

THE ONCE AND FUTURE INSPIRE

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The Inspire Project began like all things, as an idea. An idea initially formed in the mind of Indiana Cooperative Library Services Authority Executive Director, Millard Johnson in 1995. An idea that Johnson then proposed to Indiana State Library Director, Ray Ewick. An idea this pair of visionaries then proceeded to take to the Indiana State Legislature for funding. An idea based on the needs of not only Indiana's Libraries, but each of Indiana's citizens. In short, an idea whose time had come.

Inspire stands for Indiana Spectrum of Information Resources. It functions as the foundation of Indiana's virtual library on the Internet. It offers a wide range of databases in support of Indiana residents seeking information of educational, cultural, economic and personal interest. Inspire is operated by INCOLSA, the Indiana Cooperative Library Services Authority under a contract from the Indiana State Library. Funding for the databases is provided by the Indiana State Legislature as a part of the biennial budget.

Much of the idea behind Inspire predates the era of the digital computer altogether. In his landmark article "As We May Think" in the July 1945 issue of *The Atlantic Monthly* Doctor Vannevar Bush outlined both the problem of information overload and the idea for a scholar's workstation which would provide the user with easy access to virtually unlimited stores of information:

The difficulty seems to be, not so much that we publish unduly in view of the extent and variety of present day interests, but rather that publication has been extended far beyond our present ability to make real use of the record. The summation of human experience is being expanded at a prodigious rate, and the means we use for threading through the consequent maze to the momen-

tarily important item is the same as was used in the days of the square-rigged ships.

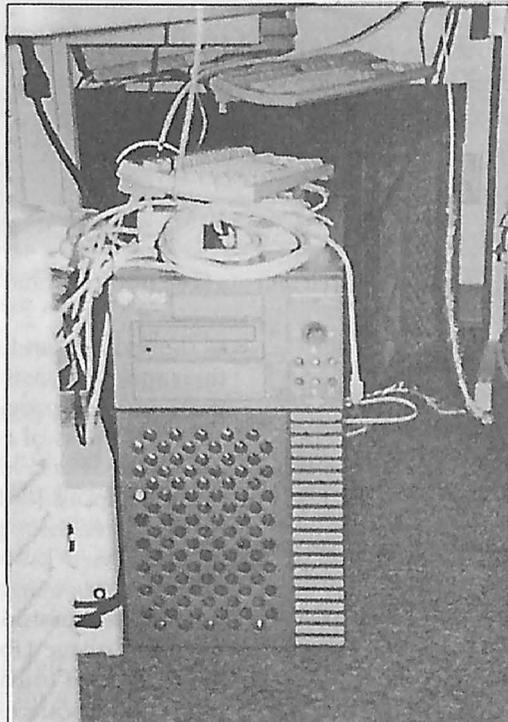
Consider a future device for individual use, which is a sort of mechanized private file and library. It needs a name, and, to coin one at random, "memex" will do. A memex is a device in which an individual stores all his books, records, and communications, and which is mechanized so that it may be consulted with exceeding speed and flexibility. It is an enlarged supplement to his memory.

Thanks to advances in computer science, the power of access to the Internet, and the variety of information provided by the databases which make up Inspire, Bush's idea of the memex as proposed in 1945 has been largely realized with almost haunting precision.

THE HISTORY OF INSPIRE

The working history of Inspire dates back to November 1996 when the Inspire Steering Committee chaired by Charr Skirvin of the Plainfield Public Library began its work. The Steering Committee was assisted by two other working groups: the Technical Working Group and the Database Selection Working Group. Together these groups designed the basic form Inspire would take. In December 1996 the Indiana Library Federation became formally involved to assist the project in seeking funding from the State Legislature through its Legislative Committee and legislative advocates. In February 1997 the project had advanced sufficiently enough to allow the Steering Committee to issue a Broad Agency Announcement to vendors seeking proposals for databases and the cost to make them available to every resident of Indiana.

The Inspire Server



In May 1997 the Indiana State Legislature appropriated \$1 million a year for Project Inspire. Combined with funding from grants and LSTA funds, Inspire had money for databases, equipment and personnel. By July 1997 the BAA had been released to vendors and an evaluation team made up of members from the Steering Committee and the two Working Groups began sorting through the responses.

