

Webb's Web

Book publishing - the way ahead

In February 2010, the Commonwealth Government established the Book Industry Strategy Group under the chairmanship of Barry Jones, to look mainly at the potential impact of digital publishing in Australia. The Group's report was presented to Minister Carr in September 2011 and has now been published at tinyurl.com/72xkumv.

The expectations of The People

There's a bit of a kerfuffle going on in two continents about online petitions. Both in the US (tinyurl.com/8a8jh6c) and the UK (tinyurl.com/7mhm6oe), they've invited citizens to submit petitions online – and it looks like the initiatives have been far too successful. In both jurisdictions, those putting forwarded the petitions have been disappointed to find that the proposals haven't been taken up, or at least not taken up quickly enough. Now it's probably that the rules and criteria haven't been spelled out properly at the beginning, but it might be seen that the authorities aren't really genuine about the whole thing. It's just another example of not thinking through the proposal before you go ahead with it.

Access to parliamentary information

The Association of Parliamentary Libraries of Australasia has published a report on the extent of Australian parliamentary material online on its website at tinyurl.com/86cyozb, covering the national and state parliaments in the areas of Hansard, live (and archived) broadcasting and other parliamentary information products. It's a useful report – both for parliamentary and other libraries and for the general community.

One minor comment I have is that it states that the Commonwealth has committed to implementing WCAG 2.0 Level AA by December 2014, and will therefore be required to implement captioning for live audio and video content; in fact, all Australian government have made this commitment, and therefore have a lot of work to do.

Getting real feedback

At web-reform-dialogue.ideascale.com/a/panel.do, the US Government set up a site looking for advice from the community on ways to improve Federal websites. The ideas that have been submitted can then be voted on by other contributors. The thing that impressed me most is that the vote tally is often negative, ie more people dislike the idea than support it – which means that they're really applying some critical evaluation to the exercise. And besides that, there are quite a few good proposals.

Communications models

It's becoming a little tiresome to see the proselytising about social media and the death of email. The latest post that caught my eye was a tweet that websites are "just" data repositories and that social media is where it's all happening; this from a person who styles himself as a communicator and is responsible for one of the better government websites going around.

People will continue to use whatever medium they find meets their needs best. As for websites being deposed by social media, I don't think they ever were hotbeds of discussion.

Equally tiresome is the bias some people have against Twitter. The administrator of one local (web-based) discussion board never loses an opportunity to have a fling at the folk who tweet about their breakfast in 140 characters, without recognising that many, many people

are using it for a whole range of purposes.

How about we just celebrate the diversity of the communications media available to all of us? It's not hard.

Getting it online

I recall the time when I was working at the National Library and we decided to convert the card catalogue to an electronic form. It was a big job – and a courageous one in hindsight – but we were fortunate in being small enough to achieve it. I was thinking about this recently when listening to a marvellous presentation by Dr Eef Overgaauw on the history of the Berlin Staatsbibliothek. He was asked about the progress they were making in digitising their manuscripts collection and he answered by outlining the scope of its card catalogue – much of which is still handwritten.

The move towards an online database is also one of the early topics in the Library of Congress's new blog on copyright digitisation (tinyurl.com/8533mu9), noting that their aim is to one day have a complete database of their 70 million historical records. It won't happen overnight.

A Big British Newspaper Archive

The British Library and online publisher brightsolid have released the British Newspaper Archive at www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/, building on the Library's earlier project which was funded by a grant from JISC. Their plans are to digitise up to 40 million pages from the BL's collection over the next ten years (they're currently up to around 3 million).

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