

Ariadne, the Web, and the Digital Library

What is Ariadne?

Ariadne was originally an Electronic Libraries Programme (eLib) project, funded as a training and awareness measure. The first issue of the magazine was published in January 1996. It was from the outset a parallel publishing exercise, in that it existed both as a free paper publication (until number 18, a final double issue), and as an electronic publication, freely available on the Web.

Its principal focus was the eLib programme itself. The magazine offered opportunities for project dissemination, and also opportunities for the projects to feed back into issues and discussions in a public environment, either by responding to articles, or writing their own. It was also a relatively accessible public face to the eLib programme, which sought to pull together its various strands, and highlight the issues involved in the creation of digital library services.

Though in a sense the magazine was founded as the eLib Programme house journal, it looked outside the programme from the very beginning, addressing issues of interest to Librarians contemplating the incorporation of new electronic services into their current provision (databases, electronic journals, etc), and also looking at the development of digital library research elsewhere in the world (principally at that time in Australia and the US).

In many ways *Ariadne*'s function was similar to eLib's: to help effect a cultural change in the Higher Education community. eLib achieved this by embedding digital library projects into the HE environment: *Ariadne* achieved this by providing a convenient forum for discussion and promotion of the eLib programme, accessible around the world.

Ariadne's First Issues

Ariadne's 'Web version' was not simply an electronic version of the paper edition. It ran parallel to the paper publication and contained all of its articles, but also contained additional materials. The electronic version made no real attempt to reproduce the look and feel of the paper edition. The headlines were different, the featured items were different, and just about everything else. The paper edition was created in a production office at the university of Abertay, with the services of an editor, production manager, and a production assistant. The magazine was produced with high quality production values and good quality paper by a printing house with the services of a professional graphic design office.

On the other hand, the production side of the Web version was not contracted out to a professional production company, largely because at that time there were virtually none to speak of. There were few Web magazines as such – there were e-zines around which had been distributed for a number of years on floppy disk or by other

means, but very few native hypertext Web magazines. So there was virtually nothing existing in the way of models to adapt. *Ariadne*'s first Web Editor, John Kirriemuir (January 1996 through September 1997: the first ten issues) had to deal with a number of the new problems and issues emerging from the act of publishing a magazine on the Web. Some of these questions are still alive and well, such as: should articles be updated, just because you can? How fixed is the date of publication? What is the nature of the concept of 'edition' on the Web? What are the implications of making retrospective changes in the navigation structure? Do we need a coverpage? (*Ariadne* no longer has one). And other general questions about the difference between a magazine on the Web and pages on a Web site.

Use of Ariadne

As might be expected, in the early days most of the usage of the magazine came from UK users, and to a large extent from the eLib community itself. The magazine received around 150 user sessions daily in 1996. The access figures have risen consistently since then: by the early part of 2001 *Ariadne* was receiving around 1500 to 2000 user sessions daily. There were more than 66,000 visitor sessions during October 2001, compared to 54,676 during October 2000. From May through October (the quietest time of the year) *Ariadne* received more than 334,000 visitor sessions. Page views during those same months ran to more than 1.15 million.

Most of these accesses – up to 70% of them – are from the United States. This is due in part to the fact that *Ariadne* tries to reflect technical and philosophical developments in information networking and digital library ideas worldwide, but also because there are interesting projects happening here which do not have parallels in the US.

The back numbers of *Ariadne* are now very extensive – 29 issues all told: each of them the size of a medium-sized paperback book. When a new issue is published, most of the accesses are associated with that issue. After a few weeks however, around 70% of the users are consulting the back issues; the remaining 30% or so can be found looking at the three most recent issues. One of the reasons for this is that *Ariadne* is now featured as a resource in many online Library and Information Science courses worldwide. Students use the magazine's search facilities to find articles on specific subjects, treating the the whole body of *Ariadne* articles as a single information resource.

A big surprise at the turn of 2001 was the discovery that 400+ users had been consulting *Ariadne* on Christmas Day 2000 (the figure was arrived at after filtering out the many indexing spiders in the statistics) . Obviously users are unlikely to be in their offices or library facilities on the 25th of December: the figure illustrates that those consulting *Ariadne* do not any longer have to be at work or college to access the magazine. It is an interesting measure of the profound cultural change which has occurred in the past few years.