While certainly not the first effort at licensing a group of commercial databases on a statewide basis—the Galileo project in Georgia receives due credit for that accomplishment—Inspire was the first such effort to provide such access to everyone in the state. The Galileo project and others similar to it provide access only to select members of a consortium, rather than anyone anywhere in the entire state. Verifying that a user was in fact searching the databases from a computer in Indiana became a key issue in the process. Using the BAA allowed vendors to offer a variety of ideas to the groups on accomplishing this important task. Mary-Elise Haug, Inspire System Administrator, describes this process in intricate detail in her article elsewhere in this issue. Suffice it to say that “authentication,” as this process is called, remains a behind the scenes key to keeping Inspire running, and that a project of this magnitude had not been attempted before.

To keep the project moving and bring Inspire from idea to reality, Justin “Juck” Lowe was hired in September 1997 to serve as Project Manager. Before Juck came aboard Becki Whitaker was largely responsible for handling the project within INCOLSA. Juck recalls that as late as November 1997, even after the selection of EBSCO as the database provider, Inspire had no machines and no system administrator. Mary-Elise Haug was hired to correct the latter problem. Sun Enterprise models 250 and 450 arrived to correct the former problem.

In January 1998 Inspire became available to the citizens of Indiana at <http://www.inspire-indiana.net>. It is the first such effort to be available to anyone anywhere within the state of Indiana, as long as they arrive at the Inspire website from an Indiana based Internet service provider, library or school. To celebrate this accomplishment a virtual ribbon cutting was held at the

Indiana State House in February. At this time the Indiana Legislature was officially introduced to Inspire.

Throughout 1998, Inspire was upgraded and enhanced with a more sophisticated user interface and with the addition of Digital Certificates to allow citizens using non-Indiana based Internet service providers such as America Online and Compuserve to access the full content provided through Inspire. In October 1998 the Inspire staff was completed with the additions of Howard Trace and Marla Rutherford to provide enhanced technical support to Inspire users. That support was important because on November 18, 1998 Inspire made history. It served 117,500 pages of full text information, breaking the 100,000 page per day barrier for the first time.

During 1999 Inspire continued to grow and mature. New and improved databases were added throughout the year and a special user interface, Inspire Kids, was developed to aid searching by younger users. Midway through 1999 it was time to prepare for Inspire’s second biennium and the process of choosing the databases that make up the system began anew.



The computer equipment it takes to keep Inspire up and running

To begin the database selection process the Steering Committee recruited representatives from all sorts of Libraries and School Media Centers, among them this author representing the Indiana Library Federation. Members of the group spent their time reviewing nearly 40 pounds of information provided by vendors in response to the Broad Agency Announcement for Statewide Access to Electronic Databases.

The group shared insights and experiences

as they sought and received input from each other and their various constituents. Trial access to the proposed databases was provided as a means to test the veracity and usefulness of each one. Meetings were held to determine which vendors and what databases to invite to Indianapolis for formal presentations and further review. After these presentations, more meetings were held to review best and final offers and again evaluate the databases being proposed. The group under the watchful leadership of Larry Frye, Head Librarian at Wabash College Library, worked diligently to provide the citizens of Indiana with the widest variety of useful information sources for the money available.

INSPIRE TODAY

Currently Inspire consists of 21 databases covering topics such as education, business, health, biographical information and Spanish language resources. The original Ebsco databases have been supplemented by database products from Gale and other sources to enhance and expand the breadth of coverage provided by Inspire. The databases offered are:

Academic Search Elite – Covering the general sciences, the humanities and the social sciences with 1,200 journals available in full text form and indexing and abstracts for over 3,000 journals.

Biography Resource Center – Providing in-depth biographical information through 142,000 biographies including 7,000 portraits on both current and historic persons.

Business Source Premier – Covering topics such as accounting, management, economics and international business, with nearly 2,000 business journals indexed and nearly 1,300 full text journals.

Clinical Reference Systems – Offering essays and images on topics such as women's health, sports medicine, pediatric health, cardiology, and drug information.

Ebsco Animals – Providing in-depth information with full text and images on a wide variety of animals and animal related topics.

Ebsco Online Citations – Covering over 2,700 titles this database of publisher provided citations includes many medical, scientific and technology oriented titles.

ERIC – Indexing and abstracts for over 750 education related journals.

Funk & Wagnall's New World Encyclopedia – Providing the full text to over 25,000 records.

