Using the internet to keep track of new developments in distance education

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ABSTRACT

The Internet offers numerous services which educators can use to keep track of developments in their fields of interest. Internet services that can be used to provide a current awareness service (CAS) in the field of distance education are explored in this article and specific examples are considered. The services considered are all available free of charge or at a very reasonable fee and can be used with a fair amount of ease by individual users. Tables of contents services, electronic newsletters (or e-zines), push services, news filtering services, intelligent agents, news services, search engines and mailing lists and newsgroups are discussed. The value of keeping track of developments in distance education is also pointed out.

OPSOMMING

Die Internet bied talle dienste wat opvoedkundiges kan gebruik om op hoogte te bly met ontwikkelings in hul belangstellingsvelde. Hierdie artikel ondersoek Internet-dienste wat gebruik kan word om 'n aktualiteitsdiens op die terrein van afstandsonderrig te lewer. Spesifieke voorbeelde word ook vermeld. Die dienste wat oorweeg word, is meestal gratis, of teen 'n baie billike prys beskikbaar, en kan met redelike gemak deur individue gebruik word. Dienste vir inhoudsopgawes, elektroniese nuusbriewe, stootdienste, nuus-filterdienste, intelligente agente, nuusdienste, soektuie en poslyste en nuusgroepe word bespreek. Die waarde daarvan om op hoogte te bly van ontwikkelings in afstandsonderrig word ook uitgelig.

INTRODUCTION

Information is generally accepted as essential for decision making, planning and, of course, also for teaching and the development of study material. Our society is characterised by the growing importance of information, a growing need for quality information to maintain a competitive edge and also an increase in access to information by the general public. The latter has been made possible by the Internet in particular and its components such as e-mail, the World Wide Web, discussion lists and newsgroups. These trends in society should also be reflected in the educational sector. Both academic and administrative staff members should be in a position to keep track of developments in their fields of specialisation and also in their special type of education. This article focuses on methods to keep track of developments concerning distance education. The same methods can, however, also be applied to other fields of interest. They can also be introduced as part of the teaching approach: in a life-long education programme, students should learn how to stay abreast of new developments.

For well-established distance teaching institutions such as the University of South Africa (Unisa) there is renewed pressure to maintain a competitive edge. Their "monopoly" on distance teaching is now being challenged by traditional, residential universities, which are moving from conventional and attendance-based teaching methods to the exciting possibilities offered by online teaching, Web-based teaching and telematic teaching. It is therefore essential for the staff of distance teaching institutions to keep track of this growing interest in distance education and related methods of teaching and also of developments concerning instructional design, curriculum development, life-long learning, adult learning et cetera. They also need to stay abreast also in their fields of subject specialisation.

Various methods of helping people keep track of new developments have been employed by libraries and information services for at least the last two decades (Williams 1979). Such methods are referred to as current awareness services (CAS) or alerting services. Most educators are familiar with them in the form of lists of new acquisitions acquired by the library and the circulation of journals, or the circulation of photocopies of the tables of contents of journals. There are also other methods available such as the selective dissemination of information (also called SDI) where an interest profile can be run against a selection of databases available from a commercial database service. Services for newspaper clippings can also be used (Behrens 1989). Some of these methods are very expensive, and they have been used mostly by trained librarians or information specialists. They also require specialised skills for effective use.

The above-mentioned CAS traditionally offered by libraries and information services are still available and they are still very important. With the Internet a whole new range of methods of keeping track of developments has, however, also become available. These services cover subject-related interests, entertainment, sport, business, daily news and many other areas, are fairly easy to use and are aimed at so-called "end-users" (eg educators, scientists, business people).A selection of these services is considered in this article. Many of them are available free of charge, or at a very reasonable subscription fee. Before expanding on these services, and their importance for educators in distance education, it must be pointed out that an individual's use of these services does not replace the important role of libraries or information services. Librarians are still the best people to advise one on how to use such services, how to set up a search profile (ie the selection of topics, organisations etc in which one is interested) and how to select a suitable combination of services (Fourie 1999). The scope of this article unfortunately does not allow me to deal with these issues as well.

