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Innovations Affecting Us/ Gophers

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Innovations Affecting Us

Column Editor: **Judy Luther** (The Faxon Company)

Unlike the furry critters that burrow in the ground, Gophers are gateways to the Internet and they can open a huge variety of remote files for our use and for our patrons. As a gopher client we can access directories, full text files (including books), phone books, search engines, library databases, weather, newspapers, recipes — any database maintained on a gopher server. Navigating the Internet becomes easy in a gopher mode as there are menus listing database options and it is not necessary to know the address of other institutions to search their databases.

Gophers represent a type of client/server technology which has been around for a few years. Basically it uses computer power at both ends, the "client" ideally uses a workstation to search a remote database on a "server". Although you can use a terminal if your network machine runs the gopher client interface, PC's have a better response time, an easier user interface and allow you to manipulate downloaded data. Gopher software is available for many client (Macintosh, PC, NeXT, Sun, etc.) and most server platforms.

Gopher was developed in 1991 by the University of Minnesota Computer and Information Services Department and is freely distributable. It has spread like wildfire. Small and large institutions alike are using it in the client mode to access information on the Internet, and in the server mode to offer local databases on the Internet. Demonstrated during the Charleston Conference last fall, Gopher was so popular there was standing room only.

Why is Gopher so successful? It demonstrates to us very clearly that information is "nonlocal". Although I know that is true, since we can remotely access online catalogs from different institutions on the Internet, I was surprised at my reaction when **Bill Britten**, Automation Librarian at the University of Tennessee, demonstrated Gopher and its capabilities to me.

It is so easy to mount files to share, publishers and vendors could list available materials for selection and ordering. Any remote database mounted on a gopher server can be easily accessible on the Internet via menus listing options from which to choose.

Once you enter the world of "gopherspace", you will find other terms being used such as "gopherize your data" which means making it available via a gopher server. "Archie" provides keyword access to FTP (file transfer protocol) archives in gopherspace. "Veronica" (my favorite, stands for "very easy rodent-oriented net-wide index to computerized archives") provides keyword access to the growing number of gopher server menus that we can browse.

Gophers are both a solution and a problem. They enable anyone with a PC to mount data which can be searched internationally. As a result, we will be faced with a multitude of files which will make finding the information we need both easy and challenging. A va-

riety of services will develop in the future to facilitate this process. If you'd like to discuss these issues, you might be interested in attending either **Nationalnet** in Washington, D.C. in April or **Educom** in Cincinnati this October.

You can obtain Gopher software via anonymous FTP from "boombox.micro.umn.edu" in the directory "/pub/gopher". If you just want to look at gopher from a public service terminal, telnet to "consultant.micro.umn.edu" and log in as "gopher". This will give you a feel for the variety of files available and how they work.

The people who developed the gopher software can be reached via email "gopher@boombox.micro.umn.edu" or write to them at Internet Gopher Developers, 100 Union St. S.E.#190, Minneapolis MN 55455, FAX 612-625-6817. You can subscribe to the gopher-news mailing list by sending a request to "gopher-news request@boombox.micro.umn.edu".

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