The Busy Women's Guide to the Internet:
Activisn and Research On-line

by Kelly Mannix

Welcome to the Busy Woman's Guide to the Internet page. This guide was written to assist the CEDAW Impact Study and Network NGOs using the Internet as part of the IWRP.

Below you will find feature information and links to Women's Human Rights as well as tools to help you harness the potential of the Internet.

Guide Table of Contents

Chapter 4: Becoming Part of the Internet Community

Chapter 1: The History of the Internet in 1000 Words

Why Women Need the Internet

Athought the first users of the Internet were predominantly male, women have quickly recognized the potential of this rapidly expanding technology. The 1995 United Nation's Fourth World conference on Women in Beijing proved to be a watershed event in the appropriation of information technology by women. At the Conference, tens of thousands of women were introduced to email as a tool through which they could lobby, campaign and exchange information with one another across the globe. (Association for Progressive Communications (APC) Women's Networking Support Programme, Information and Communication Technologies: A Women's Agenda).

Since that time, Women's Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), activists and researchers have become adept at harnessing the global potential of the Internet as a powerful and necessary extension of their existing tools to communicate, exchange ideas and organize for change. Many women have recognized that it has become increasingly common for information to be exchanged via the Internet, offering a relatively inexpensive and rapid alternative to postal service, long distance telephone calls, faxes, couriers and the need to be physically present to access critical information. These costs have often proved to be barriers to women activists, researchers and professional, for whom access to information and the ability to network with their peers is vital. As a result, despite some of the difficulties and frustrations that may occur when becoming acquainted with the Internet, this technology holds vast potential for enhancing and advancing the collective struggle for women's human rights.

Numurous global and regional socio-economic issues impact access to the Internet, with particularly implications for women's access to communications technology. While a complete examination of these factors is beyond the scope of of this guide, feminist analysis of these issues may be found in a number of Internet based and published sources.

Protecting your Computer

Security should never be overlooked in any situation. Passwords should be kept confidential at all times and changed frequently. Ideally, unique passwords should be used for different access levels. For example, your login password and your email passwords should not be the same.
All hardware and software should be insured, documented and kept in a safe place. Keep all software manuals and record serial numbers of all software and hardware. Register all software and hardware immediately upon purchase. Keep all warranty information with serial numbers in a secure location.
It is also important to establish a relationship with a computer repair technician or support person with whom you feel comfortable.

Back-up Procedures

Computers are not infallible. Power outages, surges, viruses or operating system errors can jeopardize your computer and all stored information.
When using your computer save your documents often. Develop a routine of backing up all hard-drive documents to disk on a weekly basis. Ideally, these disks should be clearly labelled stored in a secure alternate location, particularly if the computer is in a vulnerable area.

For important documents that you may need to access for years to come, it is very important to make note of the software used to create and view the documents. As technology advances, certain software becomes obsolete and documents can no longer be accessed. Crucial information should always be backed-up on disk as well as printed out and kept in secure storage.

Internet Use Considerations

When choosing an ISP it is a good idea to ask them about their security provisions for a range of potential situations, from "hostile invasions" to the protection of your login data.

Your ISP provider may only support certain email programs. Ask them to direct you to resources for reviewing the security provisions of supported email software. In North America there were reported incidents of illegal tampering ("hacking") with Internet accounts through a program that decoded passwords. It is important to remember that complete security of email software cannot be guaranteed. Therefore, for highly confidential or sensitive documents of it may be best not to use email.

Threats from Viruses

Viruses are destructive software programs that can enter the computer via disks, emails and downloaded files, causing irreparable damage to your computer. Recent destructive and highly publicized viruses include 'Melissa' and 'Worm'. A "Trojan Horse" is a type of harmful program that at first appears to perform a useful function. Instead, the program invades your system and then self- destructs causing extensive damage (such as erasing an entire hard drive).

As a protective measure it is imperative that users install and update anti-virus software (visit the software's home site and monitor any updates). Discuss recommended virus detection software with your ISP. If your computer is part of a local area network (LAN) talk with your LAN administrator to ensure you have sufficient protection on your computer. Ask what procedures are in place in the event that a virus invades the network—it only takes one user to infect the entire network. You can also visit Tucows for free software.