On the one hand there is a dire need for CAS to provide the right information at the right time and in the right format. On the other hand the abundance of information available can make this a daunting task. Individuals using CAS should therefore also take note of the burdens of information overload. The past few decades have been marked by growing complaints about the information explosion. Terms like "infoglut" have, for example, been coined. One British psychologist even claims to have identified a new mental disorder caused by too much information; he calls it Information Fatigue Syndrome (McCafferty 1998). Apart from using information to keep up to date with developments, it is therefore also important to consider the implications of information overload and the management of information. A balance needs to be found between the need for information, and the time, effort and cost required to deal with this information. More details on the problems of information overload can be found in a recent article by Edmunds and Morris (2000).

In this article, methods of and services for keeping track of developments in the field of distance education which are offered via the Internet will be investigated. Since there are numerous services available, the emphasis will fall on those which are either available free of charge or at reasonable subscription fees, and which are suitable for use by end-users without explicit help from librarians.

WHAT ARE CURRENT AWARENESS SERVICES AND WHAT CAN THEY OFFER?

Shenk (1997) maintains that time spent gathering information can crowd out time needed to assimilate information. This is quite true given the abundance of information available. Methods for sifting through information and selecting only that that might be of real importance are therefore necessary, as are methods that ensure that useful information is not missed. CAS can offer a solution to this, but what exactly are CAS?

As mentioned before, CAS were introduced by libraries to keep their users informed of new developments in their fields of interest. CAS include notification of new books, new journal articles, new reports or new conferences and workshops to be held. With the arrival of the Internet, there are now even more media and events to take note of, for example new online courses, new online conferences, new mailing lists and newsgroups, new Web sites, new CDS and new videos. It is also important to monitor developments concerning relevant

organisations or associations (eg United States Distance Learning Association or The Commonwealth of Learning), or competitors such as other universities or colleges. Taking note of the work of individuals (eg experts in the field of distance education such as J A Bååth, J S Daniels, B Holmberg, J Jenkins, D Keegan, M Moore, O Peters, K Rebel, D Rowntree, K Stewart and J T Verduin) or specific research groups is also an important facet of CAS. The focus is thus on taking note of a whole variety of things. This may require the use of more than one service.

Based on the earlier definitions formulated by Kemp (1979), Whitehall (1982), Hamilton (1995) and Rowley (1994, 1998), Fourie (1999) formulated a new definition of CAS to include the services offered via the Internet. Current awareness services are: "... a selection of one or more systems that provide notification of the existence of new entities added to the system's database or of which the system took note (for example documents, web sites, events such as conferences, discussion groups, editions of newsletters)". Such CAS can automatically notify users, for example via e-mail, or they can allow users to check the Web sites on a regular basis.

The question arises of why one would use CAS and what can they offer? CAS available via the Internet make it possible to

- keep track of new developments in a particular field(s) of interest (eg distance education, information science, history, computer science)
- keep track of trends in a particular field of interest (eg changes in terminology or paradigm shifts)
- keep track of new Web sites, discussion groups (listservs, Usenet groups), new publications
- keep track of new research projects in order to react timeously
- keep track of Internet-related developments (eg new search engines, changes in search engines, new authoring tools)
- take note of daily news events of interest (eg as reported in the newspapers)
- take note of developments by competitors (eg other universities, or other researchers)
- have intelligent agents learn from your preferences and filter information accordingly
- receive customised information (eg the weather report or your horoscope. For academics information on the cheapest airflights might be more appropriate.)
- keep track of new sites (on specified topics) picked up by a search engine

The above list of possibilities is based on the work of Fourie (1999), Kemp (1979), Hamilton (1995) and Whitehall (1982).

PROBLEMS THAT CAN BE EXPERIENCED WITH INTERNET CAS

Although they offer many advantages, the use of Internet CAS is not without problems. First of all one needs to know exactly what information one is interested in (eg books on distance education in general, news reports concerning distance education, mailing lists on distance education et cetera). This involves the setting up of an interest profile, which will not be dealt with in this article. More detail on interest profiles can be found in Kemp (1979), Hamilton (1995) and Fourie (1999).

