

## OCEANOGRAPHY

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# Quarterdeck

Richard W. Spinrad, Editor

## *Are We a "One Hit Wonder"?*

I've just conducted an interesting exercise with a result I must share with the readership of this magazine. Call it what you may . . . conventional wisdom, journalistic trivia, or simply an irreproducible result. The power of the Internet is what made this exercise possible, and while the conclusions one might draw are hardly rigorous, in the scientific sense, the impressions are lasting.

Here's what I did. I accessed the web site for *The Washington Post*, considering it, if nothing else, certainly an adequate reflection of the sophistication and intellect of the average educated individual. The *Post* has a wonderful function that allows you to search, by word, all text of the previous two weeks' worth of their newspapers. I selected five words or phrases and tallied the number of articles that included those expressions. The results (number of articles shown in parentheses) were as follows:

"Fishery (11)"	"Cruise line (7)"
"Oil and gas (16)"	"Weather (88)"
"Ocean navigation (36)"	

Then I did the same for the word "oceanography" and got one "hit". The message is clear: we're missing a bet. Any oceanographer worth his or her salt would argue that each of these topics is intimately connected with issues oceanographic. Should every mention of fisheries, or weather have an oceanographic "sidebar"? No. But certainly we should be sending our message more often than once out of every 158 opportunities!

This little drill was just one demonstration of our missed opportunities. We've just emerged from the International Year of the Ocean, and in the United States we enjoyed a National Ocean Conference. In the long run it remains to be seen whether these opportunities were fully exploited to the advantage of our community. My guess is that they made little difference. Artificial celebrations seldom provide lasting motivation. Instead, the real catalysts for increased awareness of oceanography are natural events, such as the 1997-98 El Niño and the devastating tsunami in Papua in 1998. Unfortunately, we tend to wait for the media and the public at large to come to us with questions when these events transpire. It's up to us to become aggressive and identify those natural incidents, trends, and general observations that have implications for society. This is clearly a collateral duty for most researchers, administrators and educators, but one that should not be ignored. Otherwise we are at risk for having that one "hit" on the Internet evolve to no "hits."