If you think you have opened a potentially infected file or program, immediately close all programs and shut down your computer. If your part of a LAN, contact your LAN administrator to assist you in isolating and destroying the virus. Otherwise, immediately contact your ISP for further instructions.

Tips to protect yourself and others:

◆ Never download software (including games) or open email attachments without adequate virus protection.

◆ Do not open email attachments with ".exe" at the end of the document (many viruses travel disguised as executable files).

◆ Email viruses often travel with titles such as "Important, open immediately…" or "Urgent, read immediately". Do not open these emails. Delete them immediately.

◆ Never insert a 'foreign' disk into your computer without first running it through anti-virus software.

◆ Always back up your hard drive!

How to Prepare for your Search

Getting the search results you want will depend on the searching methods you use. To prepare for a successful search, consider the following tips.

◆ You may want to begin by familiarizing yourself with a few of the major search engines. Bookmark or record these pages for quick access in the future. As mentioned earlier, conduct your own sample search with a subject of your choice to determine how the various search engines respond to your queries. Again, be sure to read the home page for information on the searching language that they use.

◆ Before you conduct a specific search, take a few minutes to prepare a list of keywords that are best suited to your topic. Determine the kind of information you would like (articles, newsgroups, studies, contact persons) while taking into account how urgently you need the information (today, next week, next month).

◆ When conducting your search, skim the results of your query and visit the sites that look promising. Be sure to save the website's URL or 'bookmark' through your web browser any sites that look promising and to which you may wish to return at a later date. It is important to note that search engines are constantly updating and indexing websites and as a result, the sites retrieved for a search query may differ from week to week.

◆ Pay particular attention to those sites with links to similar sites. These 'gateway sites' often prove to be an invaluable reference source.

◆ If you decide to use any information you have obtained from the Internet for an article or report, be sure to reference the site as you would any other published material. Bibliographic referencing of Internet sites must include the name of the author or creator, the document's title, the site URL as well as the date you accessed the material. This is particularly important as site content and location may change. Here is an example of a bibliographic reference from an on-line source.

Gregg, Lynne. 1998. Technology Marches On. Women in Technology International. On-line. http://www.witi.org/Techctr/Futures/Marches/ [January 20, 1999].

How to Evaluate Your Search Results

The Web is like any other information source and must be examined critically. Reading critically is arguably more important with Internet material due to the relative absence of content or quality controls found in other media sources such as print journals. Anyone with an ISP, access to a web server and some knowledge of HTML (programming language) can post their own webpage.

Most web sites contain a mission statement that summarizes the content, scope and intended audience of the website. In most cases, these statements will be found on the home page. In addition, there is usually an easily accessible link to the webmaster/creator. If the site is affiliated with a particular organization it should state full details and relevant links.

Below are a number of hints to assist you in the evaluation of a site within a particular subject area. While answering all of these questions may not be relevant to every search your undertake, you may find these questions helpful until you are more comfortable with navigating the Internet.

◆ Is the subject area, breadth, format and time period of the site suitable for your needs?

◆ Who is the intended audience of the website creator i.e. activists, researchers, consumers, professionals?

◆ Does the individual or organization take clear responsibility for the information on their website? Is it possible to ascertain the qualifications of the author or organization?

◆ Does the website address your subject adequately? Are there inexplicable omissions? Does the site contain substantive information or is it a list of links?

◆ Is the information factual or opinion-based? Is it possible to assess the accuracy?

◆ How frequently is the site updated (indicated at the bottom of the site's home page)?

◆ Is the resource original? Does it add value to existing sources of information or the body of knowledge?

◆ Does the webpage load easily or does it take several minutes, perhaps due to the use of large and unnecessary graphics?

◆ Does the site set any access restrictions (passwords, login IDs)? If so, are adequate instructions provided?

◆ Is there a sitemap or table of contents to direct you through the site? Is the site easy to get from one page to another?

