

proudly sponsored by
Softlink Australia



Kerry Webb

kerry.webb@alianet.alia.org.au

With the use of eye-tracking mechanisms, researchers are getting a much better idea of how people read web pages (now if only we could do brain-tracking...)

Evaluating museum websites

Former columnist Belinda Weaver and I presented a paper at the recent Australian Society of Archivists (ASA) Conference on the accessibility and usability of archives websites, so when I saw the article 'Lost in gallery space: A conceptual framework for analyzing the usability flaws of museum web sites', I was interested to see what they had done. It is a very good paper: well-organised and comprehensive, and applicable to all collecting institutions, especially libraries. See it at http://www.firstmonday.org/issues/issue9_9/marty/index.html.

Content guide

At the end of September, the Firstgov.gov team at the US General Services Administration launched a portal with information to help federal webmasters improve their sites. The Web Content Managers Online toolkit, at <http://www.webcontent.gov>, features laws and regulations, best practices, online discussion areas, frequently-asked questions, and a calendar of events and deadlines, all related to the building and maintenance of federal sites. The main part of the site comprises two categories: what you must do (because of legislative requirements), and what you should do (because it makes sense). While some of the requirements may seem overly-bureaucratic (including the need to publish a schedule of what they are going to publish), we can all learn from this and make our own publishing more-effective.

Look at this!

With the use of eye-tracking mechanisms, researchers are getting a much better idea of how people read web pages (now if only we could do brain-tracking...). The article at <http://www.cyberjournalist.net/news/001611.php> sheds a little more light on what we look at. For instance, most people look at text and not images first; visual breaks — like lines or rules — discourage further reading; navigation at the top of the page, rather than in the left-hand column, is more effective. Most interesting is the observation that advertisements at the top and the left were more noticeable, which has implications for Google and Gmail which have their advertisements on the right, where I hardly ever notice them.

Getting involved

Although it definitely has a North American slant, the Librarian Activist site at <http://www.librarianactivist.org> will steer you in the right direction if you are looking to become more active in political and social issues surrounding libraries and librarianship. It will assist you in publicising the efforts of librarians and their friends in raising public awareness. Now, if we only had an election coming up...

The search for meaning

In a world where we are expected to know quite a lot about everything, I find sites that can help you to understand the essentials (at least enough to be able to bluff it out in most conversations) are very valuable. Such a one is Digital Library Building Blocks: Glossary, which lets you search acronyms, terms and definitions, as well as providing browsing through various subject glossaries within the general field of digital librarianship. It is at <http://www.cdlib.org/inside/diglib/glossary/>.

Opening up the archives

LOCKSS (Lots Of Copies Keeping Stuff Safe) is a project that is developing tools to address the growing needs of digital preservation, although in a less formal way than some other initiatives. What they are doing is providing librarians with a cheap and easy way to collect, preserve, and provide access to their own, local copy of web-published material. They have software that converts a personal computer into a digital preservation appliance, which if given the appropriate permission will slowly crawl through the publisher's site in the same way as a search engine. It then acts like a web cache to deliver pages from the publisher, or stored pages if the publisher fails to respond. There is more at <http://www.lockss.org/>.

Do it yourself?

The Wikimedia Foundation has announced the creation of the one-millionth article in its project to create a free, open-content, online encyclopedia (<http://en.wikipedia.org>). It started in January 2001 and is claimed to be the world's largest and fastest-growing encyclopedia, with articles under active development in more than 100 languages. Nearly 2500 new articles are added to Wikipedia each day, with the result that it now ranks as one of the ten most-popular reference sites on the internet. Despite this success, I am not so sure about the concept. It is peer-reviewed 'in real time', which means that you can publish something and others can come along later and correct it, if they want to. But is this a good way to build a reference tool? If you have any in-depth knowledge of a topic, you will probably find some degree of misinformation in the articles, and many spelling errors. But, as they say, that is what the internet is about.

