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Coming to grips with information

In a world where there are more than two billion web pages, and thousands of online forums, information overload is a serious issue. While many librarians are aware of the tools and techniques for retrieving online knowledge, many would like to see further developments such as information extraction and summarising tools that present users only with the information they need. Sounds too good to be true? Dr Adam Bostock has written a paper called 'Avoiding information overload: knowledge management on the internet' that grapples with these issues. It discusses Internet technology and looks at the issues, devices, and techniques, such as XML, that can be used to better manage online information. http://www.jisc.ac.uk/techwatch/reports/tsw_02-02.html.

Who we are

The Australian Bureau of Statistics has posted data from the *2001 Census of Population and Housing* on its website [<http://www.abs.gov.au/census>]. The data was collected in August last year and big chunks of it are available at no charge from ABS. The free information includes *Basic Community Profiles* (BCP) and *Snapshots*, the *Indigenous Profile*, and the *Census guide* on CD-ROM (available at ABS shops or via a freecall number 1800 813 939). The *Basic Community Profiles* go down to statistical local area level. If you need collection district level data, you would need to pay, unless you are already a subscriber. *Snapshots*, which are text summaries of the data found in the BCP tables, are not available for all areas. Check individually to see what is available. BCPs are in Excel format, while the *Indigenous profile* (twelve tables, with comparisons between Indigenous/non-Indigenous Australians) is a zip file. Though the pathways to the data are not designed for the technologically challenged, there is still a lot here for all kinds of libraries to use.

Gilding the LILI

South Australian TAFE librarians have produced an online information literacy package designed specifically for the needs of TAFE students. LILI (LEARN Information Literacy Initiative) consists of seven modules, which cover the basics of analysing an assignment, identifying resources, searching the library or the web and evaluating and citing the resources found [<http://www.tafe.sa.edu.au/lili/>]. The site is password-free, so anyone

can take a look. The site features step-by-step instructions, cartoons, and quizzes. Credit is given to ideas gleaned from other universities such as Griffith University in Queensland. That's the point of the web, really — not to reinvent the wheel endlessly but to adapt good ideas to local conditions.

And your question is...?

Brace yourself to get answers in a range of accents if you subscribe to the services of QuestionPoint [<http://www.questionpoint.org/>], a new, collaborative reference service that the Library of Congress and OCLC have developed, with input from participating members of the Global Reference Network (libraries and institutions worldwide working in digital reference). There will be two levels of service on offer. The first will send queries to a library's own staff or to the staff of any regional library consortia of which they are part. The second level will use the Global Reference Network to answer questions. Sounds like a handy service for those plagued by questions at four in the morning as queries can be answered at any time of day.

Can do, can't do?

Suppose your library has a tremendous special collection, such as original manuscripts, photographs, family or business documents or rare books. It might even be out of print books, such as literary classics, that you would like to see freely available again. Can you digitise them? A good article on the Legal Resource Exchange deals with this issue in detail. The piece is called 'When can you digitize your library's special collection? Library Digitization Projects and Copyright' and it was written by Mary Minow [<http://www.llrx.com/features/digitization.htm>]. You'll know the barriers and the pitfalls to any such project after you have finished. Copyright is not the same in the United States as in Australia, but librarians there are grappling with familiar issues.

Suppose you can?

If you get the green light on digitisation, you could do worse than use the Greenstone Digital Library Software produced by the New Zealand Digital Library Project at the University of Waikato [<http://www.greenstone.org/english/home.html>]. This software suite is specifically designed to build and distribute digital library collections. It is a two-part system, consisting of the Collector, which helps create new collections, or add to or modify

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existing ones, and Administration, which summarises the collections in the system, and manages system users. The software runs on Windows and Unix, and both source codes and binaries are available for download from the site.

And then you might need this?

If you are digitising visual materials from historical collections, you might be interested in the 18-month free trial of the *Data dictionary for technical metadata for digital still images* [<http://www.niso.org/standards/dsftu.html>]. The dictionary is being offered by the National Information Standards Organization in collaboration with the Association for Information and Image Management. Users are encouraged to access, review, and implement the dictionary standards during the trial period. The data dictionary gives a 'comprehensive list of technical data elements relevant to the management of digital still images,' and has been designed with interoperability between systems, services, and software in mind, as well as long-term management of digital still image collections.

Everybody's doing it

I'm talking about web logs, or Blogs, which are popping up at an alarming rate in libraryland. Library Stuff [<http://www.librarystuff.net/>], created by US law librarian Steven M Cohen, focuses on the general theme of librarianship, but also covers online reference materials, search engines, and resources within the invisible web as well as the odd rant or two. If you would like to get a handle on the whole blogging revolution, have a look at the two-parter — yes, this is a big issue — 'Weblogs and Blogging' by Laurel Clyde in recent issues of FreePint. Part one appeared at <http://www.freepint.com/issues/020502.htm#feature> while you can get to part two from <http://www.freepint.com/issues/160502.htm#feature>.

It's who you know

Most school librarians can only dream of the kind of access to government that US First Lady/librarian Laura Bush has — she got an entire White House Conference on School Libraries on 4 June to thrash out the issues. The Institute of Museum and Library Services, whose director, Dr Robert Martin co-hosted the event with Mrs Bush, has provided an online transcript of the entire conference [<http://www.ims.gov/pubs/whitehouse0602/whitehouse.htm>]. Experts from education, government and related fields talked about the role of school libraries in elementary and secondary education, and research that emphasised the importance of school libraries. There was even a session on 'Reflections of an empowered library' (what's their secret?).

The keynote address is available, as are biographies of all the speakers.

Just lists

Some librarians don't retire; they just go online. The Booklist Center [<http://home.attbi.com/~dwtaylor1/>] is one librarian's way of keeping his hand in, linking as it does to more than 230 browsable booklists divided into more than fifty categories. Should keep him reasonably busy. There are the predictable lists of best-sellers and genre favourites, but there are also lists of books on a range of less frequently visited topics such as ancient Greek literature, ethics and underground press publications.

Metadating

With so much talk of metadata around, most librarians will be aware of its existence by now (it would be hard not to be). However, there may still be some librarians out there who could not easily define what metadata is, or what it is for. In that case, a plain English explanation may be just the thing, and where better to get it than the National Library of Australia? Their page, *Guidelines for the creation of content for resource discovery metadata* [<http://www.nla.gov.au/meta/metaguide.html>] begins with that most basic question, 'What is Metadata?' The page then explains it, and recommends the main metadata elements, such as title, creator and subject, to be added to resources. The guidelines are not written for a specific metadata standard, so they may be too general for some, but they do provide a good grounding for webmasters who want to add metadata to pages on their sites. The guidelines could also be applied to digital images as well as webpages.

Pain in the neck

Library work involves a lot of computer time, no matter kind of tasks you do. As with any repetitive movement, the risk of strain or overuse is ever-present. Repetitive strain injury stories have seemingly vanished from the news radar, but have not gone away all the same according to Vivienne Sales in a recent FreePint article called 'RSI and the Library and Information Science Professional' [<http://www.freepint.com/issues/270602.htm#feature>]. As she says: 'Most of us ignore the occasional, but annoying tenseness, tingling and pain in our fingers, wrists, shoulders, elbows, neck or back', but when pain stops you living a normal life, then it becomes serious. She has advice on where to go and what to do. ■

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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