◆ Is the layout functional and easy to read? Are the navigation aids on the site clearly labelled?

How to Bookmark Websites

'Bookmarking' saves sites for future access. Internet Explorer (IE) has 'Favorites' while Netscape uses 'Bookmarks' to denote saved sites. When you come across a site you would like to save, go to the menu bar on your browser and select either 'bookmark' or 'Favorites', depending on your browser, a box will appear providing you with the option to add or edit your list of bookmarks. Once the site has been added, any time the site is selected from the list the browser will connect to it.

Both Internet Explorer and Netspace allow sites to be organized into folders, when using IE choose "Organize Favorites" from the Favorites drop down menu and with Netcape select "Edit Bookmarks"

When using Netscape you can file bookmarks while surfing using the "file bookmarks "option on your drop down bookmark menu.

On-line Databases and Bibliographies

1. American Association for the Advancement of Science Directory of Human Rights Resources on the Internet
2. A Select Bibliography of Women's Human Rights
3. DIANA: Women's Human Rights Resources (Bora Laskin Law Library, University of Toronto)
4. International Women's Rights Project CEDAW Bibliography

Activism and Networks

1. A Base for Women's Empowerment - Q Web Sweden
2. ACJNet (Access to Justice Network)
3. Agencia Latinoamericana de Informaci   n: Gender and Communication
4. Asia-Pacific Women's Websites
5. Be Active, Be Emancipated (Budi aktivna, Budi emancipirana ≠ Croatia)
6. Feminist Activist Resources on the Net: Communicating with Other Feminists
7. International Women's Rights Project
8. Madre
9. Network of East-West Women
10. The Women's Internet Conference/ConfÈrence: les femmes et l'Internet
11. Women, Law and Development International
12. Women Leaders On-line & Women Organizing for Change
13. Women on the Net ≠ SID/UNESCO Project Initiative
14. Women of the World - Leadership Development
15. Women, Politics and Environmental Action: An International Symposium
16. 100 Heroines from 100 Countries

On-line Resources

Directories and Gateway Sites

1. AWOGNet (African Women Global Network)
2. WWWomen: Feminism (Directories & Major Resource Pages)
3. Feminist Majority Foundation ≠ Feminist Gateway
4. Feminist Activist Resources on the Net
5. Feminism and Women's Resources Page
6. Feminist.com
7. From Workplace to Workspace
8. Institute for Global Communications: Women's Links on the Internet
9. Info for Women WWW Home Page
10. Inter-Links Internet Access
11. Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO)
12. WHAM! and Other Feminist Resources
13. Women, Ink
14. WWWomen.com! The Premier Search Directory for Women On- line!

Organizations

1. Captive Daughters
2. Coalition against Trafficking in Women
3. Feminist Majority Foundation
4. Global Alliance against Traffic in Women (GAATW)
5. Global Fund for Women
6. ISIS International Manila
7. International Women's Health Coalition
8. International Women's Rights Action Watch
9. National Organization for Women (NOW)
10. National Women's Justice Coalition (NWJC) Australia
11. San Francisco's Commission on the Status of Women (City CEDAW Ordinance)
12. Women's Institute of Management

Research Institutes

1. The Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (CRIAW)
2. Center for Reproductive Law and Policy
3. Center on Women and Public Policy: Herbert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs
4. Institute for Women's Policy Research
5. International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development (ICHRDD)
6. International Center for Research on Women (ICRW)
7. International Women's Tribune Centre (IWTC)
8. International Instruments for Women's Human Rights University of Minnesota, Human
9. Rights Library
10. Research Institute of Asian Women
11. United Nations and the Beijing Fourth World Conference On Women
12. Beijing Follow Up
13. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)
14. CEDAW-in-action List Archive
15. Global Feminism: An Introduction to the U.N. Fourth World Conference on Women
16. Information on Signature, Accession to and Ratification of U.N. human rights treaties
17. Linkages: Fourth World Conference on Women
18. Optional Protocol to CEDAW
19. United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)
20. United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW)
21. United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women

22. United Nations Women Watch (Joint Initiative of DAW, UNIFEM and INSTRAW)