

ONLINE USER GROUPS AND CONFERENCES

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The advent of Online user groups in Europe

In the 1970's the online industry developed rapidly in Europe. At the end of the decade online searching had become common both at universities and within companies. The online users felt that they needed a forum, more or less formal, for exchange of experience and information. There was also a need to give opinion to and exert pressure on database producers and hosts and especially the telecommunication companies, with whom the "onliners" experienced most problems. Thus online user groups were established in many European countries. The Nordic countries were in the forefront, and user groups established in Finland as early as 1975, in Denmark (DOBG) and Sweden (SOLUG) in 1977 and in Norway (Online-gruppe, later NOLUG) in 1978. The still active UK user group, UKOLUG, also started in 1978. From the beginning the online groups acted as an important resource in database user training.¹

Co-operation between the Nordic online groups

In summer 1978 NORDINFO suggested establishment of closer contacts between NORDINFO and the Nordic online users. A meeting was held in Helsinki 12-13 December 1978, where two representatives from each of the Nordic online groups came together in order to evaluate the needs of the Nordic online users and the problems with the online systems. The meeting decided that the attending representatives should form an Online reference group and that suggestions for future NORDINFO projects within online should be discussed in that group. At this first meeting for example Holger Friis from DOBG was very critical of SCANNET calling it SCANDALNET considering performance and lack of training material.

NORDINFO found the suggestions of an Online reference group interesting but could not give money to such a permanent project. Instead NORDINFO co-operated future meetings of the Nordic online users groups at the Nord IoD conferences, first at the 4th Nord IoD in Uppsala the 14th of June 1979, where the Nordic Online Users day attracted 150 participants, and later in Trondheim 17th June 1982, in Århus in 1989 and at the 8th Nord IoD in Helsingborg in May 1992, where the Swedish Online User Group was very involved in preparing the program. In Helsinki in 1985 it was decided to integrate online topics in the conference itself, as described later.

Thanks to NORDINFO, a 2-day Nordic Online group meeting could again be held, this time in Lund in October 1980 with delegates from Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden.² The main discussions were about SCANNET, with suggestions of a common login procedure, searchable title fields, indexing in English, a common user manual and CCL (Common Command Language). A letter was also sent to Lockheed (later named Dialog after the search language) with suggestions that a printer be installed in Europe, since the delays in receiving prints had been unacceptable. It was also suggested that Lockheed should appoint a Scandinavian representative, who could help with co-ordinating courses. Lockheed responded positively to this and promised to install a remote printer in Europe "by the middle of 1981". But after having tested the concept Dialog decided it wouldn't work properly and tried instead to speed up the delivery of prints by using courier services and bulk mail: All envelopes with European addresses were sent to a mail service somewhere in Europe, from where they were sent by local postage. The European office of Lockheed also invited the four Nordic User Groups to "participate in the organisation of training sessions". In Denmark the newly established Danish Diane Centre soon took over that task. In November 1984 SCANNET organised a meeting in Stockholm with the chairmen of the Nordic Online groups. The main problem for online users was still telecommunication, which needed improvements. For the 6th IoD in Helsinki in 1985, where the theme would be IRM- Information Retrieval Management-, it was decided to recommend that papers relating to online be integrated in the main program instead of holding a separate Online. However, an Online user's evening was held during the conference on August 20, where Elisabet Mickos talked about Scannet and each of the Nordic online groups was presented. Aud Lamvik has written about this meeting in the Norwegian journal for information specialists, Synopsis.³

The first Nordic Online conference, Databas 88, was held in Stockholm January 25-27 1988. NORDINFO, DFI (Delegation for Scientific and Technical Information) and the PTTs of Denmark, Finland and Sweden were among

the organisers. This event, called the largest Nordic Trade Fair for databases and videotex, featured conference seminars, exhibition and product presentations. Ulla Retlev, in her review of this event for the Danish journal of information specialists, called it a success but pointed out that it was not another library meeting.⁴ Even Flood also gave a report of this meeting, where he mentions that Elisabet Mickos, the SCANNET coordinator, got a price by the Swedish PTT for her work with Nordic databases.⁵

At InfoOnline 1990, a successor of both Videotex 87 and Databas 88, held in Stockholm 24-27 April 1990, the Nordic online user groups took part in the arrangements together with the Swedish PTT. SOLUG arranged a user meeting that exemplified the geographical reach of online. The three guest speakers were Harry Collier, at that time the Executive Director of EUSIDIC, who talked about "Information strategy 1990-1995. The coming convergence.", Dr. Roger Greatrex, from the Political Research Institute in Lund, presented Japanese databases, and the SCANNET co-ordinator Elisabet Mickos presented a comparison between Online in Australia and the Nordic countries.

