

Virtual Reference Service Report

The Virtual Library: Martial Arts

<http://microbiol.org/vl.martial.arts/>

- Audience and purpose of the service

This section of the Virtual Library is devoted to the practice and application of the martial arts.

The aim is to have the most complete index of martial arts sites on the web.

- History of Virtual Library (VL)

The WWW Virtual Library (VL) is the oldest catalogue of the Web, started by Tim Berners-Lee, the creator of HTML and of the Web itself, in 1991 at CERN in Geneva. Unlike commercial catalogues, it is run by a loose confederation of volunteers, who compile pages of key links for particular areas in which they are expert; even though it isn't the biggest index of the Web, the VL pages are widely recognised as being amongst the highest-quality guides to particular sections of the Web.

Individual indexes live on hundreds of different servers around the world. A set of catalogue pages linking these pages is maintained at <http://vlib.org/>. A mirror of the Catalog is kept at East Anglia (UK).

The catalogue pages started life on the original web server at CERN, and have been hosted at various locations around the World since then. They moved to a new server in Geneva in 2004, not many kilometres from their first location.

Who runs it

Each maintainer is responsible for the content of their own pages, as long as they follow certain guidelines. The central Catalog pages are maintained by the Council of the VL. The VL was first conceived and run by Tim Berners-Lee, and later expanded, organised and managed for several years by Arthur Secret, before it became a formally established association with Gerard Manning as its Council's first chairman. The late Bertrand Ibrahim was a key contributor to the pre-association phase of the VL's development, and then served as its Secretary until his untimely death.

The central affairs of the VL are now co-ordinated by an elected council. The first council took office in Jan 2000, following elections the previous year. Major decisions, including a set of bylaws are decided by the membership at large.

In February 2006 Arthur Secret was elected president of the association. He chairs the new council, which was elected in January 2006.

Many volunteers have given a great deal of time and effort to the VL, ever since the early days of the web. There is a partial list of VL alumni to recognise their contributions.

- * Number of staff

Unknown: unlike commercial catalogues, it is run by a loose confederation of volunteers, who compile pages of key links for particular areas in which they are expert.

- Type of staff (librarians, paraprofessionals, etc.)

Maintainers:

The key quality they are looking for is sites which are or aim to be the definitive reference guide to online resources in a particular area. Create a truly useful guide to the area of expertise and maintaining that, with input from readers and others. That's what the Virtual Library is really about. As it is a community project, they also ask maintainers to stay in touch, via mailing lists, and participate to some extent in the overall project, by voting in elections, giving opinions, and linking in to other relevant VL sections. There are also some technical requirements on the content and layout of VL pages, to ensure minimal quality standards and a clear VL identity for each site.

Benefits

Some of the benefits that members have reported include:

- **Expertise** - researching sites for a VL section is a great way of learning about resources on the web.
- **Professional advancement** - VL sites are renowned for often being the best online resources in particular areas. Being the VL maintainer for a specific area will raise your profile, and can lead to useful opportunities and interactions with some of the leading members of your field. Some VL sections are maintained by organizations rather than individuals, and these also gain great positive exposure from their VL affiliation. If you already have a good specialist website, affiliating with the VL is a powerful stamp of approval and traffic generator.
- **Personal satisfaction** - the web is a wild and disorganized place. Creating and maintaining a high quality guide to part of the web can be personally very satisfying and a great way to do some good for the many visitors that will rely on your guide. We have all benefited from the net, and maintaining a VL site is an excellent way to take advantage of your

own expertise to give back to the net and help thousands of others in your field.

- **Technical Assistance** - The VL provides a community of like-minded individuals which can provide support and technical help. A number of other services include a powerful search engine, automatic submission of pages to major search engines, and others under development.
- How questions are posed to the service

Comments regarding a subject index are usually in email form. Questions may not be answered since the Virtual Library has over 250 sites to maintain. The system email is sysop@microbiol.org. To include a site, the use of their submission form includes what and where.

- Procedures and guidelines for answering the questions

Interest in joining the VL involves, (1) reading the page: *Joining the Virtual Library*, **and**, (2) visiting the sites of *several* current members to see what VL member sites are like. Then, if the philosophy fits with the VL, contact the VL on above form.

If you just want your site listing by the Virtual Library, you **must** contact an appropriate member library (or libraries). Each library has its own criteria and submission procedures.

* Arrangement

Organization of Site: This particular page of the Virtual Library: Martial Arts provides the structure and organization of the site. Each page of the site has a banner with its title, and two series of buttons on the top of the page. The uppermost row of buttons will always be the highest level of web pages (*i.e.* home, Search, Table of Contents, *etc.*). The row under the title banner will be pages at the same organizational level as the current page (usually related to the same general subject). There may be a column of buttons to the left of the page - these will be child pages (subcategories of the current topic).

*Evaluating this Virtual Library

Accuracy: "One real problem with most collections of links is that the listing continues to carry dead links for months or years. This is natural, as it is relatively easy to add a link but requires constant maintenance as sites change location or drop off the net. As a result, many links pages and collections are frustrating to use as a large number of links lead to dead ends (VL)." An ironic twist is that the site states that it attempts to maintain the site quarterly but then gives the check-up as June 20, 2003. Perhaps in this instance quarterly means

by decade rather than by year since many of the links do not work any longer or are not really relevant to a particular martial art. Another problem with this index is the links to administrative forms and emails are not maintained, making it difficult to add a new listing, become a member, or for that matter contact the administrator to enlighten them about the problems with their sites.

An interesting note includes the ticker that keeps track of how many visitors have been to the site. If the administrators or maintainers have not checked the site in 3 years what is the point of knowing if the site is being used? Another special note is the banner displaying the award they have received. If old information and incommunicative maintainers is the norm, I wonder what the criterion is to receive the GreatSports.com Site of the Day award?

*Final Analysis according to McClure and Lopata (Novotny, 2001) guidelines using a scale from 1-5. 1 =non-existent proper practice to 5 = proper practice being used.

Extensive:	5	Wide variety of subject listings
Efficiency-devotion:	1	Resources not current
Service Quality:	1	No response to queries or upkeep
Impact to user:	3	If efficiency problems are resolved users could cite relevant and scholarly data
Usefulness:	2	Worthless: Index out of date, websites expired, no response to queries.

It is unfortunate that this particular library is not functioning to its full potential. As a martial artist myself, this could be a great resource not only to submit our website on but to gather research on other arts as well. Website upkeep is very important, and if the site was actually checked quarterly administrators and maintainers would notice the lack of working resource links. Within six months I noticed a 50% jump in index access failure. This means that martial arts websites pulled their links due to poor resource service and quality leaving this virtual library to die an information highway death.

Resources:

Novotny, E. (2001). Evaluating electronic reference services: Issues, approaches and criteria. *The Reference Librarian*, 74 (2001). NP: The Hawthorne Press, Inc. 113-114.

The Virtual Library: Martial Arts. (September 9, 1999). Found on December 1, 2006 at <http://microbiol.org/vl.martial.arts/>.