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Something for all of us

We are all librarians in the 21st century, so the site of the same name [<http://istweb.syr.edu/21stcenlib/>] has obviously been built for us, or for people who want to join that club. The site has been put together by library students at Syracuse University in the United States with the aim of looking at the current state of the profession and some directions in which it is likely to evolve. It includes profiles of specific library jobs, such as information architect or information broker (though not knowledge manager — why not? I would have thought that was an obvious one), and provides links to information about becoming a librarian, trends and issues in the profession, such as digital libraries, internet filtering, outsourcing, and electronic publishing, and career resources. The site will be updated by students as they move through their course.

Life from MARS

Since libraries are trying to catalogue or otherwise record or link to valuable free reference sources online, it is good to see 'best of' lists appearing to assist in selecting resources. The latest list is the Best Free Reference Web Sites, 2001, [<http://www.ala.org/rusa/mars/best2001.html>] compiled by the Machine-Assisted Reference Section (MARS) of the Reference and User Services Association of the American Library Association. 'Machine-assisted' sounds a little quaint nowadays, especially since every single listing is web-based, rather than CD-ROM or disk-based. Time for a rethink on the group's name. Because of the provenance of the list, the entries do have an obvious American bias, but many such as xrefer, the periodic table of the elements and the dictionaries, would still be useful to libraries here.

Vanishing act?

With e-publishing doing a smoke and mirrors act, some librarians might think it's all over for e-books. For those still interested, there are a couple of new sites around worth looking at. 'Shaping a strategy for e-books' is an issues paper by Hazel Woodward and Louise Edwards of the UK's JISC/DNER (love those acronyms!) e-book working group [<http://www.jisc.ac.uk/dner/ebooks/strategy1.html>]. While its main aim is to look at the development of e-books within United Kingdom higher and further education, it covers issues relevant to all libraries such as hardware, software, standards and digital rights, how a

sustainable economic model can be created, and how e-books can be integrated effectively into learning and research. There is also advice on monitoring developments in the e-publishing industry. Of more general interest is probably the 'Can e-books improve libraries?' [<http://skyways.lib.ks.us/central/ebooks/>] site from Kansas State Library. This is nicely set out information that covers quite a lot of ground — technology, cataloguing, awards, and review sources as well as the usability, readability, affordability, and accessibility of this type of publication. There is also a guide for getting started and links to further information.

Libraries for everyone

The United Kingdom Department of Media, Culture and Sport has put up a newish report, *Social inclusion and libraries — a resource guide* [<http://www.la-hq.org.uk/groups/csg/si/si.html>]. It is designed for public libraries to help them work through issues relating to social inclusion in their services to the public. The report tries to identify the barriers, if any, that stop people from using public libraries. It also provides advice on how to overcome such barriers, by tailoring special services for minority groups or communities, locating services at point of need, and consulting communities about service needs. The site also points to other publications, research and online resources about social inclusion of relevance to public libraries.

A good freebie

One of the joys of the web is getting something for nothing. When the freebie is a valuable new reference tool, then it is even better. The United Kingdom has followed in the ABS's footsteps and made their annual statistical yearbook fully available online for free. Called *UK 2002 — The Official Yearbook of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland*, the online version (formerly the *Britain Yearbook*) includes tables, maps, charts, figures and text, but no colour photographs — these appear in the hardcopy version only. The book covers all the usual areas such as government, defence, education, employment, health, crime, religion, media and communications, sport, housing, transport, the economy, public finance, international trade, science, engineering and technology, agriculture, manufacturing, energy, and finance and other services. To

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Drug lowdown

Lots of new drug resources keep appearing, so it is time to list a few that might be handy for virtual collections. Drugs.com [<http://www.drugs.com/>] contains a searchable database of more than 24 000 prescription and over-the-counter drug descriptions. There is news as well, but the database is the site's main point. The Australian Drug Information Network [<http://www.adin.com.au/>] is a dotcom funded by the federal Department of Health to provide general alcohol and drug information as well as other databases on resources, projects and programs. There is also a very useful link to a range of web-based databases on drugs, but also on crime, law, mental health, infectious diseases such as Hepatitis C, rural health and psychiatric research. Also newly online is Acurian's Drug Trials site at <http://www.acurian.com/patient/>. This site has a big listing of current clinical trials as well as drug information, ranging from drugs in development to those already released into the market.

Online answers

Ask a librarian services are not going away, and many are now changing the way they operate to be more user-friendly. Instead of being restricted to e-mail-only services, virtual reference is now discovering the virtues and interactivity of chat. For an article on how it works, have a look at the Fall 2001 issue of *Issues in Science and Technology Librarianship*. 'Chat reference service: an analysis of one semester's data' by JoAnn Sears, Auburn University covers the introduction of the library's new infoChat service. You can read the full article, with links and references, online at <http://www.istl.org/>

At home and abroad

The Library of Congress is always up to something and now they have released a website entitled 'International resources from the Library of Congress' [<http://www.loc.gov/rr/international/>]. This encompasses a range of activities, such as Gateways to the World, which provides a guide to each of the library's twenty-one special collections. While this is mainly of use to scholars or visitors intending to descend on the library in person, some of the other sections are online and useful. Portals to the

World are just that — national directories of country-specific resources. Not all countries are currently represented, but they are working on it. They will also add to existing portals — you can suggest suitable links if you wish. The one for Australia includes history, government and law, literature and culture, news and current events, libraries and archives, and directories. Afghanistan's was longer, boasting recreation and travel (not just now, thanks), religion and philosophy and country-specific search engines. Also on offer are Special International Guides, which cover an eclectic range of topics, obviously reflecting staff interests or expertise. These included the Global Legal Information Network, the Vietnam-Era POW/MIA Database, the Handbook of Latin American Studies and the annually updated 'A world of books', which picks out the significant books each year from a range of countries.

Making the invisible visible

For those who haven't seen or ordered it yet, Chris Sherman and Gary Price's book, *The invisible web: uncovering information sources search engines can't see* is now available, and they have set up a companion website to solve the problem of links going out-of-date [<http://www.invisible-web.net/>]. Using the site also saves you the bother of typing so it is one to bookmark.

The book explains the invisible web in detail, and then goes on to list the kinds of databases you can expect to find by topic. This is a boon for librarians who can pass on the links to students or library users who want to mine specific areas such as artists' directories, real-time information, news and current affairs or investor resources. You could use the site without getting the book, but the book is definitely worth having for all the detail and advice it contains for librarians and for web users generally.

WAP speed

The wireless internet seems to have died a bit of a death lately, but like e-publishing, it will probably be resurrected at some stage. If you haven't even started to think about providing WAP services or information, have a look at Duncan Parry's article in *Free Pint*, 'WAP sites and the mobile internet' [<http://www.freepint.com/issues/181001.htm> tips]. Luckily, Parry thinks WAP is a long way off as yet, but it is coming, so be prepared. ■

This column
[with URL links]
can be found at:



<http://www.alia.org.au/incite>

Contributions and suggestions for this column are always welcome. Please contact Belinda Weaver via e-mail.

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