Co-operation between the European online groups

EUROLUG:

The First International Online Information Meeting took place in London in December 1977, probably the first world meeting focused on online retrieval. This was also the first time online users in Europe came together. During this Online event an informal meeting was organised for chairmen of the national user groups already in existence or soon to be. The participants at this meeting agreed that a forum for international exchange of experiences would be highly desirable and pointed to EUSIDIC (The European Association of Information Services, founded in 1970) as the right venue. Six countries were represented, from Scandinavia Sweden (Gunnel Hessler), Norway (Roar Storleer) and Denmark (Betty Vedel). As a result of this meeting EUSIDIC in 1978 prepared a document proposing a mechanism by which EUSIDIC could be associated with the international activities of the national online user groups. A Working Group was constituted, consisting of representatives of EUSIDIC members, one for each country with a national user group, with the aim of providing a forum for the European users of electronic information services. This group was called NUG (National User Groups), later renamed EUROLUG (The European Online User Group). The Council of EUSIDIC was willing to give support through its secretariat in organising meetings and EUSIDIC's newsletter Newsidic could be used to inform members of the activities of the group in a column called EUROLUG News. Meetings were held first three and later two times a year, in London at the International Online Information Meeting in December (the first one in 1978) and in Luxembourg, Paris, Frankfurt, Heidelberg etc. in spring. The European Commission paid travelling costs during the first years but was reluctant to pay for members of countries not within the EC. Among the Nordic countries, only Denmark was a member at that time. Members from the other Nordic countries had to apply for money elsewhere. NORDINFO and EUSIDIC sponsored for some years. In Sweden the Royal Library, DFI and sometimes TLS (The Swedish Society for Technical Documentation) also helped with the travelling costs. In Norway Riksbibliotekstjenesten gave travel support, but often also the employers of the groups' representatives, be it governmental agencies or corporations, would pay the cost.

From the beginning 11 European countries were members in EUROLUG, which soon grew to 17. EUROLUG could act as a pressure group on the Telecommunication and Online industries and on the European Commission. Discussion of pricing policies, duplication of records within the same database, updating of databases, harmonisation of invoices and restricted access to certain databases were on the agenda. Every year the member user groups prepared a country report, summarising all interesting events in their countries during the year.

Monitoring week:

In 1983 EUSIDIC undertook a survey to obtain information on the attitudes of users in Europe towards European online services. The questionnaire was designed in collaboration with EUROLUG and the Euronet DIANE Launch Team and distributed through the national online user groups.

In 1986 EUROLUG together with EUSIDIC decided to test the European data communications and check all calls during the last week of January from the European countries to online services via public data networks. The Online user groups were involved in sending out the forms to their members and collecting the answers. This was the first so-called Monitoring Week, which was then repeated yearly until 1993.

The result of this first Monitoring Week survey was published by EUSIDIC⁶ and distributed to national PTTs: many countries reported a lot of failed calls, the mean rate of failures was 31 %. Most of the Nordic countries had about 30 % failed calls.

In 1989 the British Telecom announced an award to the online group with the most recorded calls during the Monitoring Week. Sweden had the highest call rate, and SOLUG won 12 bottles of champagne! The problems with getting the champagne to Sweden were enormous, due to the strict Swedish alcohol legislation. The champagne was stuck in the Customs, since only the Swedish Systembolaget was (and still is) allowed to import alcohol to Sweden. After many discussions the champagne could at last be fetched from the Customs. It was locked up in the room of the director of the Royal Institute of Technology Library, where the Swedish representative in EUROLUG, Lilianna Kanafarski, worked, until it would be served at the end of the SOLUG day in November. In return for the champagne Harry Collier asked for a professional picture of Lilianna surrounded by the bottles and with a glass in her hand (water though!). This "marketing" picture was also published in Tidskrift för dokumentation (TD).⁷ After that, champagne, now purchased at the Systembolaget, has been served at the end of each yearly SOLUG day.

