2005

TREN Dissertations at Crown College

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Recommended Citation

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ABSTRACT:

The Theological Research Exchange Network (TREN) provides a gold-mine of information for theological libraries but has previously made this information available primarily in microfiche format. Librarians and computer personnel at Crown College in Minnesota worked together with TREN to make this information available in full-text electronic format through the library online catalog. This article explains the process so other interested librarians can work with TREN to do the same.

For over twenty years the Theological Research Exchange Network (TREN) has been collecting and placing Evangelical masters theses, doctoral dissertations, and scholarly conference papers on microfiche. Some of the finest Evangelical seminaries in the country contribute to this collection, providing a virtual gold-mine of information.

Crown College has purchased microfiche from TREN in the past, but we wondered if it would be possible to make these documents available to students in full-text format through our online catalog. The director of Crown's library contacted Robert Jones, the owner of TREN, to explore the possibility.

From a technical perspective, there were a number of issues that had to be addressed before the TREN documents could be placed online here at Crown:

1. **Storage capacity** – There are currently over 5,000 documents in the electronic TREN collection requiring 23 gigabytes of storage space.

2. **Constant location** – If all 5,000 documents were to be indexed individually, it was imperative that the URL for these files never change. Such a change would necessitate updates to all 5,000 records.

3. **Security** – Licensing requirements made it essential to limit access to registered users.

4. **Indexing method** – Because there are so many files, some method would need to be devised to allow the library staff to browse the files in order to create catalog links.

These issues are addressed separately below, but since none of them seemed insurmountable, we arranged to download a couple of TREN e-documents via the internet to use as a test case. These two e-documents were loaded on the network server, cataloged for electronic format, and exported to our online catalog. The initial results for the two documents were positive but numerous details had to be worked out.

We arranged to purchase the 5,000 electronic documents from TREN on a contingency basis,

that is, TREN agreed to send the documents on the condition that we wouldn't have to pay unless and until we were able to make the system work. If we couldn't make it work, we would simply delete the documents.

Our first problem, however, was how to transport the files from TREN in Oregon to Crown College in Minnesota. Downloading 23 gigabytes of data via the internet did not seem to be a viable option given the amount of data and the current load on our T1 line. We decided to send a carefully packed USB hard drive from the college to TREN. They copied the 23 gigabytes of data onto the hard drive and shipped it back. Once the data had arrived at the college, DVD-R backups were made of data and the data was uploaded to the web server.

Storage Capacity

Fortunately, our web server already had sufficient empty space to accommodate this new project. Since the TREN documents are static, i.e. the documents will never be edited or modified, there was no need to provide for backups of these files other than the initial DVD-R backups made upon the data's arrival. This saves a substantial amount of time and eliminates the need for additional backup capacity.

Constant location

Our TREN documents are currently being housed on the main Crown web server, http://www.crown.edu, however, since this storage location may change in the future, it was important that the TREN documents not be referenced using the http://www.crown.edu address. Instead, a new subdomain was configured on the server exclusively for the use of serving up these documents. If the files were ever moved to a different server, the new domain name, http://tren.crown.edu, could follow them to that server and no URL changes would need to be made in the online catalog.

Security

Crown uses Novell Netware servers for providing access to files and printers. Netware servers are able to provide authentication to outside applications, not only through their own Netware client software, but also via the Lightweight Directory Access Protocol (LDAP). This has been used in a number of Crown projects recently, so the foundation had already been laid when this project was implemented.

Security is applied using a configuration file in the directory containing the TREN documents. This file configures the web server to apply access restrictions to all files in the directory. Only a valid user is allowed to access the documents, and authentication of valid users is done by means of the configured LDAP server.

The end result is that any potential user attempting to access a file on the http://www.tren.crown.edu server will be prompted for their Crown College username and password. This will be the same username/password pair used for accessing other computing resources on campus which means that there are no additional ID's or passwords to remember.

The security feature is especially important at Crown because the college shares an online catalog with members of a consortium of over 100 libraries. Since patrons from any of these libraries can search the collections of all consortium libraries at once, it is essential that access to the TREN documents be limited to authorized users at Crown.

Cataloging

Having solved the technical side of the project, the next task was cataloging.

In order for catalogers to browse and retrieve the documents for cataloging, the computer department had provided a URL link to the 5,000 TREN documents now located on our server. The cataloger used this link, in our case, http://tren.crown.edu, to access these documents. Clicking on this link opens a page with additional links to specific TREN documents. Each one of these documents has a more specific URL, for example, http://tren.crown.edu/ETS-1027.pdf. Once a document is opened by Adobe Reader, it is ready to be cataloged.

TREN documents can be searched on OCLC like any other document or book. Since virtually all of the TREN documents have already been cataloged in microfiche format, there has been no difficulty finding them on OCLC. If the only record found on OCLC is for a hardcopy or microfiche record, original cataloging is needed, otherwise, copy cataloging will do.

For both original and copy cataloging each record should already have an 856 4 field listing http://www.tren.com as the URL. Catalogers who produce to OCLC and export to their particular online catalog should produce the record with this original URL in place. Before exporting to the local online system, however, the URL must be changed to the specific URL of the document as it appears on the campus web server, for example, http://tren.crown.edu/ETS-1027.pdf. This is the address that will appear in the online catalog when a student retrieves the record. When the student clicks on this URL, the full-text TREN document should open after the student enters his or her username and password.

Conclusion

TREN documents are an incredible resource, covering a wide variety of subjects including philosophy, theology, psychology, ethics, history, world religions, cults, apologetics, evangelism, missions and ministry. The specificity of the topics in this collection fills a void that most books and online sources do not cover. The Evangelical perspective is something that even the equally scholarly and specific ATLASerials database cannot match. The fact that these TREN documents are now available in full-text format via the library online catalog makes a valuable library asset much more accessible to faculty and students.

Anyone interested in electronic TREN documents is encouraged to contact Robert Jones at TREN (1-800-334-8736, rwjones@tren.com). ✠

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