

FINDING SCIENCE NEWS ON THE NET

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Internet: Prop to Finding Science Story Ideas

Where to look for detailed information about Cassini spacecraft which has unveiled the mystery of Titan? How to find new exciting researches on nanotechnology or stem cells? Such questions flicker through the mind of a science writer while contemplating to write a science story. It seems achievable in an age when any information is just a mouse click away. For an Internet savvy seasoned science writer, it is easy to pick out the right story ideas from the heap of information ranging from space to fashion, and epidemics to politics. But for an aspiring science writer, it is a daunting task. This write up will give some leads to a budding science writer about finding science story ideas on the Internet.

Internet's Edge

Before the advent of Internet, journalists were accustomed to certain amount of legwork and library combing to get any scientific information. On top of it, universities and research institutes used to distrust press making it very difficult to get any information. Another obstacle is that a science writer could be in one place at a time. To make matter worse, the writer had to wait for the post and ring concerned scientists to get vital information. Under these circumstances, meeting deadline was never easy. But the invention of the Web (Internet) has changed things to a great extent. For a science writer, access has been multiplied. Now stories are possible that would once have been beyond a writer's reach. A news release based on a scientific research sent via e-mail appears on any World Wide Web (Internet) news page within minutes. But, scholarly journals report the results of same research, long after the web version of news release.

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Right Choice

But, which web sites do the science writers track regularly? Science writers should keep an eye on web sites that are updated daily. Their needs are more urgent. Web information updated weekly is too slow for them. Only sites with comprehensive scope are to be considered. Information about only, say, AIDS/HIV or agriculture is not what writers are after. Some comprehensive sites highlight themselves as covering science including health and technology. Most often, what is meant by technology is a navel-gazing interest in computers driven by the biased investors who produce the sites. Science writers should brush aside such web sites. In addition, writers should turn their attention to web pages that organise science information in a convenient way saving time lost in unnecessary searching.

Science News on the Web

Many sites in the Internet are devoted to science and technology. Here I describe some better web sites on science news.

Eurekalert (www.eurekalert.org)—it is a comprehensive news provider for up-to-date research in almost every stream of science. One can find latest advances in nanotechnology, space probes, geology, and cancer treatments. On an average about 20 news releases are posted each day by 1993 registered reporters from various news media organizations worldwide and about 290 contributing institutions. Eurekalert is produced by the American Association for the Advancement of Science, with technical support by US-based Stanford University.

New Scientist (www.newscientist.com) has an online version of the printed magazine, which is a weekly magazine covering various aspects of science.

Newswise (www.newswise.com) was started in 1991 by Roger Johnson, a biochemist turned science writer. It contains a searchable database of news releases from US-