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More examples of the
UK knack for good
collaborative projects...

More than anyone can handle...

Advertising the competition

While I try to cover a range of news and issues in these columns, there's a lot more being reported than I can handle. So here are some of the sources of information that I find useful. My friend and colleague Belinda Weaver compiles a monthly list of What's New on the web at http://www.library.uq.edu.au/internet/new/webnew.html. Then there's Cheryl Hardy's e-Government site at http://www.egov.vic.gov.au where you can subscribe to a monthly list of news and articles. And also the Heriot-Watt Internet Resources Newsletter at http://www.hw.ac.uk/libwww/irn/, which has been going for longer than most of us have been on the Net.

And there's more...

One that I've only discovered recently is Marylaine Block's Neat New Stuff site at http://marylaine.com/neatnew.html, where I discovered the DaVinci Code Bibliography (http://www.acpl.lib.in.us/amv/davinci.pdf). It's a list of works about book itself, as well as Opus Dei and other groups and people that have helped Dan Brown become rather famous.

Collecting the information

There's no denying that the UK is spending money well in setting up a range of collaborative projects to share knowledge and expertise. Have a look at Collections Link (http://www.collectionslink.org.uk/), a collections management advisory service funded by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council. It has four main elements – an online library of best practice guides and fact sheets, an advisory service, a national database of training and skills development and a fund to support the development of new resources.

And another worthy British contribution

The Resource Discovery Network (http://www.rdn.ac.uk) is a UK-based national gateway to internet resources for the learning, teaching and research community, with links to more than 100 000 resources via a series of subject-based information hubs. All of the links have been selected, indexed and described by specialists in a range of research institutions.

One of its key features is the virtual training suite (http://www.vts.rdn.ac.uk), with a set of free online tutorials designed to help students, lecturers and researchers improve their internet research and IT skills.

No play's the thing

Google has announced a special site for searching all of Shakespeare's plays, using their Google Book Search, and I have to say that I was a little disappointed with it. You can search a digitised version of any one of the plays, using their Google Book Search, but there's no easy way to search all of the plays at once – say if you were looking up which one talked about hawks and handsaws. Still, it's been launched in conjunction with their sponsorship of a Shakespearean festival, so you can see why they did it. Have a look at http://books.google.com/googlebooks/shakespeare/.

And if Bill's not to your taste, try Uncle Sam

In a move that will have implications for sites such as FirstGov, Google has released its US Government Search facility, with content ranging from government press releases, information from government websites (state and federal) and stories from *The Washington Post* and other news outlets. They've also been given a series of government films by the National Archives and Records Administration to digitise and post on Google Video, with an indication that there's plenty more in the pipeline. The Library of Congress Law Library is also getting into the act, with thousands of volumes of US Congressional hearings being sent to Google for digitisation, at the planned rate of around 10 000 volumes a month. See the search service at http://www.google.com/ig/usgov/.
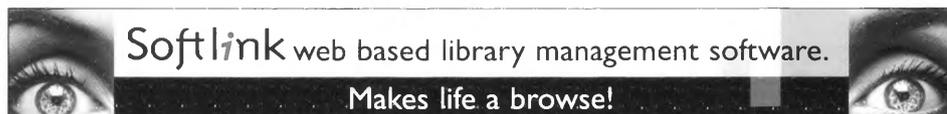
Matters for discussion

I subscribe to a number of lists – both related to professional matters and to my personal interests – and nearly all of them occasionally go off the rails. Depending on the subject matter and the strengths of people's beliefs, these derailments can be slight and temporary or severe and calamitous. Either way, the problems are usually caused by meta-discussions. For an explanation of a meta-discussion and (more importantly) what you can do about it, see Sarah Fitz-Claridge's article at http://www.fitz-claridge.com/node/18/. It may help you and your group survive.

Worth what you pay for it, perhaps

There's a list of articles at http://ireprint.info/ that are free to reprint, each of which has been submitted by a registered user of the site. It's not clear how much checking they do to make sure that the material is not subject to copyright, and maybe it's just a way for budding writers to get a little more exposure. It's been going for a couple of years at least but the quality of the material is somewhat dubious. I'd be interested to know their business model.