In 1995 the aim of the Monitoring Week changed to survey document delivery services instead of communications.⁸ This was repeated 1996.

Awards:

EUROLUG Product award started in 1984. All the online user groups had the opportunity to suggest the best products of the year (online systems, software etc.). At the December meeting with EUROLUG one product was chosen and the winner of the award solemnly disclosed at the International Online Information Meeting in London.

EUROLUG

Personality of the year award also started in 1984. Members of the Nordic online user groups who have received the award are Sauli Laitinen in 1994 and Lilianna Kanafarski in 1995. Sauli received his diploma at the 18th Online Information Meeting in London Dec. 1994,⁹ while Lilianna received hers at the EUSIDIC's 25th Anniversary Conference in Holland in October 1995.¹⁰

The Nordic user groups:11

Sweden:

In 1976 Gunnel Hessler at Lund University Library gathered a group of online users in order to document and spread experience and knowledge of search possibilities in online databases (the systems most used at that time were ESA-RECON, Lockheed Information Systems and SDC Search Service). In order to enlarge, the group suggested in February 1977 to the board of TLS to initiate the formation of an online user group connected to TLS. The board accepted the proposal and Gunnel Hessler, Lena Göteson-Herber and Irena Vinters (later Gellerstedt) were chosen as members of a committee with the remit to start a national online group. At the end of 1977 this online group had 35 members.

At a meeting in Helsingborg in May 1978 (during the TLS Spring Conference) it was stated that the online group should be a discussion forum for people using literature and factual databases in their daily work, with the name of SOLUG, the Swedish Online User Group. SOLUG became associated with TLS as an Interest group, with Gunnel Hessler as the first chairman and Irena Vinters as deputy. Regional Online groups were at the same time formed in Stockholm, led by Irena Vinters, in South Sweden led by Gunnel Hessler/Karin Adler and in West Sweden, led by Rutger Irgens. The year after a regional group was started in Mid Sweden, led by Inger Melin, and in 1981 also one in North Sweden, led by Mats Berglund.

In 1981 the Stockholm regional group decided to start Subject groups, where members with common interests could come together and discuss databases within their subject fields and help and give advice to each other. The first of these subject groups was led by Inger Enander and later by Ylva Rosell, both at IDC/KTHB, and gathered information specialists with interest within Biology, Agriculture and Food Science. This group is still active (year 2005) with about 15 members, but is now called Biosciences including Environment. In 1982 8 subject groups were active, besides the Biology group Electronics and Computer Science (Anna Maria Magnusson), Material Science (Lars Klasén), Medicine and Pharmacology (Elisabeth Kjellander), Chemistry and Environment (Laila Gunnare), Marketing and Company information (Bernt Båvestam), IoD (Elsa Werngren) and Solitaries (Lise-Lotte Lindskog). An Energy group started soon after (Marie Wallin). Helena Fernholm initiated a Patent group in 1989. The coordinators (in Swedish called summoners) of the subject groups met three times a year. Some of the subject groups were national, in that SOLUG members from other parts of Sweden could attend. But soon the other regional online groups also started subject groups. The last group formed was Datorstrulgruppen (computer fuss) with its first meeting in Lund 26th of October 1995. The subject groups met several times per year and were very

important both as a forum for exchange of experience between the members and for getting to know people with similar interests. They were often held at the member's workplace and then usually included information of the company or institution. Very experienced members could sometimes find that the others were using them too much as teachers, but the stated policy was that all members should contribute to the meetings, and in most groups this functioned very well.

SOLUG had about 80 members from the beginning in 1978 but had in 1982 grown to 275 and was with its 300 members in 1984 the largest Interest group within TLS.

Gunnel Hessler was chairman (except for a period 1978-1979 when she was in the US and Irena Vinters took over) until May 1981, when a committee with one representative from each of the regional groups was formed. Irena Gellerstedt was the first chairman of this committee, replaced by Karin Adler in 1982. Later chairmen were Viveka Alton-Lundberg, Hans I. Holm, and Marjolaine Thulin. The chairman took part in the EUROLUG meetings.

