Not Online

Concerning Information *Not* on the Internet

When we consider the billions of websites and digitized books available online, it might seem safe to assume that "everything is on the Internet," but that is not true.

Many people do use the Internet exclusively for their information-related activities, yet it is important to remember the Internet is simply one medium among others, including radio, books in print, e-mail, and e-books.

Technologically speaking, the Internet is a network of networks capable of handling all kinds of information – text, sounds, music, photographs, video, podcasts, and more. Beyond that, the Internet itself is not artificially intelligent, much less omniscient or all-encompassing: being a medium, it only contains what people decide to place online.

It is a fact that a good deal information will *never* be on the Internet. Ever.

Aside from the reality that, to be online, information has to be made available in some kind of digital form, there are many other factors making it difficult or impossible for certain types of information to be made accessible on the Internet.

Copyright is one big reason: information can only be placed online and be made available legally (be it freely or through a paid service) if authors, content providers, and/or publishers agree to do so. Copyright can get complicated, and even more so internationally, where there can be varied understandings, approaches, and enforcements of "intellectual property" from country to country.

Practicality is a factor: digitizing and hosting content can be an expensive and complex undertaking. Not every single author, publisher, or content provider has the technical ability, the money, or even the desire to digitize content and place it online.

Small presses, authors and publishers of local-interest items and newsletters, and others often do not have the resources or the reasons to make content available online.

Articles published in journals are often "embargoed," which means they can remain unavailable for months or years (unless, in some cases, you opt to pay access fees). This situation can impact the quality and depth of research significantly.

Despite its convenience, immediacy, and far-reaching technological potentials, the Internet is not always the optimal media for every kind of information out there.

Biographical or genealogical details are still often conveyed by word of mouth. Not everyone "tweets" or has a Facebook page. Not everyone is inclined to broadcast their lives through social media. Much personal information is still quite *offline* and will remain so.

Some individuals and social groups actually *enjoy* their Internet-free lifestyles!

Personal needs and preferences help decide which medium (or media) people use to transmit or receive information.

Persons with various disabilities are also to be remembered whenever we speak of information access: just because something might be online and widely available to Internet users does not always mean everyone can access that same information in the form that it is provided.

Speakers fluent in other languages might also experience the problem of something being online yet inaccessible to them because the information is not in their native tongue.

And while the Internet *is* a global medium, it is easy to forget that there are many places Internet access is not yet available due to geographic or socioeconomic conditions. Even where quality Internet access is available, not everyone can afford it.

Even when something *is* online, the sheer amount of information on the Internet can render facts and persons virtually invisible. Search engines can help, but they only see so much.

All the information presently on the Internet cannot be indexed or rendered findable by search engines. There is something nicknamed the "Deep Web," which contains a wealth of data generally invisible to search engines.

In fact, no search engine ever sees the entire Web (for more on this, please see our ***Diversify Your Search*** flyer at **http://www.thrall.org/docs/diversifyyoursearch.pdf**).

Is all hope lost? Of course not – especially if you allow your library to help you!

Libraries offer you the strongest starting point: you can access the Internet while also taking advantage of thematic encyclopedias and up-to-date reference works, indexes and bibliographies, critical editions, journals, free article databases, and many other traditional or electronic research tools not found online.

Researchers at Thrall are encouraged to visit our Reference Department and discover the ease and insight a highly specialized reference work can offer. Find key facts within minutes rather than spending hours scouring search engine results and struggling with websites – in fact, *why search at all?* (see **http://www.thrall.org/docs/whysearch.pdf**)

Our librarians can help you find faster paths to the information you need, whether it involves books, databases, the Internet, all of those things, or something else.

If you must use the Internet, please consider these resources and services we provide:
- **Article Databases & Encyclopedias** – http://www.thrall.org/databases
- **Critical Thinking & Research Advisories –** http://www.thrall.org/docs
- **Ready Reference Center** – http://www.thrall.org/readyref
- **Virtual Reference Library** – http://www.thrall.org/vrl
- **Web Guides** – http://www.thrall.org/guides