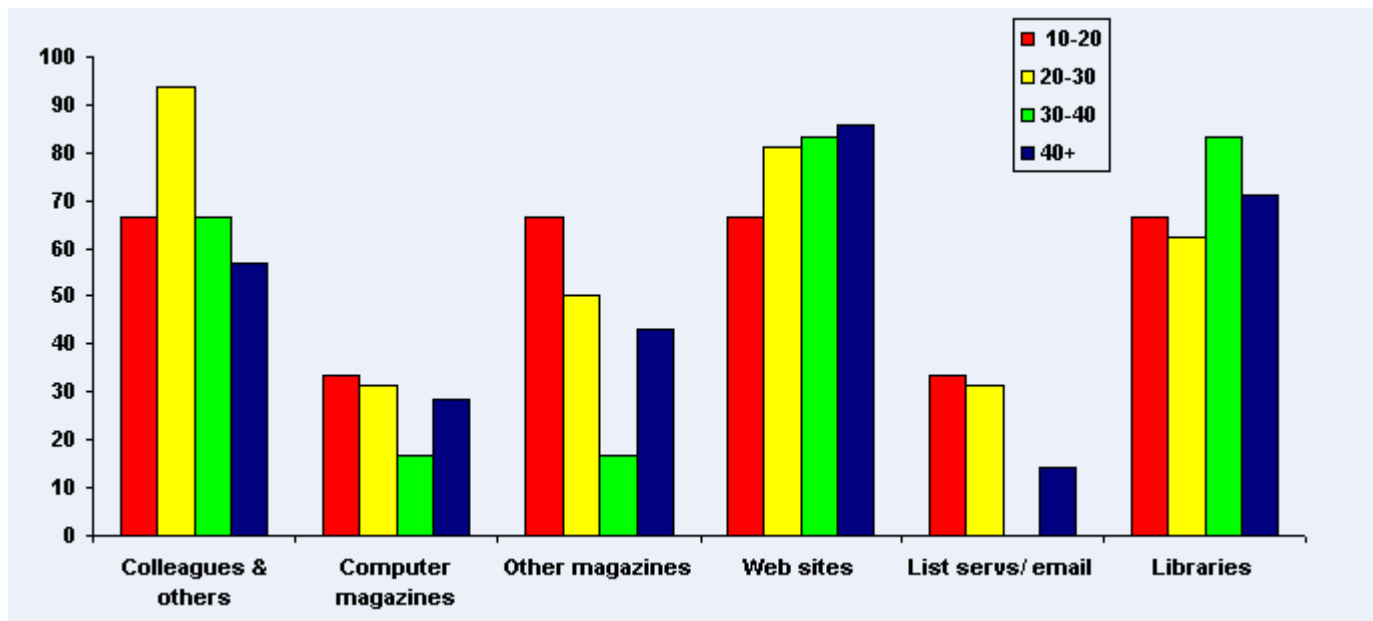
1. Management and retrieval of books, journals and other library material
Mostly undertaken by library staff
2. Management and retrieval of records
Mostly undertaken by records management staff and archivists
3. Management and retrieval of information about articles, conference papers and books (database)
Mostly undertaken by database indexers and library staff
4. Management and retrieval of web sites
Undertaken by a variety of Information Technology and Information Management staff
5. Management and retrieval of research data and business information
Managed by a wide range of internal specialists (Information Management, Library, Analysts) and increasingly outsourced

To look further at client needs for indexes I surveyed students at the University of Canberra undertaking Information Retrieval, asking them how they located information on the World Wide Web. From the 32 responses received:

- All students had used Internet indexes (or search engines), many with less than optimal success because of differences in content, masses of "hits" and limitations in searching
- After Internet Indexes the following (in order) were most heavily used to find information:
 1. Colleagues (equal 1 st ranking)
 2. Pointers from other web sites (equal 1 st ranking)
 3. Libraries and library staff (3 rd ranking)
 4. Magazines (other than computer magazines)
 5. Listserv messages
 6. Computer magazines

