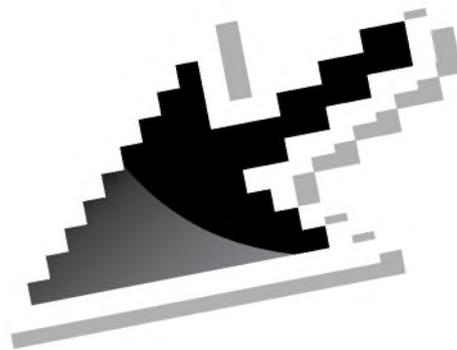# Webb's Web

More on my blog www.alia.org.au/webbsblog

It should be so easy

We've been hearing for so long that the Great Google Digitisation project is happening / settled / going back to the courts and so on, that is was quite a treat to hear that there's something positive being done elsewhere. The Digital Public Library of America (described at **www.technologyreview.com/web/40210/**) looks at first glance as though it's likely to make sense out of the whole mess – and avoids the danger of the collection being held hostage by commercial interests. But then you find that this one too is beset by protracted deliberations on copyright, including copyright of metadata. They're even arguing about the name, which doesn't bode too well for a successful outcome. It's a grand idea, so let's hope something really is delivered some day.

Getting around

I continue to be sitting on the fence about the value of the bit of Open Government that's about publishing datasets, and so is the UK National Audit Office (see **tinyurl.com/85aqys8**). On the other hand, a very good explanation of the Open Data concept at **tinyurl.com/7t9htgb** is not afraid to tackle the argument head on. They do admit some of the problems with sustainability of apps after they've been delivered and what may happen as the developers lose interest in what might have been a weekend fling at a GovHack. And does the fact that a government has sponsored the Hack event lay any obligations on that government to keep supporting the apps?

Whatever you think of these weighty matters, you have to admire a really useful product when it pops up. The Bike Share Map at **bikes.oobrien.com/** covers various cities around the world (including a couple locally) and shows clearly the location of points where you can pick up and drop off a bike, and how many bikes and spaces are available at each station.

On a related note, I recall that I wrote late in 2010 about having been caught out while driving in Victoria over the Alps and finding that unexpectedly the road was closed up ahead. At that stage I didn't have a smartphone, but if I was doing it now I'd certainly be using the Road Closures and Traffic Alerts service provided by VicRoads at **alerts.vicroads.vic.gov.au/?intcmp=HPE01000**. It's things like this that show you just how much life is changing – for most of us at least.

The media and the messages

An article in *New York* magazine (**tinyurl.com/d5tzor2**) – and you need to be careful not to confuse it with either the *New York Times* or the *New Yorker* – is really worth reading for so many reasons: organisational management techniques at the *New York Times*, sheer human interest, and how the media plans to meet the challenge of the internet. For instance, their reaction to the digital challenge was to acquire the answers site **about.com**, which seemed like a good idea for a while until a change in Google's strategy downgraded the prominence of sites like that in their search results. And about.com was headed for the scrapheap. If this story is characteristic of the overall newspaper business worldwide (and I suspect it is) then there are some very bumpy skies ahead.

I have been reading quite a bit about the media world and its future recently, and I fear for the newspapers that we've come to know and love. There was the article about why apps may not be the saviour

(**www.technologyreview.com/business/40319/**) which shows that many organisations are bravely trying all sorts of new ideas without a great amount of success. This story shows the difficulties of designing a pleasing layout, when the reader may at any time rotate their tablet from portrait to landscape and ruin the whole effect. This has been a problem from the start for the Global Mail (**www.theglobalmail.org/**), which plumped for a landscape layout for its website –quite a turn off for many of its readers.

Too easy a target?

The Atlantic magazine at **tinyurl.com/7bj5olv** relates how a class at George Mason University had the assignment of creating bogus material on Wikipedia, but were eventually found out. It's intriguing from a number of viewpoints. First (as I recall from my faltering efforts as a lecturer in Library Studies) it illustrates the lengths that teachers will go to if they want to make their courses a little more interesting. Then the reaction from the people behind Wikipedia was just a little over the top, decrying the exercise as virtual vandalism. I think they really need a good lie down. And then, predictably, Jimmy Wales came out with a very silly comment about the perpetrators. The fact that another internet-based service – Reddit (**www.reddit.com/**) in this case – was the means of undoing the whole scheme just made it so fascinating!

As long as people don't take Wikipedia too seriously, and use it as a way of getting their first leads on a subject then it's not too serious a problem. But then we're all busy, aren't we? And the pressure to get that paper or report in on time might just mean that we come to rely on it as a (or the) reference source.

Posted by Kerry Webb