There is also no one service or method that will cover all the information one may need. Therefore a combination of methods will have to be used, which can lead to duplication and extra effort in filtering the information. Free services do not always offer very powerful methods for formulating a search strategy (ie a combination of topics one is looking for). One may therefore have to search for a more general topic than actually intended, which once again requires more time to filter the information. CAS based on e-mail notification should not be a problem, as long as one is not overwhelmed by messages. It can, however, take time to visit sites on a regular basis - especially when the Internet is very slow! When using the Internet the reliability and quality of information should also always be considered. There is

also no guarantee that services which are available free of charge will be available on a continuous basis.

Regardless of these hindrances, Internet CAS can be a valuable resource for staying up to date, and it is therefore recommended that the services discussed here should at least be considered.

CAS AVAILABLE VIA THE INTERNET

The services that are discussed can be divided into the following broad categories:

- Tables of contents services and access to tables of contents provided by journal publishers
- Book alerting services
- E-zines or electronic newsletters and electronic journals
- Intelligent agents
- Filtered news services
- Push services or Webcasting
- Newspapers and broadcast news
- Search engines offering alerting services
- Mailing lists and newsgroups
- Commercial SDI or alerting services

Each category is briefly explained before examples of specific services are considered. These services are not evaluated in detail in terms of their coverage, search features offered, ease of use, user-interface et cetera. Such a discussion would be better suited to a Library and Information Science journal. The focus is on the information on distance education the services can offer. It is also not the intention to provide an exhaustive list of examples.

The addresses and descriptions of services were valid at the time of writing this article (March 2000).They may, however, have changed in the meantime.

Tables of contents services (TOCs) and access to tables of contents provided by journal publishers

Library users are used to libraries' circulating the latest journals, or at least their tables of contents. This is a time-consuming process, and often means that journals are a few months old before they reach one's desk. The Internet offers a number of useful tables of contents services, also called TOCs, which sometimes even provide access to the table of contents before the journal goes to print. There are two types of services, namely

- commercial services providing access to the tables of contents of journals from a selected number of publishers. One of the best-known and most popular services is Carl UnCover.
- services offered by publishers providing access to their own journals (eg Elsevier Science and Academic Press)

Tables of contents services allow one to scan the tables of contents of new as well as back-dated issues of journals. Although some commercial services are fairly expensive for individual subscription (eg British Library Inside), there are also services available at a modest fee. Carl UnCover, for example, charges $25 US per year. For this one can save search strategies for up to 25 topics, and one can subscribe to the tables of contents of 50 journals. The commercial services automatically notify users by e-mail about the latest tables of contents of the journals to which they subscribe. Most of the commercial services are also part of a larger document delivery service, where 24 hour delivery of articles is promised (at a price, of course!). If one is lucky one may, however, find the article(s) in which one is

interested in one's local library or in an online or electronic version of the journal on the Internet. (More about this in a later section.)

Apart from commercial services one can subscribe to the services offered by publishers. These are mostly available free of charge, and may also include automatic e-mail notification. Some publishers, however, make their tables of contents available but expect readers to check them periodically.

Since Carl UnCover is the most useful and affordable commercial service that can be recommended in the field of distance education, some of the journal titles provided are highlighted here. They include American Journal of Distance Education, Open forum: Distance Education and Open Learning, Open learning, Adult Education Quarterly, Adult Learning, Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education, British Journal of Educational Technology, Computers & Education, Educational Media and Technology Yearbook, Electronic Learning, International Journal of Instructional Media, International Journal of Lifelong Education, Journal of Computer Assisted Learning, Journal of Educational Multimedia and Hypermedia, and New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education.

The following is a list of commercial tables of contents services to consider. They all cover the field of distance education to some extent. It is, however, worth first establishing whether one's local library subscribes to any of these services via a group license.

> Carl UnCover: http://uncweb.carl.org (Automatic e-mail notification of new tables of contents of journals subscribed to. Can subscribe to 50 journals and may search up to 25 topics for a fee of $25 US per year. Linked to a 24 hour document delivery service.)

