

The Internet Movie Database: A Reference Guide to Hollywood and Beyond

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ABSTRACT. Reference services are increasingly dependent on information available through well organized and reliable Web sites. Questions submitted by library users of all ages are often incomplete, making it difficult for the librarian to easily, quickly, and completely answer the question. The Internet Movie Database (IMDb) is an established Web site that allows easy access to material relating to movies, television series, actors, and actresses with a minimal amount of information from the searcher. This article explores the Internet resource of the Internet Movie Database and its potential benefits for librarians. *[Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <getinfo@haworthpressinc.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2001 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]*

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Movies and television shows are a hot topic in our office that employs approximately 65 students each semester. During the week, students and staff chat and review current and classic movies and discuss television over steaming cups of espresso similar to the way offices of yesteryear gathered around the water cooler at break time to discuss weekend sporting events or to spread gossip.

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But what ends that friendly (or not so friendly) debate over which members of the “brat pack” starred in the movie, *The Breakfast Club*? Leave it to one librarian in the office familiar with an online resource known as the Internet Movie Database (IMDb) <<http://us.imdb.com/search>> to find the answer. *The Breakfast Club* starred Emilio Estevez, Anthony Michael Hall, Judd Nelson, Molly Ringwald, and Ally Sheedy, and was instrumental in launching their careers.

This massive, comprehensive, and well maintained Web site known as the IMDb can be used for solving a myriad of other movie and television related questions too. Ever wonder what other productions your favorite actor or actress was in? For each individual in the database, there is a current photo along with a photo gallery (if available). The date and location of birth and death when applicable, any additional names the individual was credited under, notable trivia information, and a link to a mini biography are included in the header section of the person’s main page. Below this is a full filmography including uncredited appearances, notable TV guest appearances, and a listing of any directing, producing, writing, or miscellaneous crews in which he or she took part. One of the best descriptions of the Internet Movie Database says it has “tons of info” and is “cross-indexed and linked up the wazoo.”¹

The resource of the IMDb was born in 1989 from a simple question in response to an article on the USENET newsgroup rec.arts.movies. The USENET article asked, “Who is the most attractive actress in the movies?” The responses that followed created a large pool of actresses and their films. Eventually, the simple question, “Is anyone keeping a record of the movies and actresses mentioned?” was asked, and the actress database was created.²

Although a 1995 review of the IMDb doesn’t rate this Internet resource as being complete enough to “take the place of the CD-ROM movie database or the multivolume print compilations,” a lot has changed in six years.³ Now, the IMDb is qualified to be entered in the well-known useful Internet resources available at no cost with a click of the mouse.

The other day I was flipping through the television channels. While surfing for something to watch, I came across a Walt Disney movie from 1986 titled, *The Boy Who Could Fly*. The scene that was playing had the young actress, Lucy Deakins, talking to a psychiatrist in a hospital. The actress playing the part of the psychiatrist looked very familiar, but I could not place where I had seen her before. I went to find the answer by entering the IMDb Web site and typing *The Boy Who Could Fly* in the “Movie/TV Title Search” section of the main search

page. While I had the option to limit the search to Movies Only, I knew from past experience that the IMDb would retrieve my query fine without using the limitations. I was able to retrieve the information about the movie without any problem, but I didn't see any reference to the psychiatrist. I scrolled down to the "More" section since the cast overview included only the first billed. This link produced a full Cast and Crew listing for the movie where I discovered the last person listed played the part of the psychiatrist—Louise Fletcher.

No wonder she looked familiar! I smiled to myself as I clicked on the link to her personal page knowing that she played the part of the infamous Nurse Mildred Ratched in the award winning 1975, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. Now I was curious which awards the movie had won. Yes, the IMDb has a link for that too under "Awards & Reviews," where I discovered that *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* won five Oscars in 1976 including Best Actor, Best Actress, and Best Picture.

Looking over the filmography for Louise Fletcher, I was surprised to find 74 films on her list. I browsed through the notable TV guest appearances and nearly fell out of my chair when I read that she played the part of Kai Winn in the series *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*. I have seen a few of these episodes, but never had a clue it was Louise Fletcher under that Bajoran makeup.

Perhaps the patron you're helping needs more detailed information about a movie? A menu on the left side of the Web page allows users to explore nine additional areas: overview, awards and reviews, plot and quotes, fun stuff, other information, promotional, external links, rate this movie, and review this movie. The "promotional" section is rather fun with links to movie trailers. Some of these features require special plug-ins for the trailer to be played, and I also suggest your computer's speakers be turned at a reasonable level, especially if you are trying this in public.

Another section worth checking out is "fun stuff." Here you can find links to "trivia" and "goofs." "Goofs" for movies can be an assorted number of things. This section lists errors in geography, visible crew or equipment, revealing mistakes, plot holes, and unsynchronized audio and video clips. Yes, even our favorite movies have "goofs" that can be fun to look for the next time the movie is watched.

For those that prefer to watch television, an entire section of the database is devoted to television series and special events. An especially helpful link can be found under the "Overview" section. Clicking on "guest appearances" produces a list for the entire run of the series with

the episode title, number, and date it aired. Under each of these is a listing for the show's guest stars with links to the main pages for each actor and actress appearing in this list.

Additionally, the IMDb offers more frequent users the ability to register with the Web site allowing access to participate in polls and comment on films. For the less serious user, access to rate films and participate in trivia games is allowed without registration. Best of all, the IMDb offers a "Help & Guide" for new users who want to read about the wonderful access this Web site allows for the most basic to the very complex questions.

For library users who navigate the Web on their own, learning about the IMDb will keep them looking at this site for hours. And, for users who simply need some quick reference answers, librarians have a ready resource at their fingertips.

As for this librarian, using the IMDb is a weekly occurrence. We have a renovated movie theater in town that shows a vintage movie in original format once a month. Today I peaked at the IMDb for information about this month's movie, *Some Like It Hot* (1959) with Jack Lemmon, Tony Curtis, and Marilyn Monroe. Anyone up for a comedy and romance? IMDb's plot outline states, "when two musicians witness a mob hit, they flee the state in an all female band disguised as women, but further complications set in."

So, who's buying the popcorn?

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