Gopher: A Help

H gopher

Introduction

Until recently, gopher was not recognized very well outside of Minnesota either as an animal or as the mascot of the University of Minnesota. Something dramatically altered that in the beginning of 1991.

I was attending a workshop on electronic communications here in Australia. A very excited colleague of mine was giving a live demonstration of (Turbo) Gopher, the electronic communicator. He started by showing the audience a picture of the University of Minnesota mascot, the Gopher. Then, he made up a story about the burrowing prowess of the gopher! I had never heard of this program before that.
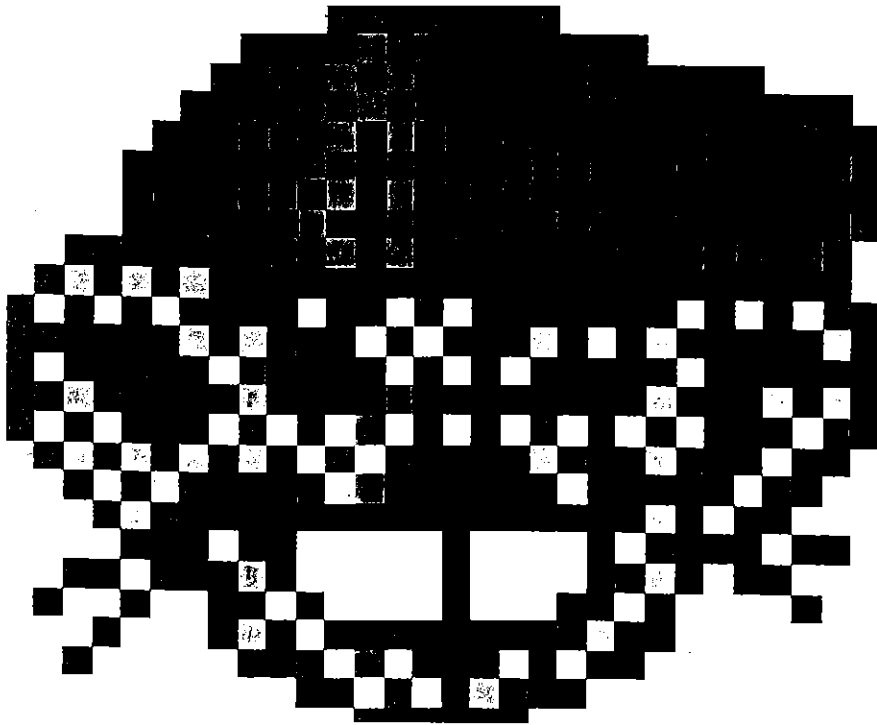
Gopher to the rescue

I have now been using Gopher for over two years. It is a wonderful program to use for many different things. It has been a wonderful tool for teaching and research. Let me give you a couple of examples.

I was teaching a course in economics. I had an article on exhaustible resources on how Nauru, the small island nation in the Pacific, used up their phosphate deposits (which was largely contributed by bird droppings). After I assigned the article to the students, I wanted some basic economic statistics on Nauru. So, I asked the tutors in the course to look them up in the library. To my chagrin, Nauru was not listed as a country in the International Financial Statistics. I could not find anything else on Nauru in the library. However, when I looked up in the Gopher, I found many entries under Nauru. Although most of them turned out to be the same information from the same source, I managed to find all the up to date relevant basic economic statistics on Nauru. (If I have piqued your curiosity, you can try it too!).

I was doing some research on studying the effect of sunlight on the incidence of melanoma, the most fatal form of skin cancer. Since I am not a specialist in the area, I needed basic but up to date information on skin cancer. Through Gopher, I found many articles in CancerNet. Many of these articles will take several years to be published in journals. Incidentally, CancerNet has very useful information on different kinds of cancer. Under `patient information', all of it is written in plain English by experts in the field. Check it out.

A friend of mine wanted to send some info to the head of a department at Princeton University. Instead of waiting till late at night to call up Princeton, I

'Il Little Critter!

showed him how to find fax/phone/email number using Gopher. (See gopher3.gif) By the next day, he had a reply at no cost!

I was looking for some skin cancer and melanoma statistics from the US. As I was going to go to a conference in Honolulu, I thought I would see if the publication was available at the University of Hawaii library. I used the Gopher in Hawaii to log on to their library catalog. I found what I was looking for. The day before I left I also made sure that the book was not checked out sitting at my office some 8,000 miles away!