From 1988 SOLUG became a board within TLS, led by a management committee of 7 members, one from each of the regional online groups and two independent ones. Lise-Lotte Lindskog became the first chairman of the SOLUG board and a very active and enthusiastic one. She was also in EUSIDIC council for five years and Honorary Treasurer from 1995 to 1998. When Lise-Lotte became the chairman of TLS in spring 1994 Inga Elding took over as chairman of SOLUG. Lilianna Kanafarski was from 1988 to 1999 SOLUG's representative in EUROLUG, where she took an active part. Even here a picture in Newsidic12 of Lilianna, together with Oriole Arnison-Newgass, the chairman of EUROLUG, documents the facts.

At first SOLUG had a column in TLS Information, the TLS newsletter, with information to its members. Then, from 1988 on, a special information sheet was included in TLS' newsletter. The headline read:

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reflecting some of the different ways the database systems used for truncation and adjacency.

A SOLUG brochure was also prepared in 1988 that could be distributed on its own.

Within the Regional SOLUG groups meetings were arranged 2-6 times per year. From the early eighties the national group had been holding two meetings a year, one with TLS Spring Conference and one with the Autumn Conference. In May 1985 SOLUG, under the chairmanship of Hans I. Holm, together with TLS arranged the Spring Conference in Tylösand. The theme was Swedish databases, and Erik Helmer arranged an exhibition with most of the database producers and vendors. Later it was decided that SOLUG matters could be included in the program of the TLS Spring Conference. Only at the Autumn conferences in November would a special SOLUG day be arranged. The program of that day typically included a Keynote speaker, reports from a Subject group, report from EUROLUG meetings and the Monitoring Week and often a panel discussion. During the 1990's a well-known online personality was often invited as Keynote speaker, like Barry Mahon in 1991, David Raitt in 1992, Björn Tell in 1993, Marydee Ojala in 1994, Reva Basch in 1995, Ian Watson in 1997, Mary Ellen Bates in 1998 and Greg Notes in 1999. When Mary Ellen Bates visited Stockholm Solug arranged for a social event program the evening before the conference called "Unplugged with Mary Ellen Bates" which was very much appreciated by all, users and non-users the like.

In 1984 the first of a series of theme days of interactive online searching was arranged by TLS together with SOLUG and the Swedish DIANE centre. The first of these was called Online from the beginning, followed by the subject themes Market and Economy, Biomedicine and Toxicology, Energy, and Chemistry. When SOLUG became a board within TLS, one of the persons in the management committee also was a member of TLS Education board and initiated many courses useful for online searchers. One of these was called "Online from the beginning again". It was held in Stockholm in 1998 and repeated in Lund in October 1999 but with the name changed to "Online searching-today's technology and amount of information".

In 1992 Tidskrift för Dokumentation (TD) had a Theme number with the overall title "Onlineanvändare är vi allihopa – snart!" (We are all Online users – soon!), where each member of the SOLUG board contributed an article.¹³

Lise-Lotte Lindskog initiated the so-called High-Tech days. SOLUG members got the opportunity to visit places in Sweden (once also in England), where interesting development within databases or systems were taking place

(Linköping University September 1991, UMIST in Manchester December 1992 (just after the Online Information Meeting in London), Electrum in Kista in Stockholm 1993, SoftCenter in Ronneby September 1997).

In 1999 TLS decided to discontinue the SOLUG board. Almost all librarians now used online searching, both in traditional databases and on the Internet, and it was thought that SOLUG was played out and that online matters now were a natural part of TLS activities. This decision was not uncontroversial, since SOLUG had been working very well for such a long time. Some of the subject groups are still active. To give "onliners" something extra, a special quarterly newsletter with information on what happens within the Online industry, both in Sweden and abroad, is now being produced by Lars Klasén for the TLS members only. The first newsletter every year is a report from the International Online Information Meeting in London.

Denmark:

The Danish Online User Group was established as one of the first user groups in Europe.

