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*Should the home page
of a site be a gateway
or a portal? Link
weightings and search
engine optimisation are
part of the answer*

Reading, resources and results

Emerging technologies report

The ACT Department of Education and Training commissioned education.au limited to report on emerging technologies that are pertinent to education and training in the pre-school, school and VET sectors in the ACT. The result has been published at http://www.det.act.gov.au/publicat/pdf/emergingtechnologies.pdf and has attracted wide interest, having been quoted in several newspapers. It's not really limited to the education sector; anyone with an interest in technological futures will learn a lot from it.

The big clean-up

I wrote last month on one response to the devastation of Hurricane Katrina; now comes the recovery phase. One worthy cause is the ALA's 'Adopt a Library Program' where libraries of all types can help libraries in the Gulf region affected by the hurricane. Various support options are featured on their site at http://www.ala.org/katrina/adopt/.

Still on things American

The US government's FirstGov site continues to do useful things. The latest addition is a browsable directory of several dozen national, federal, state, and local libraries; online library databases; grants for libraries; and more. Now, alert readers will have realised that there would be more than a few dozen local libraries in the USA, and that's where the site could be improved. If you click on the Local Libraries link, you'll be taken to the National Center for Education Studies Library Statistics Program — which may not be quite what you were looking for. Still, it's a start. See the opening page at http://www.firstgov.gov/Topics/Reference_Shelf/Libraries.shtml.

A couple of information science resources

Want to plan your next overseas trip around a relevant conference? Try the International Calendar of Information Science Conferences at http://icisc.neasist.org/ for a very impressive list of places to go to learn things. And if you need to keep track of documents in library and information science that are available in Open Access Repositories, have a look at http://collib.info/. It's a wiki-type site that harvests metadata from the records to cluster them by subject or other meaningful categories.

Content management resources

If you're new to the world of content management and are looking for a starting point, see http://www.nmpub.com/cmsresources/ from Bill Trippe of New Millennium Publishing. It's a well set-out list of authoritative resources in certain categories, such as news feeds and related sites, member organisations and analyst firms.

Easy archives

The London School of Economics has launched a new web resource for historians. 'Archives Made Easy' is an online guide to archives around the world, with reviews of individual archives. Initially these were provided by LSE doctoral students from the International History Department, but now they're inviting reviews from anyone who has something to contribute. Comments are based on a downloadable template and include language skills of staff, availability of accommodation, opening hours and much more. The site is at http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/archivesMadeEasy/.

Personal history

'In the First Person' is an index to letters, diaries, oral histories and personal narratives from more than 2500 collections of oral history in English from around the world. The list of collections has a strong representation from the USA, but many other countries are included. In addition, there is a text searching facility that won't pick up every word in every document, but it will provide a useful tool for finding material. Check it out at http://www.alexanderstreet7.com/firp/.

Australian government publications

New functionality added to the publications.gov.au site enables users to find government publications using simple or advanced search (thanks to CSIRO's Panoptic search engine), with direct access to the NLA's National Bibliographic Database. The site also provides the ability to browse a list of Australian government websites or search Australian government websites by subject category. See it all at http://www.publications.gov.au/.

Pretty Damn Friendly

Whether or not you like it, the Acrobat PDF format plays an important part in publishing on the web. Most people are satisfied with just the free Acrobat reader so that they can read PDFs, but there's so much more if you want to do more than just read. At Harold Goldstein's Acrobat/PDF Resources site, for instance, you'll find links to free or inexpensive tools for PDF creation, as well as more official sites that will tell you all about how to get the most out of the product. There are also lists of utilities and tips and tricks from the PDF world. It's at http://goldray.com/webdesign/acrobat_resources.htm.

...and another one

A product that isn't on Harold's list is one that helps users of the OpenOffice package to create accessible PDFs, by creating bookmarks from headings. It's extendedPDF, a free add-on to OpenOffice that which seems to work quite well. The user manual is a bit brief, but you can follow it without too much trouble. See it all at http://www.jdisoftware.co.uk/pages/epdf-home.php.