I was going to stay in Waikiki in Honolulu for 48 hours. With the conference in full swing, I did not have much time to do anything else. As I needed to go to the University (some distance away from Waikiki), I was able to check if there was a bus service that would take me to the University. I also found bus fare information (the guidebooks were wrong as the fare has gone up recently). Here was the clincher: I found bus schedules of Honolulu in Gopher. So, I landed in Honolulu with bus schedules in hand!

Gopher: a quick start
To use the Gopher, you need a few things for your computer in your office. First, you must be connected to the network that allows your computer to communicate with others in your university and with the rest of the world. If you use electronic mail (the "in" term is e-mail as opposed to "snail"mail), you probably already have all the necessary prerequisites for running Gopher. If your computer says it has TCP/IP (for PCs) or MacTCP (for Macintosh) and Telnet 2.4 or higher, you are in business. In fact, even if you do not have Gopher program itself, you can still run Gopher by using Telnet. You issue a command in Telnet eg;
telnet info.anu.edu.au and it will take you to the Gopher at the Australian National University. In fact, you can start by using any Gopher in the world (as long as you know the address).

I have heard many of my colleagues in the US complaining that the Gopher is too slow because too many people are using it at the same time. There is congestion on the information highway but being in Australia we are at an advantage because most of our working hours do not have much overlap with the US.

Fortunately the traffic in Asia is still low so, we can drive along the highway in the middle of the night without running into much of traffic.
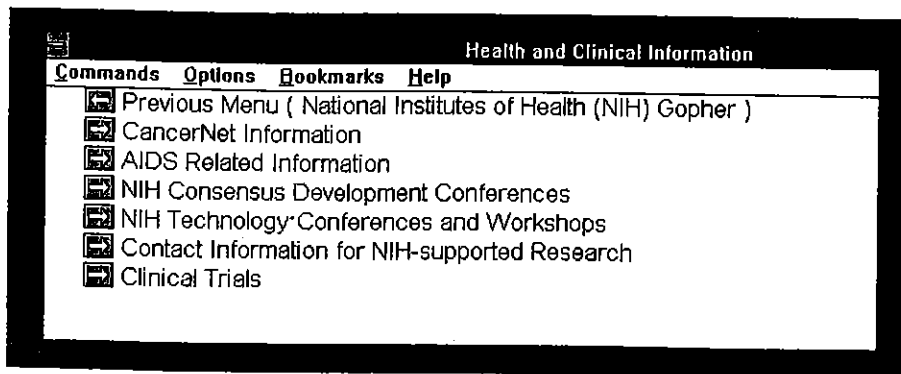
Gopher: the powerhouse
The Gopher has become the new icon for communication. Other programs such as veronica and telnet are riding on Gopher.

