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Rights

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Confused about electronic rights, and all their ramifications? Try a dose of Ivan Hoffman's site at http://www.ivanhoffman.com/internet.html. It's slanted fairly strongly towards US issues, but there's a lot of generally useful information there about a broad range of topics, and the US tends to lead the way in such matters, so you do need to know what's happening there.

And a bit more on copyright

If you're looking for a simple(?) summary of what's in the public domain, Peter Hirtle's chart at http://www.copyright.cornell.edu/training/Hirtle_Public_Domain.htm is a good place to start. It takes you step by step through the status of works, whether unpublished or published, within the US or in other places.

Free statistics for all

The ABS has announced that downloading of publications and tables from the ABS — covering most aspects of the Australian economy and society — has been made free on their website at http://www.abs.gov.au. People will now be able to access publications such as the Consumer Price Index, Labour Force and International Trade publications and print them as they want. Coupled with their e-mail notification system that alerts clients to new material on the website, this continues the Bureau's long history of service to the Australian people.

One-stop shop

There's a site for web developers called All My FAQs at http://www.allmyfaqs.com where you'll find links to resources for mark-up (HTML, XHTML, CSS, XML), scripting (JavaScript, PHP, SSI, CGI, mySQL, etc), web design, site management and so much more. One useful aspect is that the home page spells out clearly what the site is (a portal, an index of FAQs etc) and more importantly what it isn't (a web page coding help desk, a design review service or a platform for inappropriate crusades).

Future access to digitalia

A UK report from the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council and the Digital Preservation Coalition gives a warning about the long-term viability of digital collections. It's based on a survey showing that while there is commendable commitment to the digitisation process, the funding methods often don't provide the long-term sustainable support needed to preserve and protect public access to the digital collections. Among the key findings were a need for help and advice on a range of digital preservation issues, a lack of interest in dealing with the complexities of born-digital material, and a need to embed digital management into corporate thinking and planning. The report is available on the MLA website at http://www.mla.gov.uk/documents/mla_dpc_survey.pdf.

And still in the UK...

Despite the warnings of that report, the British Library is fully aware of the challenges of the digital future, according to its chief executive. In launching its new three-year strategy, Lynne Brindley has predicted a switch from print to digital publishing by 2020, with an expectation that, by then, 40 per cent of UK research monographs will be available in electronic format only, with only 10 per cent of new titles being available in print alone. To prepare for this environment, the Library will be using e-journals as a pilot for scoping and testing processes for their legal deposit, and will be storing them within a secure digital infrastructure.

More on information architecture

It sounds like a state or federal government department, but DITA is actually the Darwin Information Typing Architecture, an initiative of the Organization for the Advancement of Structured Information Standards (OASIS). They say that it's 'an architecture for creating topic-oriented, information-typed content that can be reused and single-sourced in a variety of ways'. Beneath all the gobbledegook, there are a few good ideas, but whether it ever takes off is anyone's guess. The full story is at http://xml.coverpages.org/ni2005-02-17-a.html.

What's cooking?

Just in case you haven't been turned off by all the TV shows about Frontier/Colonial/Outback houses, you can get a good idea of what they used to eat and how they prepared it, by looking at the online collection of 18th–20th century American cookbooks, courtesy of the Michigan State Library and the MSU Museum at http://digital.lib.msu.edu/projects/cookbooks/index.html. Yummm, buffalo suet.

Finding what you want

In a move to help you ease your searching, Yahoo is trying out a tool that sorts your search results according to whether they are commercial or more informational, such as from academic or research-oriented sources. You can select what sort of sources you're looking for, based on a mixture of text classification and machine learning. The tool is called Mindset, and you can see it and other experimental features at http://next.yahoo.com.

