



EIRENE: Aiming for 'critical mass'

EIRENE expands membership and links

Tim Owen profiles an international association for independent information brokers

Information brokers who feel that hosts and content providers hold all the trump cards can now exercise their collective muscle through their own professional association. EIRENE, the European Information Researchers' Network, represents over 65 information brokers from the European Union, EFTA and East European countries, and it recently also welcomed its first Turkish member. "Close contact with other members has helped me on a number of occasions find new clients abroad - in Europe and the US," said Dr Jiri Kadlec, who offers online services from Prague. "All of

them are interested in receiving information on Czech businesses, regulations and laws, political and economic events." He is happy to help other members who have urgent needs for simple research or who wish to navigate Czech information resources - free of charge if possible. "Brokerage is becoming a really international activity," he said. "And EIRENE is - and will be - of great importance for me."

Small and scattered, EIRENE members rely on telecommunications to keep in touch. "Traffic to our Web site has virtually doubled since its launch in July," EIRENE's Internet Manager David Green, who also works for Informed Business Services, told *IWR*. "It is set to increase even further as reciprocal hyperlinks from other European organisations take effect."

Luxembourg-based broker Peter Cornelius agrees that networking is the main benefit of membership. "EIRENE is very much needed as an international organisation to represent a common voice in this field," he said. Besides the exchange of information, he sees its other key advantage as being the opportunity for subcontracting to "people with the same philosophy and the same behaviour".

Negotiating discounts for its members from selected online hosts is another benefit that EIRENE can confer, and members have also reported a favourable reaction from clients - and increased marketing power - from their adoption of the European Code of Practice for Information Brokers. Developed with the support of the European Commission, it covers issues of good business practice, professional competency, confidentiality, liability, and advertising and competition, and it is subject to arbitration in cases of dispute.

Richard Beveridge of Perfect Information, an EIRENE member for two years, believes the code of practice is the reason most information brokers become members. "When one goes to a large corporate it is easy to wave this document under the nose of an in-house legal department to assure confidentiality for outsourced work," he explained.

There were six new membership enquiries to the Secretariat in September alone - hardly surprising, in view of the wide range of issues which EIRENE believes need to be addressed. "Some online providers and market research publishers are still wary of brokers and unwilling to allow us to use their information," EIRENE's outgoing President David Mort told *IWR*. "The situation is improving, but deals are being arranged by specific brokers with specific providers, rather than there being any central agreement or best practice." The withdrawal of Textline from DIALOG has concerned some brokers too, he says, because of the cost of alternative sources like FT Profile and the "limited coverage" of World Reporter.

Running a full-time broking business single-handed leaves little time for professional activity. Reporting the recent departure of two committee members, Mr Mort commented, "These goings emphasise once again the need for as many members as possible to be involved in EIRENE and, in particular, show the difficulties of maintaining an adequate number of committee members".

Peter Cornelius agrees that the association urgently needs to grow further. "Unfortunately it does not have as many members as it needs in order to have a stronger voice in the information world," he said. "EIRENE is a relatively small association, so lobbying in Europe can be difficult." However, it is trying to work with other information associations to extend its influence. "We recently had an informal meeting with EUSIDIC, EIA and the SLA European Chapter to consider setting up a network of European associations," he explained, "and other associations will be asked to join."

Achieving critical mass is clearly EIRENE's key task for the immediate future. "Next to no one outside the information broking market is aware of its existence," said Richard Beveridge. "EIRENE must become a more vibrant organisation in Europe - information brokers have no other voice within it."

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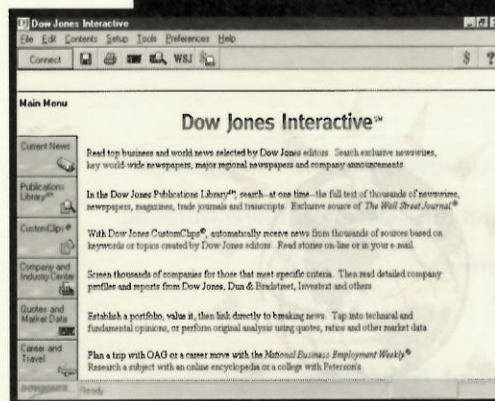
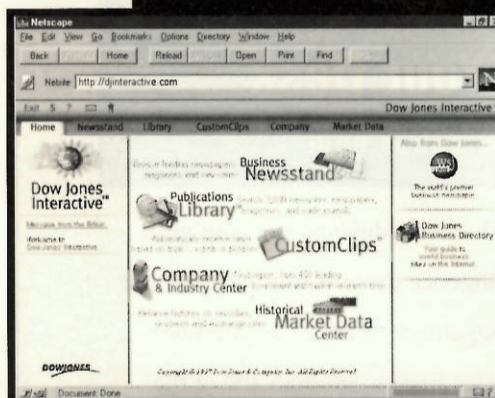
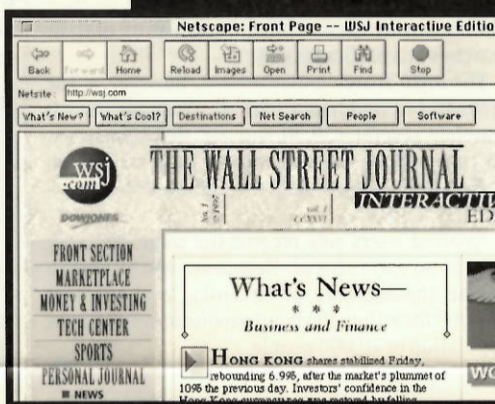
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Information Today, October 1997

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