

Like a mighty river

One thing about the whole eBook phenomenon is that the coverage is bringing the whole publishing process into the daylight. Many of us knew that it was a complicated business - with all sorts of murky deals between authors, agents, publishers, distributors and retail bookshops - but what's now being revealed makes the poor humble reader shake their head in sorrow. And the new world order doesn't look as if it's going to be gentler or kinder. The article about Amazon at www.alternet.org/story/149124/is_amazon_evil/ shows how they're prepared to build on their success - for the benefit of their readers, of course.

And from a river of another sort

The Brisbane floods dominated the news over the holiday break, and the Internet made it possible to keep in touch, whether you were trying to get the latest alerts so that you could make the necessary arrangements or interested (as so many of us were) from a distance. The ABC provided a neat little indication (www.abc.net.au/news/infographics/qld-floods/beforeafter.htm) of what the floods did to Brisbane and Ipswich. It overlaid aerial photos from before and after the flooding to show a little of how various areas were affected. Of course, something like this was quite limited in scope. That's why the NearMap service (www.nearmap.com) is so useful. This service covers around 75% of the country's population, and has a good reputation. What they did in this case was to get satellite images from all of the Brisbane/Ipswich area. If you can get to it, it's quite striking, but there are a couple of caveats: try to access it from a work connection and you'll probably get a message that you're connecting from an organisation that requires an account to provide access. Having been told that, I tried again that night when I went home and I got the same message. Then at a suggestion from a wise friend, I cleared the NearMap cookies from my browser - and it

worked! The pictures are quite stunning, but I'm still trying to work out why the cookies made such a difference.

AnonyMs?

I first met Fred Shapiro, editor of the *Yale Book of Quotations* a few years ago on the Stumpers list, and since that time we've been able to help each other in a couple of ways. He's now a sort of minor celebrity, appearing regularly in the top newspapers and magazines, and I wasn't too surprised at the level of scholarship demonstrated in his recent article in the *Yale Alumni Magazine* (www.yalealumnimagazine.com/issues/2011_01/anon4651.html). It seems that a good number of those quotations that are usually attributed to various notables can be traced to not-so-famous women, and even the compilation of *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations* and the *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* owes a considerable amount to women whose roles have been little acknowledged so far.

More on accessibility

Over the past few months, I've written about the Australian Government Information Management Office and its report into PDF accessibility. Since then, the wires have been humming. Certain interests in the US have been upset that AGIMO has dared to suggest that PDF may not be the wonderful gift to the world that they believe it to be. To their credit, the staff at AGIMO have stuck to their guns, while accepting any obvious corrections that have been put forward.

The problem is that most web managers don't have training in the topic and often lack the necessary software to create accessible PDFs. AGIMO is doing its best to provide advice and training so that people with disabilities are not left behind in the race to publish flashy documents with the latest software. In the meantime, Adobe has announced that one of its experts will be coming to Australia in a couple of months to give a series of presentations to government staff on how to make their PDFs more

accessible. Such a visit is likely to be much more productive than any amount of tendentious pleading. You can read the whole discussion at tinyurl.com/5rdqmo.

More AGIMO consultation

AGIMO is engaging with its community in a number of areas - not just in accessibility. One of the more entertaining topics is in their proposed standard for a Common Operating Environment (COE) for Commonwealth Government agencies. You'd think that such a subject would be a little dry; not at all.

Basically the idea of the COE is that Commonwealth agencies should adopt a suite of software that enables them to share information in 'standard' formats. The bulk of the comments have objected to an undue emphasis on Microsoft products - which is a stance that can be argued at length. It's an inescapable fact that any change to a new software product requires training, or at least a degree of familiarisation. I tried to use a variant of *OpenOffice* on my home computer but found the interface so different from what I was used to that I reverted to a proprietary product after a short time. So I can understand AGIMO's preference to keep the Commonwealth's workers using a product with which they're familiar, even if there's some long-term cost. The discussion is at tinyurl.com/6knosfs.

What will they think of next?

I'd like to be able to share this with you in more detail, but you'll understand that it's a bit personal (and passwords are required). The concept though is a smart one. The Maternity Intensive Care Unit at the Canberra Hospital has installed a camera above each tiny crib in the ward, so that mothers who have to leave the baby there for extra care can log in to see photos of the little one. It's good for grandfathers to use, too.

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