Search engine comparison

With meta-searching sites, one of the things you're never sure about is where the results

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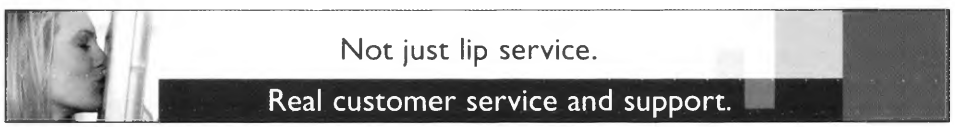


come from, and which search engines provide the best coverage. Dogpile (at http://www.dogpile.com) has addressed this with a new feature that visually compares results from the multiple search engines it queries. By clicking on buttons above the list of search results, you'll get a window for each basic search engine showing which results scored highest for them. Dogpile has also released a report examining search engine overlap between the big players. It shows that, with a large sample set of queries, 86 per cent returned a different top-ranked result in each search engine, and 32 per cent of these queries did not return any overlapping results in the top three positions. Which means that it still pays to play the field if you're looking for the best results.

e-Research on the agenda

The Australian Government has announced the establishment of an e-Research Coordinating Committee, an initiative to co-ordinate e-research nationwide. It will establish strategy and policy to co-ordinate support for research utilising advanced research infrastructure, including distributed high performance computing and research data resources and high speed networks. The Committee draws its membership from a wide range of organisations (including CAUL) and will be supported by a Reference Group, for which CASL will be invited to provide a nominee. There's more information at http://www.minister.dcita.gov.au/media/media_releases/initiative_to_coordinate_e-research.

What you see is what you get

I like to find reports on how people use search engines, especially if there's some rigour in the investigation. And even more so if there's a chance that something will come from the study. This latest one is an eye-tracking analysis of Google search results, which I reported in the May 2005 column. They've further developed the report into a white paper, which says that viewers look at results in an F-shaped scan pattern, with the eye travelling vertically along the far left side of the results looking for visual cues (relevant words, brands, etc) and then scanning to the right, as if something caught the participant's attention. It expands significantly on the initial findings, and offers a detailed look at the methodology used and many more granular conclusions examining various aspects of Google search results. Information on the report, including an excerpt, is at http://www.enquiro.com/eyetrackingreport.asp.

There was a young word called...

One of these days, someone's going to come into your library and ask where they can find a dictionary in which each entry is expressed in limerick form. Well, thanks to reading *inCite*, you'll be able to give them the right answer. The Omnificent English Dictionary In Limerick Form at http://www.oedilf.com/db/Lim.php is a gem, and even more importantly, its limericks are written by people who understand the verse form.

New DC User Guide

There's a new version of the Dublin Core User Guide, the official user guide to Dublin Core metadata. This version (the first for two years) includes guidance for new terms approved by the Usage Board, as well as new sections on the DCMI Abstract Model and a link to the Dublin Core Metadata Registry. It's at http://dublincore.org/documents/usageguide/.

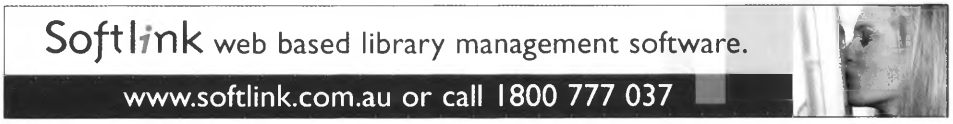
Is it necessarily so?

It's always a good idea to question basic assumptions. I've been reading a bit of discussion recently on a Web Content Management list about content re-use and whether it's really that important. Which is a good question because a lot of the justification for a CMS is the ability to store the components of a website and 're-purpose' them as required. But the truth is that most installations don't need such a facility, and you should ask whether it's really necessary. Similarly, everyone knows that all sites need usability testing, right? Well, according to Keith Robertson, maybe not. In his column and the subsequent discussion at http://www.7nights.com/asterisk/archives05/2005/06/do-all-web-sites-need-usability-testing you can see the points pro and con such a blanket statement.

Public vs private, contd

I recall the (probably apocryphal) story from the 1970s of the entrepreneur who demanded a copy of the MEDLARS database through an FOI request. Well, it seems that the tension between private and public access to information is still there. The latest dispute is between the US National Institutes of Health and the American Chemical Society over the PubChem database. The Society suggests that the Government should not be a taxpayer-supported publisher — especially one that competes with the Society's products. However, it seems that there is very little overlap between what the Society produces and what's in PubChem. I expect that we'll hear much more of this. The full story is at http://www.infotoday.com/newsbreaks/nb050606-1.shtml.

More open US government

There's a new site that will distribute more widely a number of US government reports produced by the Congressional Research Service. It's operated by the Center for Democracy and Technology, a civil liberties group, and you can search for more than 8000 reports at http://www.opencrs.com. ■

One of these days, someone's going to come into your library and ask where they can find a dictionary in which each entry is expressed in limerick form.