

Webb's web

Before we get this month's theme, here's a New Year's gift for all lovers of libraries – http://curiousexpeditions.org/2007/09/a_librophiliacs_love_letter_1.html

Walking the walk

You can read and listen and think you know how to build accessible websites, but watching someone driving a screen is the only way to see how it works and what improvements are needed. The Canberra Web Standards group meeting in November featured a visually impaired person trying to find information surfing Government sites using JAWS. The demonstration highlighted the awful sites that automatically play sound when opening a page. If you want sound, you need to have the options to turn on and off. A screen reader relies on the sound capability of the browser, which limits its usefulness if you have anything else playing.

Keeping it simple

As more people are building their own sites (individuals, small businesses, communities), I'm hearing comments like "tell me simply what I have to do because the W3C Guidelines are too hard to understand." I'm putting together a few basic ideas for people to follow, but it's not the full answer. <http://kerryspubs.googlepages.com/SimpleStepstoAccessibility.doc>

Roger Johansson has written an article pointing out how Web developers can overdo accessibility. He includes helpful hits and readers' comments pointing to good resources. http://www.456bereastreet.com/archive/200712/overdoing_accessibility/

Sign posts

Finding images for the world-wide Web that have cross-cultural meaning can be difficult. Their significance can also elude people who suffer a cognitive disability. To read a discussion about online symbols read <http://curbcut.net/standards/icons-symbols-and-cognitive-disabilities/>

They've got personality

To create an accessible site you can take the W3C Guidelines <http://www.w3.org/WAI/guid-tech.html> and use them. Far better would be to understand your audience. With accessibility, the developer needs to take note of specific needs and modes of access. Ideas can be found at <http://www.umich.edu/~webaccess/WithDisabilities.html>

Write it right

An overlooked aspect of accessibility is the need to write text that your users will understand. You should consider the way Web users scan rather than read, Flesch-Kincaid or Fog tests, the judicious use of bold text or headings for starters. You'll find a few pointers at <http://www.communitymx.com/content/article.cfm?cid=C108B>

Speak and ye shall find

General trends in search technology can be found at <http://www.searchengineguide.com/scott-buresh/current-and-future-search-trends-what-th.php> where Scott Buresh looks at the possibilities of speech processing.

For those who came in late

In many cases there's a need to apply an accessible solution on top of a site that's been badly implemented. What do you do then? <http://accessites.org/site/2007/08/5-steps-to-reworking-a-legacy-site/>

Getting search results

Consider the display of search results from Google – do you know what the layout and all its components mean? If you're in any doubt, go to <http://searchengineland.com/071128-153137.php> where they've picked the crowded (but very well-organised) brain of Matt Cutts, Google's search guru. It's an informative explanation of what's what and where it came from.

Looking for names?

All of a sudden, there's a lot more historic data available online, for both the serious and the casual researcher.

Australia's electoral rolls from 1901 to 1936 can now be accessed through <http://www.ancestry.com.au>. The rolls incorporate 42 million names and come at a small cost, but when has that deterred the serious information seeker?

Like and unlike

I've posted a few colour-related links over the past few months, and the new ones just keep coming. Look at <http://h20325.www2.hp.com/blogs/color/archive/2007/10/29/4914.html> where you can search for a particular colour (simple or arcane) and they'll not only show colour synonyms but also antonyms. From the comments it seems like I'm not the only one impressed.

One to watch

The Googleplex just keeps on coming up with new ideas (or sometimes just variations). One of the latest is Knol, which may seem like an attempt to kill off Wikipedia by building to create a new user-generated authoritative online knowledgebase of everything. The key word, I suppose is 'authoritative', which positions it squarely against perceptions about Wikipedia, but I wonder if they've been a little too ambitious here. There's more at <http://googleblog.blogspot.com/2007/12/encouraging-people-to-contribute.html>

More beautiful libraries

And if you want more of those fabulous views from the top of the column, have a look at <http://www.renaissancelibrary.com/calendars.htm>. By the time you read this, the 2008 calendars may even have been marked down a little.

Webb's web now has its own BLOG. Log in and let's chat about the finer issues of Webb's world. Our discussions will be collated and posted on the web for posterity.
<http://www.alia.org.au/webbsblog>



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