> Express.com: http://www.express.com (Provides a guest login for trial searches; automatic e-mail notification.)

The following are publishers which offer subscription services to their tables of contents or at least allow for the periodic checking of the tables of contents:

> BUBL journals: http://bubl.ac.uk/journals (Free; access to tables of contents and sometimes abstracts or full text of selected journals; requires periodic checking. One can also search on distance education.)

> Cambridge University Press: http://www.journals.cup.org (Free; offers tables of contents and abstracts; requires periodic checking.)

> Elsevier ContentsDirect: http://www.elsevier.com (Free; offers tables of contents; automatic e-mail notification; not very strong on distance education, but worth considering for ease of use and suitability for a variety of other disciplines.)

> Kluwer: http://kapis.www.wkap.nl/kapis/ (Free; offers tables of contents; requires periodic checking. Couple of useful journals on education which may also be of interest to distance education.)

> Routledge: http://www.routledge.com/routledge/journal/index.htm (Free; offers tables of contents; requires periodic checking. Couple of useful journals on education which may also be of interest to distance education.)

> SARA (Scholarly Articles Research Alerting): http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals (Free; offers tables of contents; requires periodic checking. Couple of useful journals on distance education and education in general.)

Book alerting services

There are a number of book alerting services available on the Internet. Generally one can subscribe to a broad category or categories of topics in which one is interested and one is then automatically notified via e-mail if there are new books that may be relevant. Amazon.com is the best-known book alerting service.

Amazon.com: http://www.amazon.com (Free; automatic e-mail notification; books can be ordered online.)

Barnes and Noble: http://www.barnesandnoble.com (Free; automatic e-mail notification; books can be ordered online.)

Publishers Weekly Daily: http://www.bookwire.com/pw/daily (Free; automatic e-mail notification; books can be ordered online.)

UnCover Reveal: http://www.uncweb.carl.org (Commercial; automatic e-mail notification; if available reviews are also included; books can be ordered online.)

Many of these services also offer alerting services for videos, CDs, events et cetera.

E-zines, electronic newsletters and electronic journals

There are numerous electronic journals (e-journals) available which allow free access to their tables of contents, and sometimes also to selected full text articles. In this case, it is one's own responsibility to periodically visit the Web site to check the latest tables of contents.

E-zines are messages or publications on a specific topic or selection of topics that are available on the World Wide Web. Some e-zines are available for free and are compiled and distributed by enthusiasts. Electronic newsletters work on a similar basis. One can also subscribe to some of the newsletters and have new items delivered via e-mail (eg Search Engine Report and Net-Happenings from The Internet Scout Project, or the newsletters available from About.com).

Only a small selection of e-zines, electronic newsletters and electronic journals relevant to distance educators are listed here. There are many more, and it is worthwhile to search for them. More information can be found at the following sites:

- Infojump: information for the masses: http://www.infojump.com/?ezdb,refresh
- The Mining Company: http://www.miningco.com (The Mining Company is a selection of subject guides. One can search for a topic and then combine it with a newsletter.)

The following is a list of e-zines and electronic newsletters:

CurrentCites: http://sunsite.berkeley.EDU/CurrentCites/ (Free; monthly e-mail notification.)

Distance education systemwide interactive electronic newsletter (DESIEN) http://www.uwex.edu/disted/desien/index.html (Free; e-mail notification.)

Distance Learning Notes from About.com: http://community.about.com/newsletter/index.htm (Free; e-mail notification.)

The Internet Scout Project and Net-Happenings. There is also a Scout Project on social science: http://scout.cs.wisc.edu/scout/report/index.html (Net-Happenings keeps track of new sites on the Internet. It sends out a

digested message once or more each day. There are also a number of other newsletters and reports one can subscribe to.)

The following is a selected list of journals relevant to distance education which can be accessed online. There are many more available. Most of these journals can also be accessed via the Distance Education Clearinghouse (http://www.uwex.edu/disted/lobline.htm)

American Journal of Distance Education:
http://www.ed.psu.edu/acsde/jour.asp (Offers tables of contents.)