Electronic resources meeting at the NLA

Librarians from many sectors met at the National Library of Australia on 12 October to discuss national licensing of electronic resources, and a Reference Group will press ahead with work on the proposal. Watch the site (http://www.nla.gov.au/initiatives/meetings/sitelicense/slindex.html) for comments on the recent issues paper and minutes from the October meeting. This work follows up a forum held in December 2004, which looked at issues such as wider access to electronic resources for library users.

Portals and gateways

There's an interesting discussion on website design at http://www.isedb.com/news/article/1258. The issue is whether the home page of a site should be a gateway or a portal; that is, should it feature a bit of information about the three or four most important parts of the site or just have links to all the subordinate areas? The response to the question is framed around search engine optimisation and the weighting of links. Which all goes to show the importance of search engines and the way they work. I was talking the other day to one of the long-time participants in the TREC conference (http://trec.nist.gov/) and he said that for a while they didn't sufficiently recognise the importance of link relevance in their search competitions. They've fixed that now.

Search refinements

Next in my queue of books waiting to be read is John Battelle's *The Search*, about the rise of Google (Portfolio, 2005, ISBN 1 591 84088 0). He finishes the book by asking for better search refinement. Danny Sullivan of Search Engine Watch explores this further in a column at http://blog.searchenginewatch.com/blog/051003-124141. He talks about some of the methods that have been tried in the past (several involving a fair amount of human intervention) and refers further discussions, including Tim Bray's limited endorsement of some Semantic Web developments. It's worth reading.

MLA database project

The UK Museums, Libraries and Archives Council has begun a project to create a central database of location and contact information for museums, libraries, archives and related institutions, and individuals. The project will be funded through the EU's Michael project (http://www.michael-culture.org/), which aims to open up worldwide access to European cultural heritage, and it will have an open standards OAI Metadata Harvesting interface, enabling wider access to the data. More information, including the systems to be used, is at http://www.publictechnology.net/modules.php?op=modload&name=News&file=article&sid=3573.

More search engines than you could shake a baton at

I've been around long enough to recall Campbell McComas at an early Online Conference finding the term 'European Information Services' a source of amusement. I remembered this when I read the story about President Chirac's plan to fund a Eurocentric Search Engine at http://www.telegraph.co.uk/money/main.jhtml?xml=/money/2005/08/31/cnsearch31.xml. It's not a bad idea (and it's not my money), but as others have pointed out, there are already Viola, Fast, Seekport and Fireball — all systems originating in Europe. The Emperor Napoleon also had dreams of conquering the world.

More on digital print initiatives

While the struggle over Google's plans for digital prints continues, another heavyweight has announced its entry into the arena. Yahoo! (as part of the Open Content Alliance) has announced its intention to help digitise thousands of works of American literature plus material from various national archives. Unlike Google, it will be adopting an opt-in policy on copyrighted works, but its work will commence with works that are in the public domain. The first works to be digitised should be online by the end of the year and all 18 000 works should be available through the web by the close of 2006. There's more information at http://www.opencontentalliance.org/.

Meanwhile, somewhere on a planet called Google

Google isn't taking this lying down, of course. They've invited European book publishers to submit non-English material to the Google Print project, to counter concerns that it's relying too heavily on Anglo-American content. I wonder if they expect that the legal challenges they've met in the USA will be easier across the Atlantic. The story is at http://www.detnews.com/2005/technology/0509/05/0tech-300866.htm.

Websites for everyone?

One of the perennial questions for web developers is what range of browsers do you need to accommodate on your sites? On the GAWDS (Guild of Accessible Web Designers) site at http://www.gawds.org/show.php?contentid=107 Jim Byrne is continuing the discussion with an attack on the 'statistics defence' — that a browser can be ignored if only x per cent (where x is quite a small number) of your users run it (for example, Netscape 4). One of his key points is that designing for the general access rather than the particular is an aid to future-proofing your site. He also made the point that it's against the law (in many countries) to discriminate. Of course, there were rejoinders: the 80/20 rule, the fact that life is inherently unfair etc. The discussion certainly helps to define the problem, and the solutions. ∎

Presentation is important, but if the content isn't accessible the presentation doesn't matter because there is nothing to present