Getting it write

I recently saw a web page where the owner asked us to bare with her as she developed her site (don't get excited – she was just sell-

ing home-made jewellery). The Web Site Spell Checker (http://www.texttrust.com) may not solve all of her problems but it might save her from other forms of embarrassment. They offer a free trial, just to convince you that you need their professional services, either on a one-off or regular basis.

Another digital archive
DLIST, the Digital Library of Information Science and Technology is a cross-institutional, subject-based, open access digital archive for all of the Information Sciences. The open access component is demonstrated by its content being accessible through the Open Archives Initiative (OAI) Protocol for Metadata Harvesting. Its archive is browsable and searchable and it provides an RSS feed to publicise its most recently added items. See it at http://dlist.sir.arizona.edu.

What if, indeed
Many of us like to speculate on 'what might have been', which is why the Uchronia site at http://uchronia.net/ will be of interest. It's an annotated bibliography of over 2700 novels, stories, essays and other printed material involved in alternate history. Whether your taste runs to Harry Turtledove giving General Lee AK-47s in the American Civil War or Len Deighton having George VI imprisoned in Nazi-occupied Britain, this is where you'll find it.

It goes down well
Freepint is the base website of a community of nearly 80 000 people who find, use, manage and share information about work topics. It has a free fortnightly newsletter (with an archive on the site) and a series of reports for sale on topics like enterprise search, coping with FOI legislation and e-publishing. The newsletters appear to be full of book reviews and other good material, such as an article in June on how to handle teamwork in distance learning at http://www.freepint.com/issues/080606.htm#tips.

Finding proceedings
Interdok is an organisation that specialises in locating published proceedings from conferences and annual meetings. They have a quite useful free search facility at http://www.interdok.com/dopp/dopp_search.cfm where you can specify various search terms and broad criteria. The coverage is variable, though: there's only one entry for anything to do with Australian libraries, but quite a lot for material originating in the US.

Better travel planning
One of the areas where the net has really changed user behaviour is in travel (as I reported a couple of months ago). Now there's another tool that's been developed to make your planning a bit easier. FareCompare at http://www.farecompare.com provides a huge amount of historical pricing data to show how airfares will vary during the year and also what the differences between fares booked at various times before the travel date. As usual, it's limited to travel to and from and within the US, but we can hope that it becomes more widespread in time.

Accessibility magazine
Accessible Content is a magazine devoted entirely to accessibility issues. It features news reports and opinion, product profiles and interviews with users who benefit from accessible online material. Subscription to the printed version is free to qualified readers (which seems to mean all readers, as there are no questions asked when you sign up). In any case, from 60 days after publication, the issues are freely available online. The interview in the latest issue with a blind Accessibility consultant is particularly useful to those of us who don't usually have much contact with disabled users. See the magazine at http://www.accessiblecontent.com.

Walt on Google
It's been a while since I've read any of Walt Crawford's writings. He's still a senior analyst at RLG and his most recent contribution has been an article in the Google 'Librarians Newsletter', where he applies his keen insight to the effect of Google Book Search on our profession. Of course, his comments on this product are equally relevant to other Google products and, in fact, to any online search facilities. In the article at http://www.google.com/librariancenter/articles/0606_03.html he not only explains why librarians need not fear competition from Book Search, he also points out where we can offer complementary services for the benefit of our patrons.

CAUL on contracts
Diane Costello has advised that CAUL's Electronic Information Resources Committee conducted a survey of its members to confirm their approach in negotiating terms and conditions for the university sector's purchase of journals and databases for research and teaching. The results of the survey have been published at http://www.caul.edu.au/surveys/ceirc2005survey-pr.doc She says that CAUL has decided not to develop its own licence for electronic products, but instead has compiled a selected list of 'model clauses' for those occasions when a vendor's proposed licence clause is not acceptable.
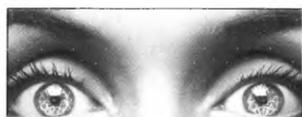
Stumped for a research topic?
There are some things that are such an easy target that you shouldn't really go there, but this one is a little addictive. It's a generator of 'post-modern' essay titles, based on the author's name and the title of a book. It's at http://www.brysons.net/generator/. ∎

The Web Site Spell Checker could save us from some forms of embarrassment...