

Webb's webb

Confidential – for quite a while, at least

The British National Archives has done a favour for many researchers by publishing the digitised form of the 1911 Census (<http://www.1911census.co.uk>), where you can (for a fee) search for all manner of people. Although it's reported that some suffragettes boycotted the census and that certain other people had their little jokes (registering their pets with cute names and nationalities) it does give a fascinating insight into the people of the time and the way they saw themselves. Citizens were assured that the information supplied would be kept confidential, but I think none of them would begrudge its being made widely available after 98 years have passed.

Public Art to become even more so

In these trying economic times, we should congratulate the BBC for announcing that it will put 2 000 oil paintings on its website by 2012 (http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/arts_and_culture/7856179.stm). They say that the paintings represent the complete collection held in public institutions in the UK, but of course we'd like to have more information, don't we? Why limit it to oil paintings? Will it be available at no charge? And most importantly, will it be accessible from outside the UK (as much of their TV collection is not)? Still, they do deserve our thanks.

Steer clear of these

Dmitry Fadeyev in Smashing Magazine has a good list of things not to do in 9 Common Usability Mistakes in Web Design (<http://www.smashingmagazine.com/2009/02/18/9-common-usability-blunders/>) Some are obvious, but all of them are worth noting. One in particular reminded me of a story I read recently. A company had an online survey that many people were trying, but very few actually completed it. So they called in a usability consultant who investigated and found that the first question required that users read and agree to a long and complicated confidentiality agreement, and most people thought "why bother?" and left the site. Another good tip came from one of the comments on Dmitry's article. Because many people are now using tabbed browsers, it would help to have something distinctive at the beginning of the TITLE tag of a page (because that's what's displayed in the tabs). So, it's probably better to have your title as "page name – site name" rather than the other way around, especially if people are likely to have several tabs open for the same site.

A little sanity from across the Tasman

It's been reported that the NZ Government might be having second thoughts about the implementation of its proposed new copyright legislation that would require ISPs to suspend service to subscribers accused of (but not convicted of) copyright violation (see <http://www.tinyurl.com/dbkzdh>). While it's certainly not the end of the affair, it does give us hope that the hysterical claims of the copyright societies might not be getting the sort of hearing that they once did.

It's quite dynamic, actually

For six years from 2002, Rachel Singer Gordon built up a following with her review column in LJ about computer books. When that stopped last year, she had the idea to create The Tech Static (<http://www.thetechstatic.com/>), which is now up to its fifth issue and is proving to be quite valuable for

collection development librarians. As she points out, there are few library-oriented publications that review books about IT topics in general. She'll publish reviews for 10–12 books in each issue, with a little general interest news thrown in. She also promotes free books, and one that interested me in the February issue was Wikipedia: the Missing Manual, which you can find (surprise!) in the Help area of Wikipedia.

Further on WCAG 2.0

In February I saw a report prepared by a market research company on how Commonwealth Government websites are complying with the newly released Web Content Accessibility Guidelines, and they were not too impressed with the result – which is a little unfair, for two reasons. First, the Guidelines had only been released for around four weeks when the survey was done, and for much of that time the workers would have been on leave, so you can't really expect too much to have been done in that period. Second, there's not yet any requirement for websites from the Commonwealth or any other jurisdiction to comply with these Guidelines. Even the Australian Human Rights Commission (formerly HREOC) hadn't issued any guidance on how the Guidelines might be interpreted in light of the Disability Discrimination Act. There's no doubt that there will soon be such a requirement and after a reasonable interval there will be a good level of compliance. But now? It's a bit rich.

The things you find on the Web

I've been playing around with Pipl (<http://www.pipl.com/>), a new search facility that just looks for information about people, but the difference is that it looks in the "Deep Web", where other search engines don't go (or so they say). You can search by name, username and e-mail address – and the results are generally more extensive than what the other search engines will deliver. It's really quite remarkable what they manage to find, such as campaign contributions to American politicians or magazine articles that you may have forgotten that you wrote.

LIS journals from ProQuest

I've tried this new service being provided by ALIA for its members. There are around 146 titles in the field of Library and Information Science, and a range of search facilities. Many of the journals cover a ten-year period or more, but there are a few where the more recent issues aren't available until a year or so after publication. One thing you'll notice is that you can get an RSS feed for many of the journals. Another pretty useful feature is the ability to find an appropriate search topic by entering a few keywords. It's really worth trying.

Kerry Webb
kwebb@alianet.org.au

Don't forget to visit my blog
<http://www.alia.org.au/webbsblog>

