

From Print to the Web: Lessons Learned

Written by Vicky Speck, Editorial Director, and adapted from the book *Creating Web Accessible Databases: Case Studies for Libraries, Museums, and Other Nonprofits*, by Julie M. Still.

All database publishers, whether university libraries, associations, or commercial houses, face the same questions in deciding to take a database or a collection to the web. Is this a database or collection suitable for web delivery? Why is a web product desirable? What are the costs and how will they be covered? Is there sufficient technical and editorial expertise in-house to do the work or are outside resources needed? How much time will the development process take? What ongoing support will be needed once the database or collection is on the web?

Almost three years ago, ABC-CLIO, publisher of *Historical Abstracts and America: History and Life*, started exploring these issues in developing the web versions of these two history research databases. Web versions were finally launched in September 1998, almost two years after the web development process started. These two databases are two of the most respected abstracting and indexing research tools used for academic research in history and the other social sciences. *Historical Abstracts* covers the history of the world outside of the United States and Canada from 1450 to the present. *America: History and Life* covers the history of the United States and Canada from prehistory to the present. Between the two databases, there are over one million entries.

Our development team learned a host of while working on this project. Some of them can be summarized below.

- It will take more time and frequently more money to complete the project, and the parts of the project that one assumes will be the easiest to do frequently are not
- The tool or utility that one is sure must be available to do some of the work usually does not yet exist. Everyone agrees it's a great idea, but the tool must be created before the project can go any further.
- "Feature-itis" can be costly and can complicate the vision of what the publisher is trying to accomplish with the product.
- Hardware problems can cause just as much trouble as software problems. At times, one must trouble-shoot to find the real cause of the current problem. The hardware problem may be on the user's site and not necessarily on the host site but trouble-shooting must be done at both locations.
- Never underestimate storage space or processing power. A good estimate is to double what you expect to need sometime in the future. (We have had to upgrade hardware twice since our databases were available on the web.)

Web delivery of information, particularly reference information, is where much publishing effort is being directed, whether it is publishers such as ABC-CLIO mounting its own products on the web or companies such as netLibrary mounting electronic versions of reference books from a number of publishers. To do it well requires time, attention to detail, and a vision of what an electronic version of a print product could look like and could function.

From the book, *Creating Web Accessible Databases: Case Studies for Libraries, Museums, and Other Nonprofits*. Julie M. Still, editor. Published by Information Today, Inc., Medford, New Jersey USA. Copyright 2001 by Julie M. Still, used by permission. All rights reserved. For more information or to order: <http://www.infotoday.com/catalog/books.htm>.