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Seek and ye shall find

AskNow has launched and made chat online reference services a reality for anyone who wants to use this new Australian service. A collaboration of the National Library of Australia and the state libraries, AskNow offers users the chance to ask questions online and get quick answers, or referrals for more complicated questions. The system allows a librarian to send web pages to an inquirer while keeping open a chat channel in another window. Minimal identification — name, postcode, and e-mail address — are required, as well as a short summary of the question. Transcripts of the entire session are e-mailed to the user at the end. Users of the service can opt to fill in a short satisfaction survey afterwards if they so wish. Though operating on 24/7 software, the service is not yet offered round the clock. See the site for hours of operation. [http://www.asknow.gov.au/]

Looking back

Yearbooks are always handy for reference librarians, and online versions with their linking capacities may be even more so. Yahoo! has launched a new Year in Review service at [http://yir.yahoo.com/]. The version online gives an overview of 2002 in several different categories, such as news stories, sports, television, entertainment and finance. News stories include obituaries, election information and a timeline of Iraq.

Fair exchange

LLRX always has something good to offer even the non-law librarian. Two new offerings worth a look are LaJean Humphries' article 'How to evaluate a web site' [http://www.llrx.com/features/webeval.htm] and Marie Wallace's piece on 'How to organize the body of a speech' at [http://www.llrx.com/columns/guide70.htm]. Humphries's article 'covers web hoaxes, counterfeit sites, and other spurious information, medical misinformation, corporate misinformation, privacy risks, charity scams, the dark side of e-commerce and e-mail fraud, legal advice, searching quagmires, how search engines work, and remedies for intentional misinformation, as well as how to evaluate websites.' Phew! The article is a summary of the chapter Humphries wrote for the recently published *Web of deception: Misinformation on the internet* edited by Anne P. Mintz, published by Information Today, 2002.

Thought you knew all there was to know about organising yourself to speak? Marie Wallace comes up with an amazing array of techniques to organise your words and make them more punchy and memorable. These include organising your speech by acronyms, alphabetically, by using plots and stories or by presenting material from different points of view. Worth a read.

New mailing list for eprints

The University of Queensland Library has set up an e-mail list for anyone interested in talking about Australian ePrint archives. The list, called ozeprints, is for anyone currently working with, or interesting in starting up, an Australian eprint service. The list welcomes news, announcements, cries for help, advice and discussion of technical issues such as choice of software, implementation, upgrades and documentation. To subscribe, send an e-mail to listserv@library.uq.edu.au with the message 'subscribe ozeprints' in the body of the message. Omit a subject line and do not include an e-mail signature.

New blogs

Eprintblog, recently created by Guy Aron, who also contributes to Vueprints, a blog about Victorian-based eprint archives, is full of useful information for library staff working on or on the road to creating eprint archives. If you have eprint news you would like to share, contact Guy though the blog to announce it [http://eprintblog.crimsonblog.com/]. Another useful blog for people interested in following the issue of open access is Peter Suber's FOS News blog. FOS stands for Free Online Scholarship and the blog champions this cause. At the site, in addition to the latest news, you can link to the FOS newsletter, the FOS forum, a timeline of the Free Online Scholarship movement, and to guide on the issues [http://www.earlham.edu/~peters/fos/tosblog.html].

Translating Bib-lish

Ordinary library users do not always grasp what libraries want to get across to them. While librarians know what we mean when we talk about indexes and databases, many users don't get it. To them, it's jargon and they need a translation tool to help them make the right choices to get where they want to go. Alternately, libraries can label what they do more simply, using words and terms that can be easily understood and that thus help readers make better and more productive choices, especially when using web services. 'Library terms that users understand' has been developed by a librarian at the University of

California, Berkeley [http://www.jkup.net/terms.html]. In addition to lists of terms that have been shown to be either effective or ineffective, it presents alternatives by documenting terms that are actually used successfully by libraries. The site includes links to usability studies, suggested best practices, and a list of related resources, many of which can be found on the web.

Get talking
If you want to talk about books, censorship, publishing or just about anything library-related, Between the Stacks provides a forum for discussion and news. Launched last year, the online community for information professionals from all levels of the field provides discussion forums that cover what librarians want to talk about. You need to register to participate. It also provides headlines from LISNews. [http://www.betweenthestacks.com/.]

Conference reports
The web had made virtual conference going a reality. If you can't be there, catch the PowerPoint or PDF transcript later — much quicker than waiting for proceedings to be published in print. Papers and presentations from the London-based Online Information, 3–5 December, 2002 Conference are now available online at [http://www.online-information.co.uk/online/conf_prog.asp]. The opening keynote was from Jeff Dean of Google, who spoke on 'The future of searching: the Google perspective'. Other streams included managing digital assets, online content strategies, information policy on issues such as knowledge management, valuing information assets, access and archiving and other useful sessions such as those on portals, scholarly publishing, information literacy and taxonomies. The Online Information Academy sessions covered useful tips on creating business plans, developing an information creativity toolbox and speaking the language of senior executives. Other papers that might be handy are those from the much smaller seminar called 'Personalisation and digital libraries', held at the Open University, United Kingdom, on 18 October last year. The papers will be of use to anyone seeking to provide customised portals or tailored MyLibrary-style resources. Clifford Lynch of the Coalition for Networked Information was the keynote speaker and you can watch the Webcast of his talk using QuickTime. The rest of the papers appear to be in PowerPoint. [http://library.open.ac.uk/aboutus/myolib/seminar_presentations.htm]
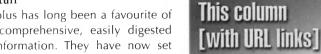
The hard stuff
MEDLINEplus has long been a favourite of mine for comprehensive, easily digested medical information. They have now set up a Drug Information section that provides details on thousands of prescription and over-the-counter medications. You can search by generic or brand name and find out about possible side effects or any current warnings or product recalls for the drug. Information is sourced from two places — MedMaster, published by the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists, and the USP DI Advice for the Patient, a product of the United States Pharmacopeia [http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/druginformation.html]. DrugDigest provides advice for consumers on drugs, herbs, and supplements, including vitamins. The site covers everything from general drug and herbal medicine information to medical research and disease management. The site was created by Express Scripts, the largest independent pharmacy benefit manager in the United States, and advice on the site has been written by doctors and pharmacists. The site includes news, reviews and a glossary [http://www.drugdigest.org/].

Feel less alone
Patent searching is a highly specialised skill so anything that brings researchers together to share news and expertise is probably a good thing. The Patent Information Users Group from the International Society for Patent Information is a good starting point for anyone with a professional, scientific or technical interest in patent information. The Group's mission is to develop patent information research and analysis systems, and to develop the skills of members carrying out that research and analysis. The site includes a Knowledge Base and FAQ, a discussion list (which is archived), selected sites in patents or intellectual property and current news [http://www.piug.org/].

Someone has to do it
The Z39.50 Maintenance Agency [http://lcweb.loc.gov/z3950/agency/] has been set up by the Library of Congress to provide information on the protocol and to keep readers informed about future development and maintenance of the protocol. For those in the dark, Z39.50 is a client/server-based protocol for searching and retrieving information from remote databases. ∎

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