Ariadne's Readership

It is difficult to say exactly who *Ariadne's* readers are, since we don't track individual users (we have no interest in this level of granularity in any case). We know which institutions are interested in *Ariadne* (which is of more use) since we see the same machines in our statistics again and again, and these often turn out to be associated with a library school. We can guess something of the general structure of the readership by looking closely at the usage of articles both over time and according to domain. Articles which are regularly used, no matter how far back they appeared in the magazine, tend to suggest references somewhere in an LIS course page, and thus accesses by LIS students. By checking the standard information contained in the Web logs, we can check the referring page for ourselves, unless the page requires a local login.

Other users are often from organisations developing Digital Library technology. These accesses come from domains associated with various digital library development programmes both here and abroad (mainly the UK, the USA and Australia).

But beyond this expected readership, there is a wide range of other users. *Ariadne* receives visits (and mail) from the interested public worldwide. Many countries which have no significant resources to devote to digital library programmes nevertheless have a keen interest in what is going on elsewhere, and *Ariadne* is a convenient way to keep up to date with developments.

From time to time permission is requested for the translation of articles into other languages. Several have been translated into Spanish by the National Library of Argentina, and at least one has been translated into Hungarian. An *Ariadne* article on the technical background to the Online Oxford English Dictionary was requested and reprinted as the feature in an IT paper newsletter distributed around Southern Asia.

The most read articles

The importance of metadata is now more widely understood than it once was: hence articles focussing on metadata and related issues are among *Ariadne's* most consulted. Items on Dublin Core metadata, a metadata format specially designed for the Web, are also very popular. Other subjects which attract a lot of attention are: personalisation of Web services; explorations of Web-based resources (such as the Oxford English Dictionary Online, and streaming video resources, etc.); and discussions of knowledge management questions. Articles reviewing progress toward the digital library have secured a consistently high readership.

Who writes for Ariadne?

Ariadne has been lucky enough both to interview and to publish writings by many important figures in the digital library field. These include Clifford Lynch, now Director of the Coalition for Networked Information in the USA; Chris Rusbridge,

former Director of the UK eLib Programme; Lynne Brindley, now Director of the British Library; Derek Law - along with Lynne Brindley a key figure in the creation of the eLib Programme - has also appeared in our pages. Graham Jefcoate, formerly of the British Library and, from January 2002, head of the State Library in Berlin wrote for us while on secondment to UKOLN, Ariadne's parent organisation. Ariadne has also published significant papers by Lorcan Dempsey, former Director of UKOLN, and now Director of Research at OCLC in Dublin, Ohio.

The Future Focus of Ariadne

The eLib programme was not conceived as open-ended, so we began to anticipate life beyond it some time before it began to wind down. There are various successor programmes, funded by different bodies - the Joint Information Services Committee (JISC), Resource, the various Higher Education Funding Councils in the UK, and the IST programme of the European Union - and *Ariadne* began to devote part of its coverage to these new programmes and projects. One of the principal successor programmes to eLib is the Distributed National Electronic Resource (DNER), funded by JISC. This programme is taking forward a number of ideas developed in the UKOLN-organised MODELS workshops, and is building on the experience of eLib projects and other related programmes. *Ariadne* is also covering the development of the Resource Discovery Network (RDN). The Research Support Libraries Programme (RSLP) is another focus of *Ariadne*'s interest: this programme is designed to bring together both traditional and new forms of access to library information, with specific reference to support for research. The principal beneficiaries of the Programme will be researchers employed in UK Higher Education institutions and their postgraduate research students.

In addition, JISC has now embraced the need to supply services to the UK Further Education community. This represents a major expansion in the volume of service provision, and also of the range of services which will be delivered in future. This widening provision of nationally distributed services and resources is of landmark importance to the educational community in the UK, and *Ariadne* hopes to cover its progress in some depth in the coming months.

Ariadne may be consulted freely on the Web at:

<http://www.ariadne.ac.uk/>

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