

Digital divisions



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A good new article stressing information literacy has just been published in the April issue of *First Monday*, the online magazine [http://firstmonday.org/issues/issue7_4/hargittai/index.html]. The piece, entitled 'Second-level digital divide: Differences in people's online skills' by Eszter Hargittai, contends there are great variations in people's online information finding skills and that these differences in skill are as significant a 'digital divide' as the more conventional one of access/lack of access to information technology. Certainly, people's information finding skills vary widely, and it is good to see research that shows that being online and connected is not enough, that other skills need to be taught if people are to make the best of what the internet can offer.

CobWebs

When governments change, departments may be merged or renamed. Agencies or commissions which have outlived their usefulness may be closed down. Virtual shredding occurs, thus causing a lot of useful information to vanish overnight. The US Federal Depository Library Program has decided to address this issue by creating the CyberCemetery [<http://govinfo.library.unt.edu>], a site that will provide permanent public access to the electronic websites and publications of defunct United States government agencies and commissions. You can look for agencies and commissions alphabetically or by category. The site also provides access to the land of the living by linking to current United States federal, state, local, regional, and international government information.

There's more old government stuff, British this time, at BOPCRIS [<http://www.bopcris.ac.uk>]. This stands for the British Official Publications Collaborative Reader Information Service, and the very tidy-looking website allows you to search and browse information from British Official Publications from as early as 1688 up until 1995. Searching and browsing are both available. With searching, you can use wildcard characters and Boolean searching. I looked for convicts and transportation and Australia and got some interesting old records (the database currently contains more than 23 000 references). Records have abstracts, which you can see when you choose to view the full record.

A new way

Online scholarly publishing and communication has occurred in a number of ways — through electronic journal publishing, authors posting their own publications on the web, and subject-based e-print archives. A new model, called Guild Publishing, has been created by the School of Library and Information Science at Indiana University in the United States [<http://www.slis.indiana.edu/csi/WP/WP02-01B.html>]. The model suggests that academic departments or research institutes sponsor the publication of working papers or technical reports in research publication series and make these publications freely available online. The report, entitled 'Locally controlled scholarly publishing via the internet: the guild model' highlights the strengths and limitations of the model when compared to other existing modes of online academic publishing and research sharing.

Skip the intro

Awesome Stories [<http://awesomestories.com>] could be bigger. The idea is good, but there needs to be more there before the site can be really useful. And all the cutesy, flashy introductions should be dumped forthwith — they are extremely timewasting and annoying. Luckily, you can skip them all, but they should never have been there in the first place. The site aims to provide the facts behind famous events, legends, people, heroes and movies so that anyone interested can do some background research easily. Say you have just seen the movie 'A beautiful mind' and would like to know more about the people and events depicted. The site will help you find primary source material. The same goes for trials such as those of Joan of Arc and William Wallace of Braveheart fame. Oddly enough for such a casual-looking site, the information providers include some major league institutions — the Library of Congress, the National Archives, the British Museum, the Bibliotheque Nationale de France, and many universities, libraries, historical societies and museums worldwide.

Book club helper

If you need some new titles to recommend to readers, or you fancy wowing your book club with some dazzling new suggestions, check out Best Books of 2001 [<http://sfpl4.sfpl.org/newbooks/bb2001.html>], a list put together by Blaine Waterman, a librarian at the San Francisco Public Library. It's not a personal list; the aim of the site is to provide links to a

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whole range of 'best of' lists put together elsewhere. You can find the United Kingdom *Guardian's* tips for the year, or see what Salon.com recommends as the best of the crop in 2001. (*The Guardian* also has a 30-question literary quiz at which I failed dismally.) The listing is alphabetical by name of the various publications that have put together best books lists. These include both fiction and non-fiction. I certainly saw some books I had not heard of, but may seek out now they have been so heartily endorsed.

Book of beasts

I was a bit disappointed not to find the Jabberwocky, but you can get a lot of other mythical critters in Gareth Long's *Encyclopedia of monsters, mythical creatures and fabulous beasts* [<http://webhome.idirect.com/~donlong/monsters/monsters.htm>]. The beasties in here come from a range of cultures and countries, and you can find them by name in an alphabetical list running down the right side of the entries. The site is quite big. There are creatures and monsters described that I have never heard of, but am certainly glad I didn't meet on a dark night. The entries document and explain the creatures in words, and some entries are illustrated with pictures from a range of sources. Disappointingly, not all entries are illustrated. Where's the picture of the Troll? Quite a few entries are still under construction, so werewolf and vampire seekers, don't say you weren't warned.

Timelines

You can waste a lot of time at Year by Year 1900–2001 [<http://www.infoplease.com/millennium1.html>] because the site has short online quizzes for each decade, and these are strangely compelling. It should be easy to get ten out of ten each time, but this doesn't always happen. Luckily, it may not be all your own fault — the site has questions about baseball and pop songs interspersed with more serious stuff about politics and international affairs, and who, apart from Americans, knows anything about baseball? It's all extremely busy; there is more on the site than you can take in at one visit. Use it to discover historic events of the previous century either by decade or by specific year, and leave the extended features, such as Millennial Milestones, World History: 1000 to 2000, American Music: 1640 to 2000, and Top Villains of the 20th century for when things are really quiet on

the reference desk. Events of the most recent year are covered in Year in Review.

Making money online

It started when xrefer [<http://www.xrefer.com>] decided to offer a premium service. Now Oxford University Press is getting in on the act [<http://www.oup.co.uk>]. The Press plan to create one of the largest reference libraries on the internet and charge accordingly. OUP aims to publish 1.5 million entries on twenty subjects online by 2010, which could possibly make it the biggest general knowledge source on the web. Subjects will range from science to the arts. Reference tools available for consultation will include dictionaries, quotations, and date information in up to four different languages. No freebie this; the information will be subscription-based. Fees for use by large libraries could be as high as £3000 per annum. The trial version I looked at provided a single look-up window into 100 language and subject dictionaries and reference works. Having all those tools available in a single cross-referenced database is certainly an amazing feat.

Collection description

If the task of writing a collection description is looming in your future, jump straight on to 'Collections and collection description' [<http://www.ukoln.ac.uk/cd-focus/briefings/bp1/bp1.pdf>], a briefing paper from the UK-based project Collection Description Focus. The Focus is a joint project of the British Library, the UK Research Support Libraries programme and the UK Joint Information Systems Committee/Distributed National Electronic Resource. This is the first in a series of briefings that will be issued by the project. The paper addresses several issues, such as what a collection actually is, collection-level description, and it discusses different types of collections, for example, archival, digital and museum collections.

Finally, Shakespeare

Shakespeare fans and academics alike will enjoy Internet Shakespeare Editions [<http://web.uvic.ca/shakespeare/index.htm>], which provides scholarly, fully annotated texts of all of Shakespeare's plays. The site has four sections: Foyer, for materials about the editions; Library, for refereed materials; Theater, for historical and current performance records; and Annex, which provides a range of different texts, such as early drafts of Quarto and Folio editions. ■

This column
[with URL links]
can be found at:



<http://www.alia.org.au/incite>

Contributions and suggestions for this column are always welcome. Please contact Belinda Weaver via e-mail.

OUP aims to publish 1.5 million entries on twenty subjects online by 2010, which could possibly make it the biggest general knowledge source on the web...

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