Even though telnet can be used without Gopher, it has become a universal tool because of the Gopher. Most universities in Australia have a Gopher site. You can search for references in academic libraries all over Australia and all over the world very easily using the Gopher. People use Gopher extensively for all sorts of searches. The circle of Gopher users grows bigger every day.
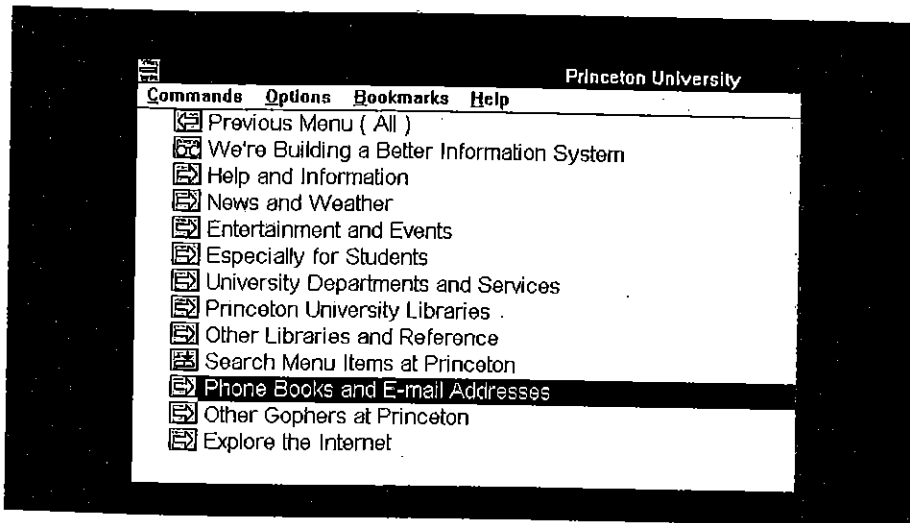
Other software
Gopher is obviously not the only browser around. There are even more powerful ones coming onto the market (well, it is a funny sort of a market,as most of these things are available at no charge). The latest one I have tried is called Mosaic. It comes from the friendly people of the University of Illinois who have given us the useful program Telnet. Mosaic operates in such a way that you can embed graphics, sounds and bits of movies into any document. To actually get the full benefits from it, your computer must be equipped to deal with these things. So, if your machine does not have a sound card, you cannot listen to the music. If you have all the right things to use it, the program is fantastic! But meanwhile, happy Gophering!...
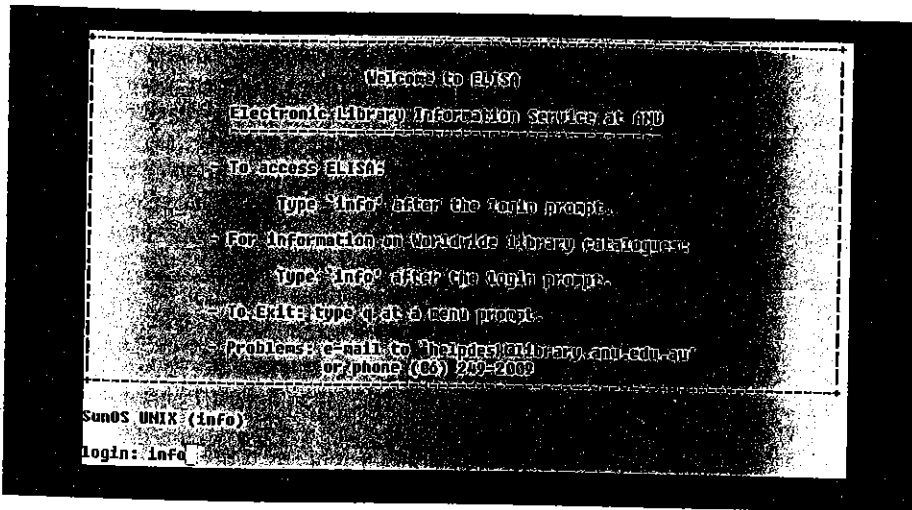
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Health and Clinical Information
Commands   Options   Bookmarks   Help
   Previous Menu ( National Institutes of Health (NIH) Gopher )
   CancerNet Information
   AIDS Related Information
   NIH Consensus Development Conferences
   NIH Technology Conferences and Workshops
   Contact Information for NIH-supported Research
   Clinical Trials
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Gopher2.gif - CancerNet's Home

Gopher3.gif An Example of University Services available through Gopher

Gopher4.gif Telnet to info.anu.edu.au - The Australian National University Information Service

Gopher5.gif - Two of the current crop of World Wide Web Browsers - Mosaic and Netscape

More about Gopher from the Gopher FAQ :

Are papers or articles describing Gopher available?

Gopher has a whole chapter devoted to it in :

The Whole Internet Users Guide and Catalog by Ed Krol (publisher O'Reilley & Associates, Inc; ISBN: 1-56592-025-2).

The Internet Passport: NorthWestNet's Guide to Our World Online By Jonathan Kochmer and NorthWestNet. Published by NorthWestNet, Bellevue, WA. 1993. 516 pp. ISBN 0-9635281-0-6.
Contact info: passport@nwnet.net

A Students Guide to UNIX by Harley Hahn. (publisher McGraw Hill, Inc.; 1993 ISBN 0-07-025511-3)

Other references include:
The Internet Gopher , "ConneXions", July 1992, Interop.

Exploring Internet GopherSpace "The Internet Society News", v1n2 1992,

(You can subscribe to the Internet Society News by sending e- mail to isoc@nri.reston.va.us)

The Internet Gopher Protocol, Proceedings of the Twenty-Third IETF, CNRI, Section 5.3

Internet Gopher, Proceedings of Canadian Networking '92

The Internet Gopher, INTERNET: Getting Started, SRI International, Section 10.5.5

Tools help Internet users discover on-line treasures, Computerworld, July 20, 1992

TCP/IP Network Administration, O'Reilly. Balakrishan, B. (Oct 1992) "SPIGopher: Making SPIRES databases accessible through the Gopher protocol". SPIRES Fall '92 Workshop, Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

Tomer, C. Information Technology Standards for Libraries, Journal of the American Society for Information Science, 43(8):566-570, Sept 1992.

Source:
gopher://gopher.austin.unimelb.edu.au:70/11/Questions