



Helping the community

The Queensland Government has published a *Community Guideline* to accessing information held by government at tinyurl.com/3fpaowo and this has sparked a bit of comment about whether such a document is necessary in these 2.0 days. Well, I don't know how the Queenslanders decided that such information was necessary – did they do a survey or perhaps they looked at the web stats for their various sites – but I think it's a damn good idea. What a lot of commentators miss is that there's a huge number of users in our community who aren't up on the latest social media tools (even now) and that they need to know the sort of techniques that are second nature to those of us who've been immersed in this stuff for years. One day we may not need guides like this, but for the moment they're very useful.

More on ebooks

All newspapers are looking at deriving new revenue streams from the work of their professional staff, and there's an interesting take on this from *The Guardian*. They're calling it *Guardian Shorts*, and they're a series of ebooks that you'll be able to buy through the Amazon Kindle and Apple iTunes stores. These have commentary on current events, and are up to 30,000 words each, costing less than £4. The first is *Phone Hacking: How The Guardian Broke The Story*. You can read more about their plans at www.guardian.co.uk/mobile/guardian-shorts-faq, where they address the obvious issue – if you've already read it for free on their website, why would you pay extra for the Short? They explain that each of these books will have a lot more detail than what's already been published. Top marks to them for trying something new.

What the Dickens?

Following the significant success of the National Library's Newspaper Digitisation project, Dickens enthusiasts worldwide have been called to the colours to complete an ambitious project by the bicentenary of his birth on 7 February 2012: the correction of the OCR-induced errors in the scanned version of his journal *Household Words* (and later *All the Year Round*). The project started with a small team at the University of Buckingham, but when they found the task too daunting a call was sent out over the internet, and now they have volunteers working on about 20% of the journals. My brief experience as an editor has been no trouble at all, and by pure luck my issue concerned reports from the Australian goldfields. If you go to www.djo.org.uk you'll be sure of a warm welcome.

Watch your mis-step

It's remarkable how some organisations have not got the message about social media – and continue to make elementary mistakes. It's more significant when they are the sort of companies who should be up with the latest, providing strategic advice to the biggest corporations around. The story at tinyurl.com/3vyp5xk shows how McKinsey & Company misread the mood of responses when they published an article on US health care reform. Now there will be many who decry the twitterati, the blogniks and the socialmediaistas and say that we don't matter, that we overreact. Well, my advice to them is to open the window and smell the 2011 air. Social media is not the only game in town but I'd argue that it's becoming very difficult (if not dangerous) to ignore. Every organisation – government, corporation, not-for-profit must have a social media strategy in place to avoid the sheer bad publicity that McKinsey generated.

We're all different

In planning a trip for later this year, I've been doing as much as I can over the internet and have been very pleasantly surprised in how easy it can be – and then we run into cultural issues. People in Scottish B&Bs for instance are mostly happy not to need any sort of deposit, and that's good. (It's also better to communicate via email, because when you make a phone call you'll find that there are no subtitles). Some German booking sites, on the other hand, seem to assume that everyone has a personal fax machine to send a signed acceptance of a booking form back to them. It just shows that you can't assume that what works for you will be relevant for overseas users.

And on the subject of cultural differences, the people at the World Wide Web Consortium have produced a draft paper on how names are treated in different countries. It's well worth reading if you're looking to develop a site that takes into account more than Mary and John Smith. See it at www.w3.org/International/questions/qa-personal-names.

Worth many thousand words

I'm a big fan of infographics (the concept that is, I don't like the term at all) and I'll often take Edward Tufte's *The Visual Display of Quantitative Information* down from the shelf and just leaf through it making little happy noises. That's why I was so impressed with the *Guardian's Visualisation of the UK Civil Service* (tinyurl.com/64mo6bo). You can print it off in PDF form if you like; it's much better though to use their *Prezi* version which lets you navigate around the chart and zoom in on particular departments. More people should definitely be using *Prezi* (prezi.com/) for their presentations.

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