Health Source Plus – Offering full text for 23 books, 1,065 pamphlets and full text from 255 periodicals covering consumer health information topics including nutrition, exercise, self-care and drugs.

Informe! – In Spanish and featuring full text coverage of 40 of the most popular Spanish language periodicals with indexing and abstracts for 60 titles.

MAS Fulltext Ultra – Providing full text to over 1,000 historical documents such as The Constitution, The Federalist Papers, famous speeches, the CIA World Factbook, the Department of Education's College Guide, nearly 5,000 Magill Book Reviews, and reports and special issues from over 500 K-12 magazines.

MasterFILE Premier – Indexing and abstracts for over 2,700 periodicals with full text from over 1,800

general reference, business, consumer, health, science and multi-cultural periodicals.

MEDLINE – Providing authoritative professional information for the health sciences and using the Medical Subject Headings or MeSH created by the National Library of Medicine to index over 3,800 biomedical journals.

Middle Search Plus – Offering nearly 100 full text magazines geared toward Middle School research covering general reference, health and science topics.

Netfirst – Featuring point-and-click access to Internet resources of interest to Libraries and their users from a database of nearly 120,000 records.

Newspaper Source – Daily updating from 143 major U.S. and international newspapers including full text from *The Chicago Tribune*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, *The New York Daily News*, and *The San Jose Mercury News*.

Primary Search – Providing full text from 50 children's magazines as well as The World Almanac for Kids and Essential Documents of American History.

Professional Development Collection – Featuring full text for nearly 250 journals and abstracting and indexing for over 330 journals targeted toward professional educators.

TOPICsearch – Searching by topic, keyword or natural language provides access to 40,000 documents selected from 2,500 sources on social, political, economic and scientific issues of interest in today's classrooms.

USP DI Volume II, Advice for the Patient – Providing patient oriented drug information in lay rather than professional language, including brand names, proper usage, precautions and side effects.

What Tree Is It? – Answering the perennial question using leaves and fruit to identify over 60 common trees.

All of the resources are now available at an even simpler web address, <http://www.inspire.net>. A simple user interface provides a unified experience and the possibility of a combined search across the various databases. The current lineup of databases resulted from an increase in funding for Inspire's second biennial budget and the hard work of the database selection committee

THE FUTURE OF INSPIRE

While no one can fully know what the future holds, Inspire is poised for an even greater role in the information needs of tomorrow. With the continued explosion of Internet access both through traditional

personal computers and newer so called information appliances, the role of Inspire as the foundation of Indiana's Virtual Library is set. New and enhanced databases continue to be added, as they become available from the vendors. New services being investigated for Indiana's Virtual Library include new user interfaces, user initiated interlibrary loan, a user searchable union catalog of all materials in the state, and newly created or organized unique content of interest to Hoosiers.

New user interfaces are being developed and evaluated with both ease of use and powerful options in mind. The Inspire of today will certainly become a more robust tool of tomorrow. At the most recent Indiana Library Federation Annual Conference, Steven Coffman from the County of Los Angeles Public Library challenged those present at the Indiana Public Libraries Association/Indiana Library Trustees Association Luncheon to use Inspire to build an online union catalog linking every library within the state. Such a linked catalog would facilitate easier interlibrary loan. INCOLSA has recently issued a BAA to support just such an endeavor.

Sir Arthur C. Clarke presents much of the concept behind Inspire in his Third Law: "Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic." Access to high quality, authoritative information, any time, anywhere, by anyone in Indiana would certainly seem to be technological magic at its finest.

Inspire today represents an historic effort to provide everyone in Indiana with access to high quality useful information. It is not magic, but the result of concerted efforts on the part of visionary leaders like Millard Johnson of INCOLSA and Ray Ewick of the Indiana State Library as well as the hard work of all the librarians, media specialists and staff members involved since its inception. Inspire relies on funding provided by the Indiana State Legislature for its continued existence. This funding is dependent on continued usage of Inspire by Hoosiers. In Inspire's first year 10 million pages were served. That figure doubled in 1999 and current usage figures show the system on pace for 2000 to serve 30 to 40 million pages. At the rate of more than 80,000 pages of full text information per day Inspire users are offering their hopes for a bright future. With ever more and easier to use Internet access devices on the horizon, Inspire and Indiana's Virtual Library are ready to demonstrate their own technological magic.

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