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# Capital-raising

I doubt if you would need cheering up so early in the new year, but we all appreciate the thoughts of William R Brody, president of Johns Hopkins University in the 6 December 2004 issue of the *JHU Gazette*. In the wake of the Google float, he proposes an ingenious way to capitalise on one of his University's greatest assets. Enjoy it at <http://www.jhu.edu/gazette/2004/06dec04/06brody.html>.

## Words and more words

You would not believe the number of properties that words have; well, you will after you have seen 'A collection of word oddities and trivia' at <http://members.aol.com/gulflhigh2/words.html>. After four pages of Miscellany(!), they get down to the real weirdness: long words; beautiful words; double-, triple- and quadruple-letter words; and so on.

## Scholarly publishing?

Google's new Scholar service is causing quite a stir. They have put it together by selecting online papers and citations and applying their own search technology. The result does not have the quality that we would expect from a full-scale commercial indexing service, but to a beginner it would be quite impressive. Many of the search results turn out to be citations to offline resources; which is somewhat useful, I suppose, but it can be a little confusing. I did an obvious search, and found that I am acknowledged as a contributor to a celebration of the 'Asterix' comics. Now, I have a vague memory of sending an e-mail to someone, sometime on the subject, but it is not something I put on my CV.

## But can you call it that?

In late breaking news (well, in mid-December), it was reported that the American Chemical Society has sued Google, arguing that the new Google Scholar service violates a trademark the society holds for its search product, Scifinder Scholar. It sure is complicated.

## Maybe it is more than the end of the beginning?

It is a provocative article, and at first you would think it is just an attempt to be different, but Dirk Knemeyer's 'The end of usability culture' might be the start of a major shift in thinking about websites. He questions the directives handed down from the mountain by Jakob Nielsen and his tribe, and explores the idea that the design of websites might in fact lead to a competitive advantage. One remarkable demonstration is the similarity between the appearance of difference banking sites, as they have all moved away from flashy design in an attempt to become less offensive to those who take offence at such things. And he cites a 2002 Stanford University study on

web-credibility which revealed that consumers place more emphasis on 'design look' and 'information design' than on 'content evaluation.' See it at [http://digital-web.com/articles/end\\_of\\_usability\\_culture/](http://digital-web.com/articles/end_of_usability_culture/).

## But what about the cat?

I always think of him as an Australian, which was why I was surprised at first to see the UK National Maritime Museum's presentation of the Flinders Papers at <http://www.nmm.ac.uk/flinders/index.cfm>.

They have more than 140 letters and documents of this English explorer, and the transcripts can be searched by keyword, date, type, author, or recipient. There is a special feature that browsers and researchers alike will appreciate — within the text of the transcripts, names, ships and unusual terms are hyperlinked to a glossary that provides more information. It also features images of maps and charts created by Flinders on his voyages.

## Fast forward a hundred years or so

The UK National Archives has digitised the Medal Rolls Index, originally created by the Army Medal Office towards the end of the First World War. The index places on one card all of the details about an individual's medal entitlement, their rank or ranks, the unit or units they served in, the first operational theatre they served in, and references to documents showing their entitlement to the medals. Families of British and Commonwealth soldiers (but not sailors) who fought in World War I will be able to trace their relatives' war records through the site at <http://www.documentsonline.nationalarchives.gov.uk/medals.asp>.

## The metadata environment

The US Environmental Protection Agency (<http://www.epa.gov>) has implemented a search facility that gives results based on a ranking of data stored in metadata fields, in the order of subject, title and description. The text of the document is of course also indexed, but terms found only in the text are given lower priority in the ranking algorithm. It is a result of work carried out by a US Government Working Group that has called for the adoption of metadata standards government-wide, together with the use of uniform resource names (URNs) to assist in tracking material as it moves from site-to-site. The report of the Working Group can be found at <http://www.cio.gov/documents/ICGI/CGI-Requirement-040805.doc>.

## Which search engine?

With new announcements about search engines coming out all the time (including

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Google and its library digitisation project, which I will comment upon in a couple of months after the dust settles) it is not easy to keep abreast. A good resource is the one compiled by Laura Cohen at SUNY Albany, which categorises the available engines by what you are looking for, how to search, how the results are to be displayed and so on. It is well worth a look, and you will probably see a few new names there, at <http://library.albany.edu/internet/choose.html>.

