



Belinda Weaver

weaver@alia.org.au

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Good policy

A recently launched site called Australian Policy Online is a tremendous source of current news and reports from more than sixty Australian think tanks and research centres [<http://www.apo.org.au/>]. Most of the centres are affiliates of universities. Each week there is something new and interesting to read as centres publish reports or other results of research. If you have read about it in a newspaper, you will probably find it here too. The site hosts forums and discussions on issues, publishes book reviews, and is a useful gateway to Australian research bodies as it links to all the member organisations. You can sign up for a weekly e-mail newsletter if you want to stay informed.

Get connected

The United Kingdom Office of Library Networking has created Z-directory [<http://www.ukoln.ac.uk/distributed-systems/zdir/>], which provides information on Z39.50 targets in the United Kingdom, so as to make it easy for libraries to connect to library services such as online catalogues. The list is not fully comprehensive, although all United Kingdom organisations with Z39.50 targets can register their services if they wish. For sites which are registered, you can find out details of their current library system, for example, SIRSI, Talis, Innopac; the full target address, such as wallace.ntu.ac.uk:210; a database description, record syntax and search attributes. Most sites provide an administrative e-mail address for system/connection queries as well. You can find links to other Z39.50 directories as well such as Z39.50 in Europe.

Defining your terms

For a commercial publisher, The Economist gives quite a lot away [<http://www.economist.com/businessdatabase/>]. The site is now offering a freely searchable database that covers around 6000 terms commonly used in business. In addition, you can get business profiles, which currently cover around 140 personal biographies of business people. There are also practical guides to topics including finance, marketing and e-commerce.

Diccionarios en internet [<http://home.worldonline.es/migonzal/diccionarios/>] is another free online reference source. This subject directory of reference works in English or Spanish links to more than 400

works such as dictionaries, encyclopædias and glossaries.

24/7 — everybody's doing it

The *New York Times* has recently run a story on librarians staying relevant in the internet era by offering digital reference round the clock. Cleveland Public Library in the United States is one local library that has created a service called KnowItNow24x7 [<http://www.knowitnow24x7.net/>], because 'parents taking kids to soccer and piano and putting them to bed at 9pm ... are not going to come in and ask reference questions.' But they might want them answered at home, in a targeted, coherent manner by trained researchers, something search engines cannot do.

'Any time, anywhere' is the motto of the 24/7 Reference website (<http://www.247ref.org/>), which provides a platform for digital reference services. You will need to register to read the story from the NYT [<http://www.nytimes.com/2002/08/29/technology/circuits/29LIBR.html>]. If you want more services to look at, use Bernie Sloan's list of Collaborative Live Reference Services as it links to more than forty different services. [<http://www.lis.uiuc.edu/~b-sloan/collab.htm>]. Just because the *New York Times* has recognised librarians, it does not mean the internet threat has gone away. In a recent issue of *Free Pint*, Terry Kendrick tackles the thorny question of search engines versus librarians in an article called 'Answering quick reference enquiries Using Google' [<http://www.freepint.com/issues/080802.htm#feature>].

Big Bang and beyond

Despite the title, the Chemsoc Timeline is not all about chemistry — it includes physics as well [<http://www.chemsoc.org/timeline/pages/timeline.html>]. Sound exciting? This is a very attractive site that makes science learning fun and easy. It is basically a timeline since the Big Bang that covers events and scientific discoveries in a painless manner. Some cover only a few seconds (the moments after the Big Bang) while the rest march in years or decades. The site covers such diverse topics as the use of metals in coins, Arabic alchemy, the development of a magnetic compass, the distillation of wine and Halley's comet.

Open archives citation tool

The citation databases in ISI's Web of Science

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have long been consulted by academics anxious to assess the impact their papers published in journals have had on the work of others. Now Citebase has been developed to do a similar job for papers deposited in open archives such as the physics pre-print server arXiv (<http://www.arxiv.org/>), formerly at Los Alamos National Laboratories in the United States and now hosted at Cornell University. Using Citebase, you can search across free e-print archives, and get search results ranked according to criteria you specify, such as citation impact. For those unfamiliar with the field, an e-print is simply any electronically published research paper. It might not yet be published, in which case it is called a pre-print. Published papers are called post-prints. Data used in searching is obtained from archives using the Open Archives protocol for metadata harvesting. At the moment, searches are limited to papers in physics, mathematics, computer science, psychology, neuroscience, and biomedical science, but as e-print archives grow, more will be searchable via Citebase. [<http://citebase.eprints.org/>]

Another e-print project, ePrints-UK [<http://www.rdn.ac.uk/projects/eprints-uk/>], aims to provide a one-stop shop for searching e-print archives in UK higher education. The project is still on the drawing board, but may develop into a national service through which researchers can search across the collective output of those research repositories that comply with the Open Archive protocol.

Book club

Book clubs come in for their fair share of rubbishing and satire, but bookgroup.info [<http://www.bookgroup.info/>] is a genuinely handy site. It provides a list of books one English book club has tackled over seven years, so it can be useful when you are absolutely stumped for ideas to recommend to library readers (or to read yourself). There is a good range of writers and topics, and books are rated on the star system, with only a very few getting the coveted five gold stars.

Room for one more?

Even with so much medical information on the Net, there is still a place for MedHist [<http://medhist.ac.uk/>], as it aims to cover the history of medicine rather than current issues. This is a gateway site that includes only good quality, evaluated materials, so for anyone needing good signposts to the history and development of medical knowledge, such as how leprosy or the plague were tackled, this is it. The site has been developed

by the Wellcome Library for the History and Understanding of Medicine at the Wellcome Trust and is affiliated to the BIOME life sciences hub [<http://www.biome.ac.uk/>] and the Resource Discovery Network [<http://www.rdn.ac.uk/>].

Library portals

A new 52-page report produced by the LITC at South Bank University in London reviews a range of library portal systems. These are tools for managing electronic information resources owned or licensed by a library. Some of the jobs they do include integrating a range of resources for the user into a single system, allowing cross searching of databases of different kinds, personalisation and customisation, providing tools for user authentication, and management tools such as the collection of user statistics. The report looks at a range of available systems and provides the original survey forms used for assessment. [http://www.jisc.ac.uk/techwatch/reports/tsw_02-03.pdf].

Licensing agreements

Whether you want to give it away or keep it to yourself, Creative Commons aims to provide a form of words to cover your situation [<http://www.creativecommons.org/>]. The site has recently launched, and its first project is to offer a set of copyright licenses free of charge. These will cover different scenarios for online work, such as permitting others to copy, distribute, display, and perform the work and derivative works based upon it only if they give you credit, or only for non-commercial purposes. The licenses are due for public release in (northern hemisphere) Autumn 2002.

Five-star history

Teachers and librarians will find the Best of History website handy [<http://www.besthistorysites.net/>]. History is neatly divided up into useful blocks such as World War II, Mediaeval, Ancient/Biblical and pre-history, among others, and provides rated lists of links. Ratings are based on a star system — the more stars, the better the resource. The site provides lesson plans and maps as well, and there is a section just on art history.

Free range librarian

Sounds like a headless chicken, but this new site is a monthly meditation from the excellent Librarians' Index to the Internet [<http://lii.org/>]. The site aims to cover issues important to librarianship. Submissions of between 500 and 1000 words are welcome. [<http://lii.org/FRL>]. ■

**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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