Distance Education: an International Journal:
http://www.usq.edu.au/dec/decjourn/demain.htm (Offers tables of contents.)

e-Journal of Instructional Science and Technology (e-JIST):
http://www.usq.edu.au/eledpub/e-jist/index.html (Full text articles available in HTML and PFD format.)

European Journal of Open and Distance Learning:
http://www1.nks.no/eurodl.index.html (Still partly under construction; seems to offer free subscription.)

International Journal of Educational Technology:
http://www.outreach.uiuc.edu/ijet (Offers access to full text articles.)

The Internet and Higher Education: http://sbe.nova.edu/ihe (Not fully active at the time of writing this article, but seems very promising.)

Journal of Distance Education: http://www.hil.unb.ca/Texts/JDE/ (Offers tables of contents and abstracts.)

Journal of Distance Learning Administration:
http://www.westga.edu/~distance/jmain11.html (Offers tables of contents and abstracts.)

Journal of Interactive Media in Education: http://www-jime.open.ac.uk/ (Offers access to pre-print articles (open for comment) as well as published articles.)

Journal of Library Services for Distance Education:
http://www.westga.edu~library/jlsde/ (Offers access to full text articles.)

Online Chronicle of Distance Education & Communication:
http://www.fcae.nova.edu/disted/index.html (Offers access to full text articles.)

Intelligent agents

Intelligent agents are programmes that learn from what one does while one is on the Internet. They remember the topics one searched for, notice the types of information resources one prefers et cetera. There are different types of systems based on intelligent agents, such as recommendation systems (eg Amazon.com and Alexa which recommend books and music titles). There are also notifiers (eg Net Minder's MindIt, The Informant, TracerLock and Daily Diff from Ingenius) which notify one about changes to particular Web sites. Intelligent agents can also search the Web (and other Internet resources) for information on one's topic(s) of interest. In the field of distance education notifiers are especially important to keep track of changes in

- organisations
- societies
- individuals (eg subject experts)
- competing institutions
- associations.

The following is a list of services based on intelligent services:

Alexa: http://www.alexa.com (Recommendation system.)

Amazon.com: http://www.amazon.com (Recommendation system.)

The Informant: http://informant.dartmouth.edu/ (A free service that will do Web searches for one, and then e-mail the results. At periodic intervals, which one specifies, the Informant uses the Altavista, Lycos, Excite, and Infoseek search engines to find the 10 Web pages that are most relevant to one's keywords. As a second option, one can enter up to five URLs (Uniform Resource Locators) that are of particular interest to one. At periodic intervals, the Informant checks these Web pages and sends one e-mail if any of them have been updated. If a new page appears in the top 10 or if one of the pages from the previous top 10 is updated, one is notified. Alternatively, one can enter up to five URLs that are of particular interest to one.)

NetMinder - Mind-It: http://www.netmind.com/ (NetMinder is a free service on the Web that watches for changes on Web pages and notifies one.)

TracerLock: http://peacefire.org/tracerlock (Sends searches to AltaVista and reports on new pages with one's search terms by sending one an e-mail message.)

The following is a list of sites that can be useful in monitoring for changes concerning distance education. Please note that it is only a selection of sites.

American Distance Education Consortium: http://www.adec.edu/

British Association for Open Learning: http://www.baol.co.uk

Canadian Association for Distance Education: http://www.cade-aced.ca

Commonwealth of Learning: http://www.col.org/

Distance Education Clearinghouse: http://www.uwex.edu/disted/home/html

Distance Learning Channel: http://www.ed-x.com

Distance Learning International: http://www.distantlearning.com/main.html

Distance Learning on the Net: http://homepage.interaccess.com/~ghoyle/

Education World: http://www.education-world.com/

European Association of Distance Teaching Universities (EADTU): http://www.eadtu.ouh.nl

Finnish Association for Distance Education: http://oyt.oulo.fi/fade/eng/fedeesc.htm

Institute for Distance Education (IDE): http://www.umuc.edu/ide/ide.html

International Center for Distance Learning: http://www.collegelearning.com/

OLT Learner's Corner: http://olt-bta.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/learning/index.html

