

## TechnoTools



**Will Husby**

### **Electronic Documents and the World Wide Web**

The lifeblood of our profession is a combination of accurate, up-to-date information; plus an understanding of current theories of learning and communication (to supplement our intuition and seat-of-the-pants delivery); plus a knowledge of tools and techniques for planning, delivering, evaluating and supporting effective interpretation and education services.

Until recently, interpreters depended on printed materials – books, journals, and pamphlets – for the lion's share of new information that we incorporate into our work. Early on in our careers, many interpreters begin to accumulate a personal library that, like our bodies, tends to increase in bulk as we age.

The reason for this burgeoning of personal reference is that to do our jobs, we need to keep up with developments. Much of these specialized materials, especially titles focussing directly on interpretation, are not readily available in most public libraries – and heck, most of us like to collect... I expect that personal libraries will always be an important resource to interpreters. However, when you need new information quickly, personal libraries are not always the answer.

Over the last ten years electronic documents distributed over the World Wide Web have become an increasingly important resource to interpreters. A key reason for their importance is that they can be very quickly accessed. If you need to gather information for a project – say on the natural history of snapping turtles, or the life of Champlain, or on current techniques of formative evaluation when developing museum exhibits, you may be able to get all the information you need in an afternoon – or even in a half-hour. The skill is in finding the good documents. For this you need a search engine – a web-based tool that can locate websites that contain the information you are looking for (see Mary Ellen Grant's article on Internet search engines in this issue and watch for more articles in future issues of *Interpscan*).

Electronic documents on the web may be quickly accessed and almost all are available free, but you need to consider them critically as to the reliability of the source. Anyone can make a document available – from research scientists, and reputable organizations such as the World Wildlife Fund or the Royal Ontario Museum, to fringe groups and individuals with limited skills and hidden agendas – researcher beware!

*Will Husby has worked for years with technological equipment to support his work as an interpreter. He stresses that technology should support – not dominate – the core work of the interpreter to provoke, relate and reveal the stories of our heritage resources.*

*Will works out of an office in his Bowen Island home with various computers, scanners, printers, CD burners, and other humming plastic boxes with exciting chunky shapes. He is the assistant editor of *Interpscan*. Contact him at: [w\\_husby@istar.ca](mailto:w_husby@istar.ca).*

