

*Ed. note:* I'm often asked about other places that review Internet resources. This column, by Kurt Wagner, is devoted to that topic.

**Internet resource evaluation: A discussion of review sites.** *Access:* <http://www.mckinley.com/>. *Access:* <http://www.pointcom.com>. *Access:* <http://gnn-e2a.gnn.com/gnn/wr/index.html>.

By now, many more librarians and researchers have access to the Internet than did even a year ago. Campuses, offices, colleges, and universities are becoming increasingly connected, and the Internet has seen explosive growth. Lycos, a popular Internet searching tool, claims to catalog 10 million URLs and index 91% of the Internet. Search engines such as Lycos are invaluable and essential to doing research on the Net, as essential as the catalog is to the library. However, the results of key-word searching returned with such engines can, themselves, be a problem.

Lycos can retrieve many hundreds of Internet sites per search, and descriptions of these sites are uneven. Third party review of Internet resources marks the transformation of the Internet from being a completely ad hoc network to a source for useful reference and research.

What follows is a discussion of three Internet resources which, in turn, provide evaluation of Internet resources. As the numbers of Internet sites continue to increase by hundreds of thousands per year, such evaluative tools will become increasingly important for the conduct of useful and effective information gathering from this medium.

**Magellan—McKinley's Internet Directory.** *Access:* <http://www.mckinley.com/>. The McKinley Group is a team brought together in 1993 to create Internet navigation and evaluation tools. Its directory of 1.5 million sites includes 40,000 that are fully reviewed and rated on a four-star system. Magellan/McKinley func-

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tions as a kind of "Michelin Guide" to the Internet in that if a site appears at all, it is at least given minimal approval.

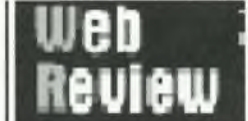
Using Magellan is simple, and it's designed to offer the Internet novice as well as the accomplished user an opportunity to sort through material for a "faster, easier, and a more enjoyable experience." From the homepage one can simply enter a key word to begin the process.

At this point, one can control the number of results returned per search, request that sites below a certain rating not be returned, or request short, medium, or long descriptions. Sites that contain no adult content are given a "green light" icon, and one can request that only "green light" sites be returned.

After a search has been entered, the results appear as an annotated list of sites. At this point, more searching terms can be entered and the search redone. Each result contains a link to the site itself, a link to the review, and a summary of the site's contents. Magellan/McKinley reviewers evaluate each site on criteria that include: completeness of coverage, organization, up-to-dateness, and ease of access. Points are awarded to sites for depth and accuracy, ease of exploration, and "Net appeal." The latter criterion measures a site's use of the Internet medium to appeal to the user; is the site thought-provoking? Is it insightful? Is it funny or cool? Each review provides the site's key words, audience, a description, language, producer, producer's address (physical), phone number, e-mail contact, cost, and whether or not it is a commercial site.

Magellan/McKinley's reviews use little evaluative language. There is no discussion of a site's drawbacks or weaknesses. The rating system implies that only sites receiving favorable review are included. In this sense, all of the sites that appear are at least "good."

**Point.** *Access:* <http://www.pointcom.com>. Sites reviewed by Point are authorized to display a "Best 5% of the Web" emblem on their homepage. This has become a sought-after badge of distinction among Web site manag-



ers. Point is owned by Lycos, the big Internet search resource, but maintains a separate operation. This association is useful, though, as both resources have hyperlinks to one another and can be used as one tool. Point serves as a filter of the Internet, reviewing what it considers the best five percent of sites. The Point staff continually monitor and search the Internet for sites to review, and also accept the nomination of sites by individuals. Reviews are categorized by broad subject. One follows the hyperlinks to a second, subject-focused page then selects reviews on the desired topic. The reviews average about 175 words and are generally positive. Inclusion alone is a positive review.

Point evaluates sites based on their content, presentation, and experience. A score from one to fifty is awarded in each category. Content assesses the thoroughness of the site and its up-to-dateness; presentation assesses its beauty and ease of use; and experience rates its overall "worthiness." The approach at Point is more fun than scholarly, as seen in a kind of fresh half-seriousness that is enjoyable.

Point pages are designed to allow searchers to sort results based on scores of any of the three categories or by number of visits to the review. Besides reviews, Point also offers an online, evaluative Web news page called Point Now, which is linked to on Point's homepage.

Point Now is a continually updated "Wall Street Journal" of the Internet and Web. Because it is designed with the "front page" look of a newspaper, the user immediately sees current news headlines hyperlinked to the associated story, a condensed "Top Pick" site review, and links to business, weather, sports, people, a special section, new sites, and new reviews. As a way of bringing together Internet and other news, Point Now has no equal. It is a useful and time-saving resource for keeping informed on this rapidly growing medium.

**GNN (Global Network Navigator) Voices—Web Review.** Access: <http://gnn-e2a.gnn.com/gnn/wr/index.html>.

GNN provides another comprehensive look at what is new and best on the World Wide Web, the Internet's graphic interface. GNN is pro-

duced by O'Reilly and Associates, who specialize in online and conventional publishing of computer, Internet, and technology-related topics. GNN Voices and Web Review take the form of online magazines, liberally borrowing the print magazine interplay of color, design, and style. These pages have a definite "pop culture" feel.

**GNN Archive.** Access: <http://gnn-e2a.gnn.com/gnn/wr/rev-index/alpha.html>.

This site archives the GNN reviews. Review criteria include a one- to five-star rating, one star being equivalent to "don't bother looking," five stars being "just about perfect, one of the best sites on the Web." GNN makes use of two unique measures in its reviews: the "Quality Time" rating which asks, "If you had only an hour, how much time would you spend at this site?"; and the "Dreck-o-meter," which indicates the amount of information deemed worthless by the GNN staff. These important, if subjective, ratings report on two aspects of Internet sites that greatly affect their usefulness and reliability as reference or research tools.

The reviews here are not categorized or searchable. The list of sites is not extensive, 200 or so, and can be browsed in alphabetical order by site name.

Although most "major" sites get attention, GNN site reviews lack the organization and scope of those at McKinley or Point, but the very good review criteria they use can help us to become more effective at evaluating sites for ourselves.

## Conclusion

A simple browse through Internet indices or a search using engines like Lycos or Webcrawler is not enough to use the medium effectively. The millions of Internet sites added annually and the variegated array of good, bad, and indifferent sites make the development of evaluative tools a necessity. A few minutes spent at one of these review resources can save hours of valuable time of virtual wandering about on the Internet.—Kurt W. Wagner, William Paterson College of New Jersey; [kurt@frontier.wilpaterson.edu](mailto:kurt@frontier.wilpaterson.edu) ■

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