

INTERVIEW

with Eugene Garfield

A Lifetime of Achievement and Still Going Strong

Eugene Garfield, known by many as the “Father of Scientometrics and Bibliometrics,” received the 2006 Online Information Lifetime Achievement Award Nov. 29 in London. The International Information Industry award paid tribute to Garfield’s more than half-

century of leadership, innovation, and work in the information industry. In a nutshell, he basically revolutionized scientific research with his concept of citation indexing and searching.

At 81, Garfield is still going strong. As the chairman emeritus of Thomson Scientific, he still maintains a busy schedule of speeches and presentations at conferences and symposia. His schedule is filling up fast for 2007, so if he has any inkling of slowing down, he’s not letting on yet. When asked if he has any plans to retire, Garfield is quick to say, “What would I do?” He said he tried golfing once, but he came back to the work that he obviously loves to do.

Garfield originally started out in chemistry. As a chemistry graduate of Columbia University, he signed on to help with an indexing project at The Johns Hopkins University in 1951. He turned his attention to developing bibliographic citations as viable options to conven-

tional indexing methods. He tested his theory by publishing his own weekly bulletin called *Current Contents* (a table of contents from scientific journals). His fellow scientists saw immediate value in it.

One of the pivotal points for Garfield came in the early 1950s after he read the 1945 article “As We May Think” in *The Atlantic* written by Vannevar Bush. The article expressed Bush’s vision of creating a collective memory by recording people’s information trails through a device called a Memex that could capture the useful trails through the common record. Something clicked with Garfield.

Garfield’s concepts organized the scientific landscape. Back in the early 1950s, “[t]here was no such thing as an information industry,” he said. “I’ve said this over and over again, most of the ideas that I have thought of in some way or another were in ... 1951 and 1953. Those are the years that changed my life, and my career especially.”

By 1962, Garfield had launched his company ISI (Institute for Scientific Information) and began publishing the *Genetics Citation Index* on behalf of the U.S. National Institutes of Health. He followed a similar strategy in 1964 through ISI with the publication of the *Science Citation Index (SCI)*, which indexed 613 journals and included 1.4 million citations in a five-volume print edition. *SCI* morphed into Web of Science, which now provides information from 9,000 journals.

The list of his accomplishments spans decades and volumes. A prolific writer and editor, he has published more than 1,000 weekly essays in *Current Contents* (which is still an essential component for clinical research and research labs) and has published and edited more than 5,000



Eugene Garfield, chairman emeritus, Thomson Scientific

works by authors in *Citation Classics*. He started *The Scientist* in 1986, a biweekly newspaper for research professionals about news and developments that pertain to scientists. His latest project is developing HistCite (algorithmic historiography), an innovative search that can combat “information overload.” Information overload is something Garfield considers a key challenge to the information industry today. He said that we have an increased need for greater differentiation

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in information, and finding the right information is sometimes like trying to find a needle in a haystack.

When it came to citing the highlights in his own career, Garfield just smiled. A true Renaissance man, Garfield has been a chemist, an information scientist, an editor, a publisher, and a database producer. “The reason I had a reputation as a writer is because I had a good staff,” he said. But he continued: “I tell you that among scientists, I was known not for my *Science Citation Index*, but rather for the *Current Contents*. The influence of *Current Contents* was ignored by historians.”

Since not everyone accepted his innovations and ideas, he took it all in stride and kept right on going: “Like in any other career, you just have to move on,” he said. “You just have to ignore the naysayers.”

The day after Garfield accepted his lifetime achievement award in London, he spent time at the Thomson Scientific stand at the Online Information conference autographing the profile of him in the glossy Thomson Scientific booklet, *Thomson Scientific: Information to Change Your World*. The long line of autograph seekers was wrapped around the perimeter of the Thomson booth waiting for a chance to meet and chat with the citation legend.

—B.B.



Eugene Garfield accepts the Online Information Lifetime Achievement Award at the 2006 International Information Industry Awards in London.



Garfield thanked Online Information, colleagues, professional communities, friends, and especially his family for their continued support.



After the awards presentation, the Royal Lancaster Hotel opened the floor to dancing.