#### **KM in practice**

One of the key challenges in the field of knowledge management is how you manage tacit knowledge (as a baby boomer who will probably retire some time in the next decade, this is something that I have an interest in). In a paper at [http://www.anecdote.com.au/papers/Want\\_to\\_manage\\_tacit\\_knowledge.pdf](http://www.anecdote.com.au/papers/Want_to_manage_tacit_knowledge.pdf), Shawn Callaghan makes a convincing argument that one of the most effective ways of doing this is through Communities of Practice. He emphasises the benefits of a collaborative approach in general, but also acknowledges that a proper support structure needs to be in place for this to work.

#### **Copyright laws safe, for the moment**

At a time when our laws are being influenced more and more by the United States, a report in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* brings some bad news. Two archive groups — the Internet Archive and the Prelinger Archives, which preserves films — had challenged four current copyright laws, by arguing that they prevented access to out-of-print books, old films, and academic articles of little or no commercial value. They were unsuccessful, but are planning an appeal. The full article is at <http://chronicle.com/temp/email.php?id=6l2ztf0vwq2mktkqnaftktp3lp5qn18>.

#### **And another example...**

The *New York Times* reported in November that Project Gutenberg, the volunteer effort to put the world's literature online, may be the latest victim in the copyright wars. The Australian Gutenberg affiliate had posted the 1936 classic novel *Gone with the wind* on its website for downloading. They then received an e-mail message from the law firm representing the estate of Margaret Mitchell, and it was pulled. The issue is the date at which the novel enters the public domain: in the United States this will not happen until 2031, ninety-five years after its original publication; but in Australia and some other places, the book became free of copyright restrictions in 1999, fifty years after Mitchell's death. Which all makes the Google/libraries project just a little more complicated.

#### **Quality medical information online**

It is a site under construction for the moment, but when it goes live in a couple of months, patientINFORM (<http://www.patientinform.org>)

will disseminate original medical research directly to consumers. It is a collaborative effort of leading voluntary health organisations, scholarly and medical publishers, medical societies, and information professionals, and will provide patients and their caregivers with online access to up-to-date, reliable research for specific diseases. The voluntary health organisations in the project (with an initial focus on cancer, diabetes and heart disease) will integrate the information into materials specially created for patients, with links to free full-text research articles and additional selected material on journal websites. A major driver for the project is the recent trend of patients seeking medical information on the Web, and the need to be able to assess the quality of what they find there. The project's motto 'Access + Interpretation = Understanding + Empowerment' is a little twee, but it is a good summary of the concept.

#### **Food for thought**

Of particular interest to Firefox users (by some accounts more than seven per cent of all Web surfers) are a couple of new facilities to improve your Web experience. <http://del.icio.us> is a social bookmarks manager, which allows you to add sites that you like to your personal collection of links, to describe them and to share your collection with other people. You can see an example at <http://del.icio.us/tag/australia/> which shows what some people think are significant sites and also how they would categorise them. And equally as tasty are the [Nutr.itio.us](http://Nutr.itio.us) extras that integrate the facility with a range of browsers.



#### **eLiteracy — read all about it!**

*JeLit* is an online open-access peer-reviewed journal focusing on eLiteracy and related issues. Volume 1, issue 1 can be accessed at <http://www.jelit.org> with issue 2 due for publication in December 2004. There you will find an outline of the themes that the journal will be addressing, like definitions, its relationship with learning, delivery methods and ethics.

#### **Where are we going?**

The major findings in Year Four of the Digital Future Project's Study of the Impact of the Internet on Americans has been published at [http://www.digitalcenter.org/pages/current\\_report.asp?intGlobalId=19](http://www.digitalcenter.org/pages/current_report.asp?intGlobalId=19). Highlights of this report include the finding that seventy-five per cent of Americans can access the internet from some location, 73.5 per cent say that most or all of the information on government websites is reliable and accurate, and thirty-eight per cent of respondents agree that new technology will lead to the loss of personal privacy. ■

*...Project Gutenberg, the volunteer effort to put the world's literature online, may be the latest victim in the copyright wars.*

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