The German Agricultural Information Network (DAINet) - veterinary medicine-related information on the Internet

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Introduction

Agricultural producers, advisers, scientists and public administrators world-wide need information systems for fast and simple exchange of information and rapid, economic, and interdisciplinary access to different types of information such as texts, factual data, graphics, and pictures. For this reason, open decentralized information systems like the Internet have become more and more important. Today, the user has the problem to extract relevant information from the existing flood of data at the time when he needs it. Search catalogues and search engines therefore have important access and order functions on the Internet.

The conception of the DAINet

With the development of the German Agricultural Information Network (DAINet), such a search catalogue for information about agriculture, nutrition and forestry has been made available. The DAINet pursues the following goals: The world-wide existing Internet services for the agricultural sector have to be recorded and classified in a logically unified system. The users should have target-specific access to the widely distributed Internet sources via a central reference system. This way, the DAINet combines the advantages of a centralized information catalogue with the decentralized responsibility for the contents by the producers of the information services. As a central information system, the DAINet gives references to about 8,000 sources on the Internet. With 220,000 visits per month, it is the central navigation, reference and information focus for German agriculture and forestry (http://www.dainet.de).

The DAINet is being developed by the Centre for Agricultural Documentation and Information (ZADI) in Bonn, Germany. ZADI has a long experience in literature documentation and information retrieval from German and international databases. The experience from this work forms the basis for the development of the DAINet. It also is the foundation for the description and structuring of Internet sources. Structure and menu categories of the DAINet homepage reflect the expertise in the field of information supply and the feedback from the interaction with the users.
Indexing of Internet sources

The system is based on the individual Internet services which have to be searched, found and described. They then have to be assigned to the access paths, which the DAINet offers on the basis of their various contents and types of media, so that the users with their different viewpoints will arrive at the appropriate individual source references. In a database, the indexing therefore follows the characteristics contents, media and identities. The indexing of contents is made by assigning the source to a subject field, to a user group and by describing it in a text. The registration of a source's media make it possible to label it as database, a text or a video document. The inclusion of the important identity markers like Internet address, originator, and country code allows to recover the sources on different search paths.

The structure of the DAINet in an overview

As a multi-media information system, the DAINet presents diverse access paths to the information services of the agricultural sector. The constantly modified structure of this navigation system take into account the information needs of the various user groups. The information supply is divided into four main areas: search, information forums, service, and dialogue. Search gives access to 25 subject fields of agriculture from agricultural law to
viticulture as well as to an alphabetic catalogue with special topical focuses. User group-oriented information forums provide access for users with a special information need, for example for farmers or for people working in horticulture and forestry or else in science. The sources collected under these headings give rapid access to information, which are of interest for the specific views of these users. In the category service, the user will find addresses of public administration offices, research institutions or companies, and he also has access to information about job offers, a calendar of events, and different kinds of factual data, literature and full text databases. The category dialogue directs the user to discussion lists and newsgroups in the agricultural sector and provides the opportunity to contact the DAInet editors.

Navigating for information in the field of veterinary medicine

A high-performance database technology allows the rapid finding of relevant information. This database technology makes it possible that the ZADI offers information of different types like factual data, bibliographical data or full texts for on-line searches on the DAInet.

The user interested in veterinary medicine will find the relevant information in the subject field veterinary science. Like all subject fields, it is hierarchically structured to allow access to scientific information as concretely as possible. Today's mostly international-oriented information supply is increasingly being supplemented by German sources, especially from the universities.

In the category forums information services can be found whose veterinary information is mainly important for farmers and consumers. For example, in the forum agriculture the forms for the import and export of breeding and working animals or for animal health certificates can be viewed and downloaded. The lists of breeding and trading companies, which are licensed by veterinary law as seen by the veterinary control number given to them, also consist an important information opportunity for producers, officials, and consumers.

The database addresses with more than 3,000 entries allows to find institutions for all kinds of veterinary issues. By entering search terms the user has access to addresses and, if available, the Internet services of these institutions. He can also find veterinary-related institutions by organizational category, since among others, research institutions, public administration offices, associations, and libraries can directly be searched and selected depending on the information about veterinary medicine they contain.

The DAInet keyword entry publications gives access to published articles, dissertations, and monographs for people interested in veterinary medicine. The literature databases collected here include among others the central German literature database ELFIS which with more than 2,300,000 bibliographic references gives comprehensive information about the German scientific literature in the agricultural sector. The database is searchable on-line for every Internet user and records title, author, institutions, summary of contents and all other bibliographic data necessary for procuring the source. The large amount of veterinary medicine-related literature is searchable by keyword.
Research projects in German agriculture are also available for on-line searches in a separate database. Keywords on veterinary medicine will lead to research projects which are conducted or which have been finished about these topics in Germany. The data records shown will inform about the contents, the scientists and institutions involved, and the status of the project.

The DAINet database calendar of events contains more than 1,000 references to meetings, conferences, and workshops divided by subject fields, dates, and type of event. The references are on-line searchable. Veterinary medicine events can be found by entering the relevant search terms.

The discussion lists and newsgroups which form the category dialogue give persons interested in veterinary medicine the opportunity to contact colleagues and other people interested in the topic. 20 subject-related discussion forums have been created by the ZADI, which allow the exchange of information on economic topics, plant and animal production. The user can choose a forum of 20 different discussion lists in the field of veterinary medicine.

By the way of the DAINet newsletter which is sent every week to all subscribers the user regularly receives news about the Internet and the developments on the DAINet.
Outlook

The more than 220,000 visits per months are an indication how much search catalogues like the DAINet are needed for navigation on the Internet. The constantly rising demands to the complex reference system DAINet make developments necessary which provide more variable access paths. To achieve this goal, a database-controlled search catalogue is being created which contains all information sources with their characteristics and which is searchable by various approaches. With the creation of this dynamic catalogue the DAINet will be adaptable to future developments on the Internet and will better answer the needs of the users.