In July 1977 Betty Vedel sent out an invitation to a first meeting with Danish online users, which was held on August 22. The aim was that the users of online systems should be able to meet colleagues and exchange experience and help each other to solve problems. The group took the name DANSK ONLINE-BRUGER GRUPPE (DOBG) (Danish Online User Group). In the beginning the group had no chairman, no minutes were written and the group was not connected to any other organisation. In April 1979 a charter for the Danish Online User Group was established, the purpose of the group being to strengthen the Danish know-how with regard to utilisation of the online systems for information and documentation by

- a) being a forum for widening the knowledge about online systems
- b) maintaining a general view of Danish expertise in the field
- c) placing the group's knowledge at the disposal of national and international authorities
- d) being an initiator of courses and seminars valuable to increase the Danish expertise in the field

Membership of DOBG was open to everybody interested in the purpose of the group. All members made up the plenum of the user group, with plenum meetings held 4 times a year, first at DTB (The National Technical Library of Denmark), also housing the secretariat of the group for the first 2 years. Later the meetings were held in different places in Denmark. The agenda could include reports from EUROLUG meetings, information on telecommunication's progress, new databases and hosts and logon-procedures, reports from working groups, and information on courses and seminars. Minutes from these meetings were sent out to all members.

In the April 1979 charter it was decided that DOBG should be led and co-ordinated by a steering committee of five persons, elected for one year, later changed to a two year rolling schedule. The first five elected were Jannik P. Davidsen, Elisabeth Henning Jensen, Alex Gorski, (soon replaced by Durga S. Nag), Birgit Pedersen, and Betty Vedel (replaced by Karsten Weis in November 1979). In August 1980 Elisabeth Henning Jensen became SDC's representative in Scandinavia, and Inge Justesen was elected in the steering committee in her place. The committee met about eight times a year. Chairmen of the committee were Betty Vedel 1979, Jannik Davidsen 1979-1982, Pia Bune (later Jensen) 1982-1985, Helge Clausen 1985-1988, Durga Nag 1988-1996, and Troels Laurell 1996-. In 1981 there was a suggestion that DOBG should be connected to DTL, but after discussion at a plenum meeting this was refused.

At the same time that DOBG was reorganized in 1979, working groups were established, where more subject-oriented questions relating to databases or telecommunication could be discussed. Even a regional working group was established. The first groups were Business and Economics (led by Alex Gorski), Humanities and social sciences (led by Karl Krarup), Bio-medical science (led by Ulla Retlev), Technology and science (led by Karsten Weis), and The Western regional group (led by Inge Justesen). This group is still active, now forming a network group within DFID, (Dansk Forening for Information og Dokumentation) and renamed The Online group, A Document delivery group was started in August 1980 by Anne Mette Emdal.

The first task of the new established DOBG was to send a letter in March 1978 to the Danish PTT with complaints about the high prices of the telecommunication to the important US databases. Telecommunication costs consisted of a fee per minute and a fee for the number of characters transmitted plus maybe a special fee for a long distance call to the nearest data network node that could be as high as DKr 5-6 per minute to the US. This was on top of the costs for searching the databases.

In August 1978 DOBG decided to accept the offer from EUSIDIC to co-operate in the European working group for online users (later EUROLUG). Jannik Davidsen was elected as the first representative.

At the end of 1979 DOBG had 110 members, which in 1988 had grown to 300.

In August 1987 DOBG celebrated its ten years anniversary with a meeting followed by a reception for all members. In his speech the chairman, Helge Clausen, underlined the informal way with no paid subscription and people working voluntarily as a reason for the stability of DOBG. Helge Clausen also mentioned the important relations to national and international bodies like PTT, Danish Diane Centre, EUSIDIC, other User Fora etc. Especially the good relations to the Danish PTT, with representatives joining most meetings, had meant that the user questions, complaints and viewpoints were brought forward. During its first ten years telecommunication problems and pricing in the data networks had been the most discussed topics. Presentations of new services and databases and, in the first years, workshops and seminars were also organised by the user group. Later the Danish Diane Centre took over this task.

When a EURONET-DIANE centre was established in Denmark in 1981 DOBG was active in it's planning and wanted the centre to be able to give advice on all available online information systems and not only those within EURONET-DIANE. DOBG also wanted to have a representative in the steering committee of the centre, which was accepted. Birgit Pedersen was elected as the first representative from DOBG. DOBG also sent a representative to EURONET-DIANE User Forum, which usually was held in connection with the EUROLUG spring meetings.

