Conference report

Online Information 2001 – The 25th International Online Information Meeting (IOLIM)

3–7 December 2001, London, UK

The Online Information 2001, which new name – probably – reflects the changes we have seen in the (online) information industry. It was a jubilee conference, the 25th International Online Information Meeting. Roger Bilboul's name will be for ever connected to this meeting, which he has started in a modest form with less than 50 exhibitors and a couple of hundreds delegates/visitors. Even in his wildest phantasy, he could not have imagined more than a couple of thousand visitors. Its ever largest figures have been reached in 2000, as the 2001 edition has been reflecting the September 11 tragedy in the USA with less visitors (-20%), less paid delegates (-35%), but a nearly stable number of exhibitors (289).

Your reporter has attended all 25 Online Meetings and the one with highest impact for him was the 1980 Meeting, when so many of us were shocked by the death of John Lennon. Many of us 'veterans' will remember the pioneering work of Roger Bilboul, Carlos Cuadra, Harry Collier, Arthur Elias, Eugene Garfield, Roger Summit, Alex Tomberg (with his brain child being the compilation of the first online usage statistics and the first directory of online databases published within the frame work of EUSIDIC's member services), Charles Citroen, Cor van de Wethering, Dan Wilde, David Raitt and so many others.

Delegates of the first five International Online Information Meetings (IOLIM's) would find themselves probably landed at another planet and/or attending the wrong conference, when the would have come back at the Jubilee Conference after 20 years or more. Their concerns had to do with enhancing the transmission speed during their search process (from 120/300 to 1200 baud, and higher), with unwilling PTT's and with government agencies trying to rule this business (like COBIDOC in the Netherlands in the 1970's). The business model was connect time and discounts were more or less unknown. The core of the business was STM and online business information was just born. They would have been overwhelmed by issues, like content ownership and web-based and intranet delivery of content, consortia, new business models (pay-per-view), cross-database searching, knowledge management and taxonomies, portals, digital rights management, digital libraries, wireless and remote access, information ethics, managing e-journals, information literacy, etc. They would have recognized hardly any of the exhibitors and would be worried, that they couldn't find SDC or ESA. . . . Of the 289 exhibitors, only 5 of them have been exhibiting at all 25 shows, and would have been familiar to our veterans:

- British Library,
- CAB International,
- Dialog (now part of Thomson),

- Gale (now part of Thomson), and
- INSPEC.

Most striking to them would be at this year's the exhibition has been: the isles of the large three information companies, who have absorbed nearly all the companies they use to know, such as Dialog, Engineering Index/Compendex, IAC, Metal Abstracts, Predicasts, SDC, etc.:

- Thomson,
- Reed Elsevier, and
- Wolters Kluwer.

When we take for granted, that Internet and Intranet, are no longer new information technologies, we could see at the Online Information 2001 further trends to

- the importance of content ownership,
- aggregators who try to win the platform battle,
- improved metadata and taxonomy considerations,
- consortia buying power, and
- target group/niche market oriented business models, incl. Pay-per-view announcements, but view concrete offers.

These trends require the vendors to reposition its place in the market, as stressed by Richard Harrington, CEO of the Thomson Corporation, one of the three largest information conglomerates. Many of those trends could be recognized in a presentation by Rene van den Bersselaar, manager Special Projects at the InfoCentre of Organon in Oss. He told the audience of the Dutch International Forum (Nederlandstalige sessie), that electronic resources (internally generated or externally acquired) are now made available via an Intranet to all employees world-wide. For digital storage and retrieval the software Documentum is being used. Current awareness services are offered via the so-called Contents Service and documents, incl. Tables-of-contents of hundred of journals (after digitisation) are made available via an universal interface DocViewer. The information is format and application independent. Users are able to compile their own interest profiles for the Contents Service, as well as to order themselves the required full-text documents. An enterprise portal application, which include the above mentioned electronic resources is, is in the process of implemetation.

The Dutch International Forum is one of the five international forums, which are based on the French, German, Italian and Spanish language of the attendees. In addition there is a Meeting of Scandinavian delegates.

Johan van Halm