Questions and Answers Session VI

Olivier Berger, INT

Is the conceptual fingerprint technology that you discussed a patented technology or will it be freely available to researchers?

Les Grivell

Part of the technology is patented, that is, the actual structure of the fingerprint. The rest of the technology is more or less open source, as it is based on very standard technology in the text retrieval analysis fields. Collexis is very willing to work together with academic organisations and encourages people who use the technology to place their fingerprints in the public domain.

In order to set up one of these systems, it is necessary to have a licence to use the abstraction and fingerprint generating software. Collexis wants to open up research as much as possible and academic users would only need to pay a very low cost licence.

Stevan Harnad

How do your projects relate to open access? It is not clear to me who the customer is for Figaro, nor what the relevant product is. In relation to E-BioSci, I understood that this was a search engine for proprietary and open access databases. In this context, what does "free to the user" mean and what to say about licensing if the system is accessing non open access literature?

Stefan Gradmann

Figaro customers are academic e-publishers. The Figaro back office will remain in the background and invisible to the actual authors and users of scientific content. We want to facilitate publishing front offices, enabling people to carry out self-publishing. It promotes technology such as Eprint that can be bought on the shelf so that people do not need to reinvent the wheel.

Les Grivell

In terms of the value of a new search engine to the open archive movement, independent archives often have problems with the quality of metadata and cross-connectivity. We offer biology archives the ability to apply fingerprint technology to the contents of their archives. Furthermore, we improve connectivity by using sophisticated concept based search technology. The engine remains within E-BioSci, which stores fingerprints generated by different archives and allows them to connect into related resources, taking people to the correct archive or database.

From the floor

You discussed the shortcomings of URNs and DOI. What are the solutions to this issue? Why did you not consider the URN-Seki option?

Stefan Gradmann

We are considering URN-Seki. I only wanted to warn you against the potential dangers of DOI.

Jan Velterop

I am grateful that you mentioned the many possibilities for re-use of the literature, which is an important part of what open access is about. Embedding literature in databases allows us to carry out meta-analyses, etc. I have been very impressed by your experience of the fingerprint technology you presented. I understood that the system was free for public or government funded organisations.

Les Grivell

Collexis grew out of an EU project, Share, that was aimed at developing health information networks within developing countries. They provide a percentage of their turnover to projects focused on that goal, and provide their technology free to Class I countries. I am not sure of the situation with respect to government organisations, but they do have contacts with science and research council in order to match up scientists' profiles with their various requirements. I certainly would be interested in developing the technology further, in using it to identify scientists unique, as this would be a resource that could open new horizons.

Jean-Paul Ducasse

In a French language project on digital scientific publishing, we developed a platform that accepts, respects and produces structured valid documents stored in XML and accessible in various formats. This platform has been developed on an Open Source basis. The goal is to provide scientific institutions with tools for archiving and disseminating documents. In this context, we also provide an indexing tool. What we really need is to have all of these initiatives come together to avoid new systems being re-created every six months.

Stefan Gradmann

In this context, I suggest you come to the OpenOffice meeting in Hamburg this year.

Geoffrey Bilder

I hope that you will be considering Shibboleth for access control. In relation to DSpace, I have some concerns in relation to persistent identifiers for online resources. What will be the licensing arrangements for other parts of the E-BioSci system? Do you have any other commercial partners working on this?

Les Grivell

Ingenta is a partner, and is building the interface to the system.

Stefan Gradmann

We have considered Shibboleth and are in contact with Ingenta.

Pieter Bolman

SPARC supports open access, and its flagship publication is "Organic Letters", published by the American Chemical Society. When will it become an open access journal? As you know, ACS is one of the important not-for-profit organisations that are vehemently against Open Access principles.

David Prosser

Hopefully, as soon as possible. The world is moving very quickly and open access and institutional repository concepts have only taken off in the last few years. The rival journal idea was a good one initially. Given that the technology and tools are changing, it would be foolish for any organisation to not take advantage of developments in order to best serve the scientific community.

Bernard Lang

You highlighted a very important point: what is even more important than access to archives is open access to databases. What actions are you taking in relation to databases? My second remark, on Les Grivell's presentation: Your way of recommending a specific patent-protected technology seems to me rather similar to the common practice of monopolising in order to control the market.

Les Grivell

Having looked at search engines and text mining technologies in general, we found the Collexis technology to be the best in terms of price and quality. We therefore decided to enter into a collaboration with that company on the understanding that the use of that tool in an academic setting would be absolutely free. We hope to sustain our activities by charging commercial organisations for use of the system. Given that the technology is evolving at a fast pace, we are prepared to change to a new system in the next few years.

Stefan Gradmann

Your question concerns identifying and pointing to elements in databases. I recently read of a proposal to use OAI for datasets. I would be strongly opposed to this.

Jean-Claude Guedon

In relation to journals supported by the OSI, it is very clear that in order to improve their value worldwide, we have to improve the value of the publication by promoting systematic links between documents and databases. This enables researchers to access the relevant trials directly. Another option is to review the system of peer review.

Francis Muguet

This illustrates the problem related to open access for databases. ACS's attitude, mentioned by P. Bolman, is based on the fact that they have a very expensive database. Should they provide this on open access, all chemists, including commercial chemists, would have access to it. What are your views on the evolution between the various foundations: the Soros Foundation was the first one to support open access and has now been followed by many other foundations?

Jean-Claude Guedon

In the US and Canada, the issue of the public domain is of growing interest, due to a background of encroaching private interests. People are now very wary of the trends. The conference held at Duke University in Autumn 2001 resulted in a series of very interesting articles on protecting or reconstructing the public domain, which is a guarantee of biodiversity and intellectual diversity. In order to find these papers, use "duke" and "benkler" on the Google search engine.

Jack Franklin

To sum up, we have had a very good technical meeting. It is interesting that it began with a discussion on money and ended with a discussion on money. The technology solutions already exist. However, the question is how to transfer the required funds to where they are most needed. As an experienced receiver of EC grants, I should just like to ask the two last speakers if they have their business plans ready.

I thank the organisers for inviting me to this meeting, which I have very much enjoyed.