Open and Distance Learning Association of Australia (ODLAA):
http://www.odlaa.org

PennState College of Education: http://www.ed.psu.edu/acsde/

United States Distance Learning Association: http://www.usdla.org/

University of Wisconsin-Extension: http://www1.uwex.edu/

WannaLearn.com: http://www.wannalearn.com/

World Lecture Hall to monitor sites developing Web-based university-level academic courses in specific disciplines:
http://wnt.cc.utexas.edu~ccdu543/wlh.test1.htm

There is also a growing trend for individuals to publish personal home pages listing the publications, research interests and work in progress of experts. To check on such sites, one can use search engines such as Northern Light (http://www.nlsearch.com) or AltaVista (http://www.altavista.com).

Filtered news services

Filtered news services are only useful to those interested in news announcements affecting distance education, and may perhaps be of greater value to management and administration.

Newswire services provide filtered news services or personal Web services. Examples of such services include Crayon, and portals such as MyYahoo and My Excite Channel, NewsPage, and NewsAlert. These services receive news and articles from many sources, for example newswires and trade journals. Delivery is normally via their Web site (one has to go and check for new entries) or via e-mail. Only a few of the services are listed here. The kind of information that can be expected will mostly be news headlines, announcements and so on. Portals such as MyYahoo and My Excite Channel offer one-stop searching and shopping on the Internet. They act as a main gateway to the Internet that includes a search engine plus additional content (such as current news, entertainment etc). They are designed to keep people at the portal for as long as possible. Many of the search engines and well-known directories are moving towards becoming portals, for example Yahoo and Excite. The value of portals depends on the kind of information required. Academics would definitely not be encouraged to spend time on monitoring their horoscopes, the latest sport results or movie reviews. Information on the cheapest airflights to encourage attendance of overseas conferences may, however, be valuable.

The following is a selection of news filtering services:

CRAYON: http://crayon.net (Free. Personalised news service.)

Integrated NewsWire: http://www.artigen.com/newswire/index.html (Free. Lists current headlines from various sources in a number of categories (eg science and technology).

My Excite: http://my.exite.com/ (Free. This is a portal service.)

MyYahoo: http://my.yahoo.com/ (Free. This is a portal service. It provides news headlines, weather reports, sports, stocks and entertainment information.)

NewsAlert: http://www.newslart.com (Free. Personalised news service.)

NewsBot: http://headlines.hotbot.com (Updates headlines in one's area of interest.)

NewsPage: http://www.newspage.com (NewsPage Direct is a personalised electronic news service, and is available for a fee.)

Push services or Webcasting

Push technology is software that sends (pushes) information directly to one's desktop, rather than requiring one to search for information oneself on the Internet. Push services are mostly associated with the use of information channels, for which one needs to load special software. Push services let one decide on the content sent ("pushed") to one regularly. PointCast is an example of push technology. Browsers like Microsoft's Internet Explorer 4.0 and Netscape also include push or Webcasting technology. As with filtered news services, the value of push services depends on the kind of information required. They are therefore not recommended for everybody, since although very useful, they may easily lead to an overload of information.

The following are two examples of push services. It is up to each individual to decide on their usefulness in the field of distance education.

PointCast: http://www.pointcast.com (The software for PointCast Network or EntryPoint can be downloaded.)

BackWeb: http://www.backweb.com (The software for BackWeb can be downloaded.)

More information on push technology can be found at:

- Anancyweb: http://www.anancyweb.com/push_links.html (The site includes links to push technology.)
- Webcasting (push technology): http://whatis.com/webcasti.htm

Newspapers and broadcast news

There are numerous online newspapers (eg New York Times, The Times of London and local newspapers such as The Sunday Times and Daily Mail and Guardian), meta-indexes to search newspapers (eg AJR Newslink and Internet Public Library: Online Newspapers), newswires (eg those provided by services such as Yahoo and Excite) and audio news (eg World Radio Network and Daily Briefing). Reading news online is one of the top reasons given for using the Internet.

