

How much information?

by Gerald Oliver

The University of California at Berkeley has been measuring how much information is being created - whether stored through paper, film, magnetic or optical media. The staggering conclusion is that almost 800Mb of recorded information is produced for each person in the world each year.

The University categorises storage of information according to four physical media - print, film, magnetic and optical - and its dissemination through four electronic channels - telephone, radio, TV and the Internet. In 2002, approx. five exabytes was stored on physical media - and 92 percent of that was stored on magnetic media, mostly hard disks. To put that into perspective, five exabytes is equivalent to 500,000 new libraries the size of the US Library of Congress print collections!

Here are some other scary facts:

- The US produces about 40 percent of the world's new stored information, including a third of the world's new printed information.
- New stored information grew at a rate of 30 percent between 1999 and 2002.
- Instant messaging generates five billion messages a day.
- One tree can produce about 80,500 sheets of paper: 786 million trees are needed to produce the world's annual paper supply. Each inhabitant of Europe consumes about 15 reams of paper a year (7,500 sheets); in North America the figure is about 24 reams a year (12,000 sheets). At least half of this paper is used in printers and copiers to produce office documents.
- Email generates about 440,000 terabytes of new information each year worldwide. Two terabytes is equivalent to the extent of an academic research library. One terabyte is equivalent to 50,000 trees made into paper and printed.

In figures that will be already out of date (they are based on 2002 data), the study shows that the "surface Web" (fixed Web pages) amounted to 167 terabytes, while the "deep Web" (database-driven websites that create Web pages on demand) amounted to almost 92,000 terabytes.

If that has not quite blown your mind, then you can see more at:

<http://www2.sims.berkeley.edu/research/projects/how-much-info-2003/>