



On the move

Regular readers will have recognised that I adopt a sceptical attitude to the issue of smartphones and tablets, although this will undoubtedly change some time in the near future as the upward trend of their suitability for my circumstances and the downward slope of their affordability move to an intersection point. Until that time, I reserve the right to view the whole mobile scene with a critical eye.

Take, for example, the recent lunch I attended on Managing Online Communities. I enjoyed the experience very much - but I'm not so sure about the other nine people at my table who were bent over their smartphones and pads all the time, probably tweeting about what the presenter was saying. What was more intriguing was that the speaker used her iPad as a prompt for the outline of her talk, and she giggled a couple of times about the tweets that people in the audience were sending. She could perhaps have turned off Twitter for the duration - which would have shown just a little more respect for her listeners.

But then I saw an article from A List Apart (bit.ly/f4CFmf) that makes a good case for a complete rethink of the way we do conferences and presentations. I'm still not convinced, but it did spark some interesting discussion.

On a related topic, I've been reading the UK Government's ICT strategy (www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/content/government-ict-strategy) - and very impressive it is. One thing that strikes me is that there is a strong emphasis on creating mobile solutions to the provision of government services. Now, it's true that if you create online services from the beginning in the right way, they can be implemented across all sorts of platforms: desktops, laptops, mobiles, tablets. But what people seem to ignore is that many of these services are already in place,

albeit with sub-optimal support for mobile devices. But a government that's so cash-strapped that they're applying savage budget cuts finds it necessary to do a lot of work to placate the mobile lobby? It must have been a hard decision to make.

But there are (of course) some nice features

And I'm not talking about the ability to walk along an aisle, point your camera at a product and do an instant price comparison with every other shop on the planet - although that does have some attraction. No, I'm thinking more about Quick Response codes (also known as QR) and explained clearly in the story at tinyurl.com/3lx8pop. You will have seen them in various places and perhaps wondered what they're about. Well, it looks like they're about to take off. Consider the scenarios in the article where the website you're sent to knows the location that you're scanning from and offers you some tailored solutions. Neat.

eBook lending

Things appear to have gone quiet about HarperCollins' decision to restrict lending its eBooks, announced earlier this year - which resulted in a statement by the ALA (ala.org/ala/newspresscenter/news/pr.cfm?id=6517) politely criticising the move. What I was more impressed by was the analysis by Eric Hellman at tinyurl.com/3topqyu, in which he used the marvellous resource of the University of Huddersfield's huge data base of information about circulation and recommendation at tinyurl.com/6hsw48. With this data, Hellman has identified HarperCollins' cunning plan to grab even more of the market. Later news is that various UK publishers are continuing talks with libraries in that country, to try to work out some sort of arrangement that's acceptable to all parties. Good luck with that.

This was all given a kick along when Amazon announced late in April that it would be offering libraries a lending service based on the Kindle in the US, which has a few authors worried that they'll have to work even harder to make a pittance from their work. And if you want to buy one, you probably won't be able to. Australians should feel quite discriminated against when it comes to buying eBooks, and the post at tinyurl.com/4ynknjx shows why. No doubt the publishing industry knows what it's doing, but its potential customers are not happy. Here we are, all cashed up with a strong dollar and they refuse to sell us a product with no real overheads. The post has a collection of good links to free eBooks and tools for managing your eLibrary.

When the clouds roll by

There's been a lot of head-scratching and soul-searching about Amazon's cloud outages (tinyurl.com/3d5vpxd), and that series of incidents should prompt senior management (and not just IT managers) to reconsider their strategies. It won't completely halt developments in this growing area, but it should cause people to revisit their risk management plans, which isn't really such a bad idea.

When we really had variety in our entertainment

And here's a plug for a new resource: I heard on an ANZAC Day program that the Australian Variety Theatre Archive (ozvta.com/) would be opening in May. The Archive features various forms of memorabilia from the times up until the middle of last century when vaudeville was the most popular form of theatre, and strongly influenced the early days of television.

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