Just rub the magic lamp

The UK National Archives has announced a project to put records of some of the UK's most-famous immigrants online, with an estimated completion date of March 2005. Included among them will be that on-again off-again Briton Henry Morton Stanley; but

Softlink

Library Management Solutions
It's so Easy!



not Karl Marx, who had his application turned down in 1874. Available soon will be 7000 naturalisations from 1931–1935, already available at the public research rooms in Kew. After the project is finished, users will be able to enter the name that they are searching for, and get details of the person's previous nationality, the town which they came from and when they were naturalised. You can follow the progress of the project through the National Archives site at <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/>.

Research in information retrieval and extraction

The Web IR and IE site at <http://www.webir.org/> is the place to go to keep abreast of research into topics such as searching techniques, hypertext structure, metadata, the structure and nature of the web, and the behaviour of the people who use it. There is a good coverage of the important conferences and online proceedings, as well as a list of relevant mailing lists and newsgroups.

US research online

The US Department of Energy Office of Scientific and Technical Information (OSTI) is developing a tool to make Federal research information available on the web. At <http://www.osti.gov/fedrnd/> users can now search at one website across more than half-a-million summaries of R&D projects from seven Federal resources. Among the new additions to the distributed database are information on Small Business Administration awards; ongoing and recently-completed research projects in agriculture, food and nutrition, and forestry from the Department of Agriculture (USDA); and a snapshot of work that the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is doing now in any given topic area.

ADT upgraded

The Australian Digital Theses Program is being upgraded with the assistance of DSTC and their Metasuite software. The current repository will expand to provide an index to all Australian higher degree theses, whether they are in digital form or not — no matter when or where they were awarded. The ADT site is at <http://adt.caul.edu.au>.

Legalities of digital theses

While we are on the subject, Theo Andrew at the UK Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) has written a paper on the legal aspects of converting paper theses to digital format for storage. He points out that the change to the media involved has serious implications for the way theses are created, stored, organised, managed and accessed. The paper examines in some detail the agreements required by an institution when managing and storing theses in electronic format, including those already held in paper format and those presented by students electronically ('born

digital'). It is expected that this paper will be of interest not only to those responsible for arranging digital management systems, but also for staff overseeing postgraduate studies and those accountable for student regulations and policy. The paper is at <http://www.jisclegal.ac.uk/publications/ethesesandrew.htm>.

What's up?

From those great folks who brought you <http://www.resourceshelf.com>, there is an up-to-the-minute service called Docuticker [<http://www.docuticker.com/>]. It is a blog-type publication notifying users of new reports from government agencies, non-government organisations, think tanks, and other groups. Recent topics include spam, the Digital Divide, eGovernment, use of RFID technology and (not surprisingly) the electronic aspects of elections.

Repository service for institutions

BioMed Central has launched a repository service for universities and research institutions at <http://www.openrepository.com>. It offers help to institutions to quickly and easily build, launch, maintain, and populate their institutional repositories, and by adhering to formatting and metadata standards they will be able to make their collections easily accessible.



Saving your links, saving your bacon

If you are as disorganised as I am, you will appreciate any help that you can find to keep those pesky but useful bookmarks under control. It starts off fine, doesn't it? There is a system, a classification even, and you will be sure to annotate them with proper descriptions of what they are really about, but then you are too busy or something much more important grabs your attention, and the system crumbles. Well, there are some utilities that can help you (as long as you give the process a little attention). Chris Sherman at Search Engine Watch has previously reviewed a number of 'web content managers', and now turns his attention to Content-Saver, and he reckons that it is pretty good. The review is at <http://searchenginewatch.com/searchday/article.php/3393291>.

Books online

Tolkien had something to say about never leaving a live dragon out of your calculations; I feel the same way about serendipity. The inestimable Stumpers list comes up with many useful resources, none less than a recent post that was intended for another list. But somehow it found its way to Stumpers, and now librarians all over the world have been reminded of the Online Books Page at <http://digital.library.upenn.edu/books/>. The poster apologised for his slip, but was promptly thanked by many list members, one of whom posted a link to the Athena site at <http://un2sg4.unige.ch/athena/html/>

...The Web IR and IE...is the place to go to keep abreast of research into topics such as searching techniques, hypertext structure, metadata, the structure and nature of the web, and the behaviour of the people who use it.

Address  http://softlink.com.au	 Contact Softlink Today!
Softlink	1800 777 037