

Enjoying Life One Word at a Time

logophile n. a lover of words.

Like many editors, computer scientist Anu Garg has a passion for words and loves expanding his vocabulary.

“Once we are able to discern different shades of words, it helps with communication”, he said. Garg compared a communicator’s vocabulary with the palette used by a skilled painter. “If you are an artist”, he explained, “you don’t want to work with just four colors.”

In 1994, this logophile decided to share his love of words with others. While a graduate student in computer science at Case Western Reserve University, Garg set up a Web server, gathered friends’ e-mail addresses, and began producing “A.Word.A.Day” (AWAD). Each morning, those on his mailing list were greeted by words like *hypogeusia* (diminished sensation of taste) and *myrmecology* (the scientific study of ants).

AWAD started out as an experiment, but soon news of Garg’s mailing list began to spread by word of mouth. First he gained new subscribers throughout the university, then from other universities, and eventually from people all over the world. “That’s when I recognized that I had something very important in my hands”, Garg said.

Today about 530,000 people in more than 210 countries subscribe to AWAD. The subscription list is about as diverse as it is long. “Editors are word people”, Garg said, “so there are a lot of editors on the list.” But AWAD has appealed to word lovers in just about every profession from school teaching to truck driving.

Garg selects the words he features in AWAD himself and groups them into weekly themes to help provide coherence. Some of AWAD’s themes have been animals, mathematics, chemistry, and medicine.

Providing a theme is only one of the many tasks involved in delivering new and interesting words to AWAD subscribers each day. Garg also researches and writes the definitions, searches for real-world examples, and provides the history of each word. He even devoted a week to words

with unusual histories.

“Each word comes with its own story”, Garg said. “If you look into the history, it is fascinating. Just like people, they are born; they grow.” For example, he said, the word *editor* comes from Latin and originally meant *publisher*. According to the *American Heritage Dictionary* (fourth edition), the word *editor* was partially derived from the Latin *edere*, which means to distribute or to publish. In 1712, *editor* first appeared, in the sense of “one who edits”. But it was not until 1793 that the first recorded use of *edit* as “to prepare for publication” appeared.

In addition to AWAD, Garg’s Web server (which he calls a *wordserver*) hosts an anagram service, dictionary, thesaurus, bulletin board, and chat room. Producing AWAD and managing the wordserver consume a few hours of each day. Even with the flexible hours of his day job as a consultant for AT&T, Garg spends many evenings and weekends working on AWAD. But because he finds exploring new words so enjoyable, he doesn’t really consider it work.

Thanks to the dedication of this fun-loving wordmaster, AWAD subscribers have seen a new word pretty much every day, at least 5 days a week, for the last 8 years. That’s more than 2000 words, but Garg said he doesn’t expect to stop any time soon.

“The English language is not static”, he said. “Every day people coin new words. Some stick, some fade away. And old words get new meanings. I don’t think we’ll ever run out of words.”

For more about A.Word.A.Day, see www.wordsmith.org.

Words on the Web: A.Word.A.Day and Its Counterparts

A.Word.A.Day
www.wordsmith.org

Devoted to “the music and magic of words”, A.Word.A.Day has been delivered to subscribers 5 days a week since 1994. The words are grouped into weekly themes and are presented with definitions, etymologies, and examples from literature. Previous words are archived and are

Net Results

continued

retrievable through an alphabetical list of words, a list of themes, and a chronologic list of dates when the words appeared in AWAD.

My Word A Day

www.mywordaday.com

"Your daily dosage of vocab vitamins", this site provides words each day that are grouped into weekly themes. Featured words with their definitions, etymology, and literary examples are delivered Monday through Friday and are archived back to 2000.

One Word A Day

www.owad.de

Designed for those learning English as a second language, this site includes audio clips and quizzes with each day's word. The featured words are generally intended to build a professional English vocabulary. One Word a Day has a mailing list and a searchable archive.

Dictionary.Com Word of the Day

www.dictionary.com/wordoftheday

This online dictionary randomly selects a word of the day, which it distributes to subscribers on a mailing list. Each entry includes a brief etymology, multiple definitions, and examples from literature. Beginning in 1999, the words are archived by date only.

Oxford English Dictionary Word of the Day

oed.com/cgi/display/wotd

This site posts a new word each day, with its definition, etymology, and examples from literature. Each entry also includes a small chart showing the approximate dates when each usage appeared in the language. There is no archive of past words and no mailing list.

JENNIFER ANN HUTT is a graduate student in science and technology journalism at Texas A&M University. She prepared this column while an intern at Science Editor.