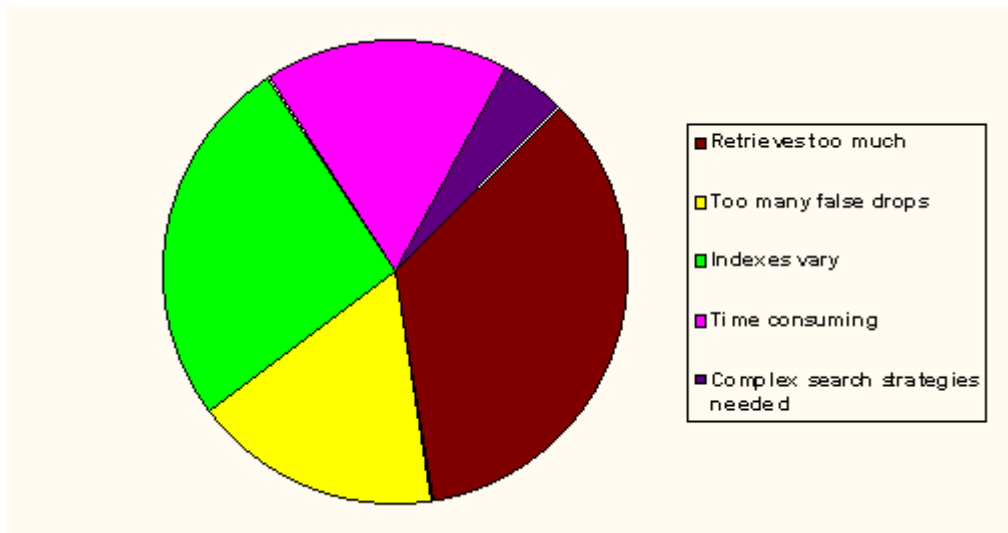


When age is considered for the responses there seem to be variations for the group 30-40 and 20-30. Individuals in the 20-30 year age group are the majority of the responses. They used colleagues and other people to a greater extent than other forms of information. The 30-40 year age group used libraries to a much greater degree than other age groups, and listservs, computer magazines and other magazines significantly less than the other age groups.



General comments indicated that there was much frustration from the very high retrieval rates, which resulted in some relevant material and much extraneous material. Concern over the great variability in the results from difference search engines. They indicated awareness that time was a very limiting factor in searching and concerns that they did not always find relevant information.

A graphical representation of the concerns expressed in comments can be seen in the following figure:



A very important questions for the future of indexers is what will happen to improve the indexing of web information and how the skills of indexers can be recognised and utilised in this new medium. One significant development that is relevant is the emergence of Metadata, or standards for data about data on Internet (primarily web) sites.

What is metadata?

At its simplest metadata has 2 attributes:

1. It is data about data (a record of attributes)
2. It is also a pointer or indicator of the location of the data.

Lagoze

[From Lagoze, C (1996) The Warwick Framework : A Container Architecture for Diverse Sets of Metadata, *D-Lib magazine July/August 1996*]

1. Content or data is a first class object
2. Metadata or data about data is a second class object
3. There is a linkage or relationship between metadata and data (even the catalogue can itself be a first class object)

Why is metadata important?

- Complexity of and need for improvements in Internet (primarily web) searching
- Knowledge management issues
- Emergence of information recording in museum industry emerging as a strong need
- Emergence of technical standards which allow for rich encoding of information

What do users want?

- Relevant material (not thousands of hits)
- Time saving indexes
- Indexes which offer good complex searching
- Reliability and Currency

What are some of the emerging issues?

- Establishing technical standards (high participation by IT and Librarians)
- Establishing implementation packages/protocols

- Development of search engines which use Metadata (Resource Discovery issues)
- Organisational commitments to indexing their web data
- Funding for professional indexing and development of professional skills in web indexing

Some examples of metadata in action:

- Green Pages: Environmental data directory
- Instructional Management Systems Project
- AusGILS (Australian Government Information Locator Service)

Under development

Now it's over to you!!!!