From 1989 it was decided that DOBG should "go online" and only write minutes from the meetings to an electronic mailbox, from which the members were supposed to download them. Unfortunately, the result was a diminished interest in reading the minutes and keeping an archive.

During the nineties the meetings were held less frequently, only to stop totally due to lack of interest in autumn 1997. However, due to its informal structure DOBG was never officially closed down.

Norway:

Within the Norsk Dokumentasjonsgruppe- NDG (Norwegian Association for Documentation), founded in 1968, several interest groups developed. The chairman of NDG, Tove Molvig, proposed already in 1975 to establish a special interest group, Online-gruppen (Online User Group).¹⁴ For whatever reason this group seems not to have been established until September 1978, when Anne Tvetter Knoop took the chair of the first working group of Online-gruppen. It soon became the most popular group, in that more than half of the NDG members applied. The work in the group was driven by the members. It worked as a pressure group on the PTT and database producers and vendors. In the beginning of the 80's the interest for the Online group diminished. After a restructuring, initiated by some fiery spirits, the group established in January 1987 as NOLUG, Norsk Online Brukergruppe/Norwegian Online User Group. Soon most of the members of NDG also became members or NOLUG. The members of the first executive committee of the "new" NOLUG were Jon Anjer, UB Oslo, Per B. Kristensen, Norsk Hydro, and Ane Cecilie Røed, Axess Information Services.

Subgroups of NOLUG were later the same year established in Trondheim, with Even Flood as the contact person, and in Bergen, Bergen Online Forum, with Øystein Wendelbo as the contact person. These groups arranged meetings in their region for some years before the activities ended.

NOLUG is a member organization for users of online information with the purpose to promote the interests of users of online systems by :

- Stimulating communication and exchange of knowledge/experience between members
- Organizing educational meetings and training events
- Representing member interests nationally and internationally through participation in EUROLUG and by liaising with the information industry regarding commercial databases, CD ROM products, software, and other information products
- Serving as a reference group for Norsk DIANE Senter (service centre for database searching)¹⁵

NOLUG has been involved in the EUROLUG activities, including meetings and the Monitoring Weeks. The Norsk DIANE Senter was each time the office which did the work with the Monitoring Weeks on behalf of NOLUG.

NOLUG started in 1987 an electronic meeting, or mailbox or bulletin board, for the members. This was part of an electronic meeting system PORTACOM at a VAX machine at the University of Oslo and a first step to gain experience in this sort of communication, but it ended after a few years.

Also in 1987 Norsk Online Forening (NOF, Norwegian Online Society) was founded. This started as a forum for users, hosts, advisers and brokers of online services, together with suppliers of technical applications, telecommunication, and data processing. Tron Kleivane from Axess Information Services was the first

chairman. Norsk Online Forening cooperated for several years with the company Axxess Information Services in the arrangements of the Oslo Online conferences, with seminars and exhibitions. NOF later merged with the telecommunication society NORTEB (Norsk Telebrukerforening) to create NORTIB (Norsk Tele- og Informasjonsbrukerforening/The Norwegian Tele- and Information Users Group).

Even NOF started in 1987 an electronic meeting, FORUM, which in the beginning only could be contacted by telephone. This meeting, or mailbox, was available for members of NOF, NOLUG and Den Norske Dataforening/ Østlandet – Faggruppe for informasjonsdatabaser (The Norwegian Computer Society). Also this mailbox ceased after some time, as technology developed.

NOLUG is the only of the Nordic online user groups that has survived and it is still active! (year 2005.) It is now associated with NFF (Norsk fagbiblioteksforening/Norwegian Association of Special Libraries) through a cooperative agreement. The meetings and seminars (4-6 per year) are often arranged in cooperation with the Oslo University College, Faculty of Journalism, Library and Information Science, and attract students, librarians as well as information specialists both from academia and from business and industry. Sometimes well-known international information personalities are invited as Key Speakers. NOLUG has now 169 members (May 2004).