24.com: http://www.24.com (Can subscribe to a weekly newsletter; provides access to a selection of South African newspapers.)

AJR Newslink: http://www.newslink.org (Meta search engine for news.)

CNN Quick News: http://www.cnn.com/QUICKNEWS/mail/ (A morning e-mail service from CNN.)

Daily Briefing: http://realguide.real.com (Provides a selection of audio and video updates.)

Daily Mail & Guardian: http://mg.co.za/mg/ (Requires a username and password.)

Internet Public Library: Online Newspapers: http://www.ipl.org/reading/news (This is a service of the School of Information at the University of Michigan. It has a collection of over 2 000 online newspapers which are geographically organised and searchable.)

MetaPlus News: http://www.metaplus.com/pv/news.html (Links to a number of personal news services, newspapers, audio news sites, etc.)

The New York Times Direct: http://www.nytimes.com/infor/contents/services.html (Free; sends daily e-mail notifications of stories from the sections one prefers.)

New York Times: http://www.nytimes.com (Free online news headings and some full text features.)

NewsAlert: http://www.newsalert.com (Offers various free services, eg free headlines and basic portfolio and alerts. Also offers commercial services.)

NewsBot: http://www.newsbot.com (NewsBot is the news-on-the-Web search engine associated with HotBot. Headlines are presented by category (eg health, politics).)

NewsEdge: http://www.newsedge.com (Free CAS news service for business.)

NewsPage: http://www.newspage.com (Free, personalised news page.)

NewsTracker: http://nt.excite.com (Free, personalised news page.)

Northern Light Current News: http://www.northernlight.com/news.html (NorthernLight news search service.)

Reuters Business Briefing: http://www.reuters.com/rbb (Commercial news service; free trial available.)

The Sunday Times: http://www.suntimes.co.za (Online news.)

The Times: http://www.the-times.co.uk (Online news.)

World Radio Network - Audio on demand: http://www.wrn.org/ondemand/ (Collection of international radio programmes available through Real Audio.)

Yahoo - Newspapers by country: http://dir.yahoo.com/News_and_Media/Newspapers/Browse_By_Region/Countries (Yahoo has a geographic index to newspapers.)

Some search engines can also be used for newspapers, for example:

- NewsBot: http://www.newsbot.com
- Northern Light Current News: http://www.northernlight.com/news.html

Search engines offering alerting services

At the time of writing I was aware of only one such search engine, namely Northern Light (http://www.nlsearch.com). One can set up profiles for a number of topics and receive free e-mail notification every time new Web sites on the topic(s) are picked up.

Mailing lists and newsgroups

Mailing lists and newsgroups can be an excellent informal method of keeping track of new developments. Examples of useful mailing lists include the following:

> alt.education.distance: newsgroup

> DEOS-L: http://www.cde.psu.edu/ACSDE/DEOS.html

> Distance-Educator.com offers a mailing list: http://www.distance-educator.com/portals/03managers.html

> Education world (offers five mailing lists to which one can subscribe): http://www.education-world.com/mailist.shtml

Commercial SDI or alerting services

Commercial SDI or alerting services have been offered by database vendors such as Dialog for many years, and are now also available on the Internet. SilverPlatter also offers an SDI service. These services are, however, very expensive, and use of them may depend on the services to which one's local library subscribes. Despite their cost these services are very useful since they cover a large number of databases, and provide access to the kind of structured information sources to which libraries have been used for many decades. Examples of commercial SDI services include:

- Dialog: http://www.dialog.com
- SilverPlatter: http://www.silverplatter.com

It is advisable to consult a librarian or information specialist if one wishes to use such services.

CONCLUSION

The use of Internet CAS can open up access to a wealth of up-to-date information. This can contribute to more innovative and productive teaching and research practices. However, it requires careful planning with regard to the topics, institutions, people, organisations, or associations one wants to monitor. Specific services also need to be selected with care, otherwise it may lead to a total overload of information. Although all the services mentioned here can be used by individual users, it would do no harm to call on the advice of a librarian or information specialist, who may come up with even more suggestions for services and with advice on setting up a search profile.

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