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SWAIS Gateway: How to Set One Up, User Support Issues, and Why Join Up?

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I. Introduction

Our beginnings as a "Gateway" were very simple. The U.S. Government Printing Office was looking for a local area "Gateway." So Gil Baldwin, Chief of the Library Division at GPO, contacted Joan Cheverie, who is the Head of the Government Documents Department at Lauinger Library at Georgetown University. After much discussion with Mr. Baldwin and Lauinger Library's administration concerning technical requirements and potential impact on the library staff, Ms. Cheverie responded enthusiastically to the invitation of being a "Gateway" for GPO Access.

II. How Was SWAIS Set Up?

SWAIS was set up with the assistance of Lauinger Library's Systems Office. The library already had a Sun file server (SparkServer 1000). The department acquired a modem, a terminal server, and two pieces of software (tcl and Expect). Steven Jackson, the Head of the Systems Office at Lauinger Library, programmed the modem and terminal server and configured the software, which took approximately three weeks. At that time, the current version of our library's integrated library system, Innovative Interfaces Inc. or III, allowed users to connect to GPO Access by dialing in, logging in, typing a password, and typing a terminal emulation. This version of the system's software had connectivity, however it did not have the means for scripting. In addition, we were unable to improve the screen display. The words of the text would wrap around the edges and it was difficult to read.

The next release of the III software (Release 9.0) allowed for scripted connectivity. Users could then go through our library catalog, but never see the log-in process because it had been scripted with a log-in. Our system has 3 modems and virtually unlimited telnet ability because the library has 90+ user licenses for III. In other words, at any one time 90 simultaneous sessions can be occurring on our library system.

Users can connect to GPO Access in one of two ways:

First, they can telnet to George at 141.161.93.5 and the log-in is George.

Second, they can dial in at 202-687-6296 for 1200 baud or 202-687-1887 or 202-687-5967 for 2400 baud and the log-in is George.

The basic equipment to connect to GPO Access through SWAIS is outlined in the "Recommended Minimum Technical Guidelines for Federal Depository Libraries" published in Administrative Notes, v. 16, no. 17, pp.19-21 (Dec. 15, 1995).

Steven Jackson wanted me to inform you that he would be happy to answer any of your systems questions regarding GPO Access (the SWAIS way).

III. How Is It Working Now? Positive Aspects, User Support Issues

How is it Working Now?

GPO Access has been working well. Steven Jackson provided statistics for me to share with you. He can only provide statistics which reflect the number of times our system was used to connect to the "Gateway." He cannot provide figures reflecting the number of searches nor the number of documents retrieved.

September 1995	228
October 1995	301
November 1995	519
December 1995	138
January 1996	260
February 1996	163
March 1996	346

Since we became a "Gateway" in late summer, we do not have a full year of use data available. Therefore, there is not enough data to make a significant analysis of the seasonal usage pattern. However, it can be assumed that the government furlough, poor weather, and the holidays accounted for variances in the monthly usage of our "Gateway."

In the first six months, the GPO Access Gateway has developed a loyal audience through Georgetown University. Steven Jackson informed me that GPO Access now constitutes five to six percent of all Lauinger Library's gateway activities, which is significant considering the number of gateways available at Georgetown University.

Positive Aspects

An outstanding feature of GPO Access is the continual growth of new information sources being made accessible through the service. Federal depository libraries are kept informed about new databases available on GPO Access through Administrative Notes. Also, the Library Programs Service of the U.S. Government Printing Office is making a great effort to extend a helping hand for training. In Administrative Notes, v. 17, no. 2, pp. 13-14 (Jan. 15, 1996) there is an article entitled, "How to Request GPO Access Training or Demonstrations." This is a service which should be taken advantage of by libraries considering establishing a "Gateway."

User Support Issues

Our departmental phone number is made available to users who connect to our "Gateway." Many calls received have been questions regarding difficulty connecting to our system, for example, baud rate compatibility problems. Additionally, we talk users through searches over the phone. It is a consensus in our department that the manual for GPO Access is invaluable. Specifically, what makes the manual so useful are the examples of search strategies given for each database on the service. User assistance is also available from the GPO Access User Support Team:

IV. Conclusion: Why Join Up?

The "Gateway" libraries who provide GPO Access through SWAIS provide an important service. We enable those individuals who do not have Internet access to locate government information. We increase exposure for the U.S. Government Printing Office. We provide technical assistance to users. But most importantly, we make access available to a wider population, therefore improving public access to government information.