Finland:

Finnish Society for Information Services (Tietopalveluseura) was founded in 1947, initially as the Finnish Society for Literature Services. It was an active organization bringing together information professionals in Finland. The core of the activities has been, and still is, sections and working groups. When the breakthrough of information technology came in the seventies, a group of members suggested in 1974 that the society should set up an EDB section to handle and promote EDB (Elektronisk databehandling-Electronic Data Handling) applications in information services. The new section started with Helka Holmen as chairman, followed in 1975 by Sauli Laitinen; both originators of the EDB section.

The aim of the EDB section was to follow the development in the rapidly developing EDB field, especially relating to information services, act as a coordinating body, make surveys, report activities and to arrange training and seminars. As the online era at that time had already started in Finland, consequently the use of online information retrieval systems became a part of the new section. Thus the Finnish online group started as a part of the EDB section as early as in 1975.

The EDB section arranged several meetings per year concerning as well different EDB applications as online databases and systems. During the first year 6 meetings were held dealing with:

- domestic EDB-applications
- card files or EDB-lists
- EDB-training
- online systems
- IBM text processing
- the EDB-project at the Finnish research libraries

At that time 72 persons were members of the EDB section and almost 30 members took in average part in the meetings.

The use of online databases expanded rapidly during the 70ths and consequently the need of information on new databases, online systems, search techniques etc., increased in the same way. To satisfy this need the EDB section decided in 1978 to start an online newsletter (Online-Uutiset) for members and other interested. The first editor was Timo Mylly, later on replaced by Ari Koivisto and Irma Salovaara, all working at VTT (Information Service of the Technical Research Centre of Finland). The newsletter consisted at the beginning primarily of copies taken from Lockheed (Dialog), SDC and IRS newsletters and of information on online and database courses. Online-Uutiset was published four to five times a year. Later on the contents were extended with reports from meetings and seminars, as for instance the regularly arranged Nordic online meeting days. At that time the Nordic online bulletin EXTEMPLO, accessible via SCANNET, was used for information on meeting and seminars.

The Online-newsletter was produced at the Information Service of the Technical Research Centre of Finland (VTT). VTT had a great selection of online systems and the majority of the international online databases seminars were held there, thus collecting of news on databases, research languages and systems was a natural part of

their activities. Online beginners did not at that time have resources to obtain all needed online documentation themselves. Online-Uutiset was thus an important channel for the growing amount of online users in Finland. Online-Uutiset was published as a separate newsletter until 1985. In 1986 it was published as a column in Tietopalvelulehti (Finnish Journal of Information Service), which was launched by Tietopalveluseura in 1981. The last online column was published in 1997.

The EDB section decided in 1982 to finish their activities. Next year Tietopalveluseura decided to start an online user group of which the leader was Sirpa Salmela. The practical work started in 1984 and was divided in two regional and four subject oriented online user groups. Leader of the group in North Finland was Sirkka Passi and Arja Valta of the Pirkanmaan ryhmä (Tampere district). The group working in the fields of natural sciences was lead by Marita Rosengren, the food technology group by Hillevi Latvalahti, the electronics by Elina Savo and the energy by Tuula Kivelä. (Scannet today April 1987). The groups arranged their own meetings for changing experiences and getting information on new databases and systems. The online group finished its activities as such in 1992 and the currently active working groups or special interest groups were implemented in other subject-oriented groups.

The online group cooperated with the European online group, EUROLUG, and arranged the yearly Monitoring Week, which during many years concerned the reliability and user friendliness of the European PTT's packet-switched networks. The practical work was done at VTT.

The production of Finnish online databases started in 1975 reaching a number of more than 70 in 1987. The databases were in general small and with different search languages, which made their use problematical. These factors led to the start of a spontaneous online consumer movement to improve databases and online systems by testing and informing producers and hosts. A work group for the evaluation of Finnish online databases (ARVI) was launched in 1988 within Tietopalveluseura. Tuulikki Jalkanen and Ritva Juntunen were the driving force. The ARVI group created and published a criteria list for evaluation of databases. Eight different databases from four online systems were evaluated with the help of 30 volunteers. The results were published and distributed among others to the database hosts in question. Ritva Juntunen reported about the Finnish quality system at the Online 1998 in London. The ARVI-group continued its activities until 1993, when Tietopalveluseura decided to merge ARVI and the online groups. The new Database Work Group (Tietokantatyöryhmä) was active until 1996. After the start of the WWW the need of help and support of using online databases diminished.

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